

Tarrant County Community Supervision & Corrections Department Research Brief:



Supervision with Immediate Enforcement (SWIFT) Court Outcome Evaluation, 2013



SWIFT Court is a specialty court first launched in June, 2011 under the leadership of the Honorable Judge Mollee Westfall, 371st Judicial District Court Judge in Tarrant County, TX. This specialty court program is closely modeled after the Hawai'i HOPE model of supervision designed for offenders at high risk of failing supervision and/or those with a history of violating their conditions of community supervision.

Quick Facts

- **Technical revocations of supervision for the general felony population of offenders on supervision in Tarrant County, TX accounted for 47% of Tarrant County CSCD's felony revocations in FY 2013.**
- **The SWIFT Court program has an 83% retention rate.¹**
- **Only 8% of offenders in the SWIFT Court program have been revoked for technical violations.**
- **It cost only an average of \$6.75 per day to supervise an offender in the community on a specialized caseload, compared to an average of \$50.04 to house an inmate in a state penitentiary in Texas.²**
- **High risk offenders placed in the SWIFT Court program are being diverted from prison, and saving tax payers thousands of dollars.**

WHAT IS SWIFT COURT?

A unique strategy, Hawai'i Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE), designed to address drug-involved offenders who continued to violate supervision was first implemented in 2004. HOPE sought to impose sanctions swiftly for technical violations of supervision (non-law violations of supervision; e.g. failure to report, positive drug tests, etc.), and consisted of immediate arrest and short stays in jail.

The SWIFT Court program in Tarrant County, TX is closely modeled after HOPE, and felony offenders with moderate or high risk upon assessment or after commission of multiple technical violations of supervision can be amended to participate in this program if they meet other eligibility requirements.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

In 2013 the Research Unit at Tarrant County Community Supervision & Corrections Department (CSCD) launched a research project that sought to determine the effectiveness of the program in reducing technical violations of supervision, obtain feedback from program participants via a voluntary and anonymous survey, and gauge the understanding and perceptions of the program from

various CSCD staff.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was examined on a sample of program participants placed in the program in 2012 (n=145). Numerous variables were examined including basic demographic variables, supervision variables, such as the average number of technical violations of supervision prior to and after placement in SWIFT, types of technical violations, progressive responses to violations, the number of violation hearings held while in SWIFT, and number of days in jail as a sanction for violations both prior to and after placement in SWIFT.

Surveys

A survey for SWIFT Court participants was created, validated, and administered at various CSCD offices throughout the county to those who volunteered to participate (n=169). The participant survey gathered information regarding participants' opinions about their SWIFT supervision officer, the court, and overall satisfaction with the program.

Next, an online survey was sent to a number of CSCD staff (n=65) via email who would potentially recommend their offenders for participation in the program. Since CSCD staff is the main source of referrals, it was important to ascertain staff understanding and perceptions of the program.

¹Retention rate is the success measure since there is no definitive completion date for SWIFT unless offenders complete their term of supervision.

²Criminal Justice Uniform Cost Report, Fiscal Years 2010 to 2012. Legislative Budget Board. Austin, TX.



For more information regarding the full SWIFT Evaluation Report, contact Kelli D. Martin, TCCSCD Research Unit Supervisor.

Office (817) 884-1222
kdmarin@tarrantcounty.com

Felony Population Revocations in Tarrant County, TX[†]

Fiscal Year	Total Felony Population	% Felony Population Revoked	% Felony Population Revoked for Technicals Violations	% of Total Felony Revocations for Technical Violations
2013	12,387	13.1	6.2	47.3
2012	12,541	13.8	6.3	46.3
2011	12,701	11.7	5.5	47.3
2010	13,144	12.2	5.8	47.7
2009	13,467	12.3	5.5	44.6

[†] Martin, K.D. (2014). Modified table from "Felony Technical Revocation Study: An Overview of Technical Revocations of Supervision in Tarrant County – FY 2013."

Findings

Data was analyzed for the entire population of SWIFT Court participants (N=573),¹ who had ever been in or were still currently in SWIFT, to compile demographic and offense-related data, as well as to determine outputs. The average SWIFT Court participant is single, young, undereducated, poor, male, with 48.1 percent being White and 51 percent African American (21.6 percent Hispanic, 78.4 percent Non-Hispanic). The SWIFT Court program has an 83 percent retention rate¹, with only 17 percent of offenders being unsuccessfully discharged.³

Examination of technical violations committed prior to entering SWIFT and after placement in SWIFT revealed that 59 percent of offenders reduced their technical violations (n=145).

Review of new offense arrest data showed that 20 percent of the sample had been arrested for a new offense prior to entering SWIFT which prompted their placement in the program, thus diverting them from prison. Only 9 percent of the total SWIFT population (N=573) had been revoked for new offense arrest(s), and only 8 percent for technical violations.

Additional statistical analyses were conducted to determine if there were any significant relationships between demographic variables, supervision variables and retention in the program; no significant relationships were found, meaning regardless of age, race, gender, income, offense, etc. offenders can be successful in the program if they abide by the rules.

With regard to survey findings, overall, offenders held favorable views of their SWIFT probation officer in the areas of communication, competency, fairness and respect.

The next section of the participant survey gathered information regarding various aspects of the deterrent effect of the program, changes in cognitions, and overall satisfaction with the program. There were many encouraging findings: a majority of respondents (82%) reported the SWIFT Court program has made them think about their actions (cognitions); 86 percent reported they have stopped violating probation because they know they will go to jail (deterrence); 56 percent reported discontinuing the use of illegal drugs due to the stringent drug testing requirements (deterrence); 60 percent believed the judge is tough, but fair (general satisfaction); and 68 percent reported the program has helped them (general satisfaction). Other findings revealed close to 90 percent of offenders reported having money problems, 50 percent having employment and transportation problems, and 45 percent were worried about their health.

CONCLUSION

The SWIFT Court program is a viable alternative to incarceration for high risk offenders, who would otherwise be revoked and sentenced to the penitentiary. It is helping offenders make positive changes in their lives.

Key Findings

- 1. The SWIFT Court program has an 83% retention rate.**
- 2. Fifty-nine (59) percent of offenders reduced their technical violations of supervision after entering the program.**
- 3. Overall, offenders have reduced positive drug tests.**
- 4. Over 80% of offenders surveyed reported the SWIFT Court program has made them stop violating their conditions of community supervision because they know they will go to jail.**
- 5. Fifty-six (56) percent of offenders surveyed reported the random drug testing has helped them stop using/abusing substances on their own.**
- 6. Nearly 70% of offenders surveyed felt SWIFT has "helped them."**
- 7. Participants have positive views of their SWIFT supervision officers in the areas of communication, competency, fairness, helpfulness, and respect.**

³ Unsuccessful discharges included those that were discharged for committing technical violations and those arrested for new offenses.