

Hickson: Preserving drug court a successful team effort

BY BILL HICKSON CATHOLIC CHARITIES, ARCHDIOCESE OF DUBUQUE | Posted: Sunday, June 8, 2014 12:00 am

It was mid-May 2013 when we learned that public funding for the Dubuque-Delaware Drug Court was scheduled to end that June 30.

This effectively meant that the program would cease at that point. No new clients would be accepted, and those already in the program would return to traditional and less-effective methods of support to battle their addictions. Their struggles to remain drug-free and crime-free were destined to become more difficult.

A combination of factors such as expiring federal grants and the worthy goal of controlling state spending led to the exclusion of this program in last year's budget. But no one connected with the program, neither the participants, the team, the judicial district administrators, the politicians, nor the members of the general public familiar with the court seemed to want this program to disappear. Given the timing of the announcement, with the Iowa General Assembly in its last week of work in Des Moines, it seemed the end was inevitable and the only choice was to make the transition back to traditional supervision for current participants as painless as possible.

But the community was not ready to give in.

If a way could be found to fund the court for one more year, it would give the community time to appeal for restoration of public funds in the next state budget cycle. I am proud to say that the agency I work for, Catholic Charities, took the lead in this effort, along with the priests of the Dubuque Deanery. It was decided to appeal at worship services for a special free-will collection to be taken at local parishes during the summer of 2013. This campaign was successful in raising the \$45,000 necessary to fund the drug-treatment portion of the drug court budget and was combined with other cost-saving measures. The drug court was saved for one year.

As part of our education program last summer, we told donors we would again enlist their help when the Iowa General Assembly gathered for its 2014 session. By that time, however, our local representatives and senators in Des Moines were well aware of how the community had spoken with its actions in preserving the court. Throughout the summer and fall, the Telegraph Herald reported on the fundraising campaign and gave editorial support to the effort to preserve the court. Other media also took up the story.

In the end, it seemed no one in state government needed much convincing. No great lobbying effort was required. The actions of the community last summer were sufficient. All principals in Des Moines worked to correct the situation. The governor's proposed budget restored funding not only in

Dubuque and Delaware Counties, but in Black Hawk County and other locations. Language was added to the funding bill that stated it was the intention of the General Assembly that drug courts throughout Iowa be maintained.

This is a story of cooperation between many individuals and groups, across governmental and political divides, to achieve a goal that serves the common good. Those who played a part in writing this page of local history deserve thanks.

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