

## Guest Column: Drug court is a viable alternative (5.14.08)

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Guest column: Drug court is a viable alternative

By Lois Pulvermacher

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JOSHUA (Justice Organization Sharing Hope & United for Action) urges the Brown County Board to initiate a drug treatment court as a means to fight crime and reduce taxpayer expense.

Drug treatment courts exist in 15 Wisconsin counties and 2,000 across the nation. They select nonviolent alcohol or other drug offenders to participate in an intensive program that includes but is not limited to: weekly visits before a judge; treatment (one-on-one and group work); rigorous drug testing to ensure compliance; employment; payment of fines and services; and community service hours. Each offender is assessed and an individual plan is determined.

Drug treatment courts are a way of being "smart on crime" states Winnebago County Circuit Court Judge Scott Woldt. It is easier for a drug addict to sit in jail with meals provided at taxpayer expense, than to fight their addiction.

National recidivism rates for those who have successfully completed drug court range from 4 percent to 29 percent. Rates for defendants who have not completed a drug court program are 39 percent to 58 percent. Now take into account its costs \$28,622 per year to incarcerate an inmate vs. \$8,100 per year for treatment. Not only will drug courts reduce the rate of drug-related crime in Brown County, it will mean a considerable savings.

Brown County Sheriff Dennis Kocken stated, "We are not winning the war on drugs." It is time to try something new that we know works. We can make Brown County a safer place to live.

JOSHUA held a public forum April 8 at St. Willebrord Church that was attended by more than 150 Brown County Citizens desiring to learn the benefits of a drug court. We heard solid evidence from Woldt that the court works. We were honored to hear a former drug addict, Cynthia Running, share her story how participation in a drug court helped her turn her life around and made her a contributing, productive member of society.

JOSHUA was encouraged when Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt, Kocken and the office of District Attorney John Zakowski announced they would support the formation of the court. Brown County Circuit Judge Donald Zuidmulder spoke about his enthusiasm for, and willingness to run, a drug court in Brown County.

Now is the time for Brown County Board to act favorably.

Lois Pulvermacher chairs JOSHUA's TIP - TAD (Treatment Instead of Prison - Treatment Alternatives and Diversions) committee. JOSHUA is a nonprofit, interfaith social justice organization in Brown County.