

LDTC - Caribbean Excursion

London has had a Drug Treatment Court (DTC) since June of 2010. DTCs exist to reduce substance related harm, substance abuse, crime and recidivism among non-violent persons who commit crime for the purpose of supporting their addiction or dependence on controlled substances. By very nature they are trying to be a hybrid: solving problems that punishment alone cannot improve, bringing together supports for addicted individuals who desire to improve their health and overall wellbeing, and to stop committing crimes. It takes a great deal of goodwill and teambuilding to help professionals step out of the normal confines of their roles and to take risks in order to achieve such potentially good outcomes.

On Wednesday, April 10 Joanne Humphrey received a call from Ontario Supreme Court Judge Kofi Barnes, who chairs the Canadian Association of Drug Treatment Courts (CADTC) and The International Association of Drug Treatment Courts (IADTC). He was requesting assistance from the treatment providers of the LDTC to participate in a Drug Treatment Court Skills Workshop in Bridgetown, Barbados. Our decision to participate had to be made by that Friday, and the training was to start April 22. With support from ADSTV and through a whirlwind of preparation, Joanne and Pam Hill arrived in Hastings, Barbados, to meet with the other training team members April 21.

The desire to open a DTC in Barbados had existed for a while, but getting a practical vision and a sense of how to make it happen, required some inspiration, and hands on training. Justice Barnes brought the resources needed! He is an energetic and inspiring leader whose ease with people and sense of humour enabled people from various levels of treatment, law enforcement and government to “walk in each other’s shoes”. He does this to create the sense of team that every problem solving court requires to help make changes in the lives of crime involved people with addictions.

As is often the case, we, as trainers, derived a great deal of benefit from explaining what we do, and why we do it, and from learning about the various roles in Drug Treatment Courts, as taught by our colleagues from Toronto and Vancouver, as well as people who have roles in DTCs in the Caribbean.

Following two days of presentations, talks, panels and case study, a mock pre-court demonstration was given, where each of us from Canada simply played the DTC roles we would normally play. It was amazing how well relative strangers could run such a session, relying purely on playing our defined roles. It reinforced for us that the DTC model works if we stay true to it and have a sense of purpose!

The culmination, however, was when all the participants were broken into teams, each coached and facilitated by one of our Canadian team, and asked to step outside of their normal roles to role play a DTC case. Now Barbados is a small country, physically about the same size as London, Ontario, and the population is even smaller, so people tend to know each other. Defined jobs and roles are very important to keep the boundaries necessary for conducting business. So having a police officer sit on the bench, and a probation officer play the role of the offender; a judge play the role of a treatment provider and a defense council the role of prosecutor, took a lot of goodwill and playfulness. The room was full of laughter – laughter that reinforced learning.

One of the highlights for the treatment team was an invitation to dine at the beautiful official residence of the Canadian High Commissioner to the Barbados, Richard Hadley. His warmth and hospitality was greatly appreciated.

A highlight for Pam and Joanne was a chance to visit Verdun House residential treatment centre at St John, and to see the incredible gardens/fields and the farm animals that are part of the daily activities of the clients. It was easy to see how the environment could foster a time of true rest and recovery. One generous staff member made it her personal mission to give us an insider's 3 hour tour of the island. Thank you Ruth!

Thanks to all of the training team for such a creative, spontaneous and enjoyable experience, and to the people of the Barbados who are so hospitable and proud of their beautiful island!

We appreciate all of our London DTC colleagues as well. This opportunity helped us to think about how much we have achieved in these first few years.

Respectfully submitted by

Pam Hill
Director London Drug Treatment Court