

NEWS RELEASE

Arizona Supreme Court
Administrative Office of the Courts



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Mesa Community Court Receives Innovation Award

MESA – The Mesa Municipal Court’s Community Court program was recently recognized by the Arizona Association of Drug Court Professionals with an Innovation Award.

The Community Court is a new approach in response to the many cases that involve homelessness with associated mental illness or substance abuse. The Court receives citations or referrals from attorneys and judges for any case in which underlying social problems are indicated. The Community Court is centered around the concept that these defendants are members of the community and that the community needs to be involved in responding to the many critical needs of these persons. Housing, mental health services, counseling and direct personal support are involved in a diversion of the criminal aspect of these cases. As defendants progress and engage in support, their eventual success results in a dismissal of the case and all other pending fines and obligations.

The Community Court recognizes that Native Americans are a significant part of the community and local population. The Community Court fully involves Native American representatives who will manage the cases of Native American defendants through programs that reconnect these defendants with their tribal heritage and core values.

Since its start in July of 2018, the Community Court has received more than 500 defendants. In the Court’s experience, successful graduations have steadily increased, averaging 10 – 15 per month. More importantly, those active in Community Court do not re-offend, police contacts have been reduced, and trespassing arrests are down. Many of the most chronically homeless have completed the program and are no longer on the streets.

The Community Court includes participation from Mesa Municipal Court Presiding Judge Matt Tafoya, court administrators and supervisors, public defenders, prosecutors, Navigator Community Bridges, Native American Fathers and Family Association, Lutheran Indian Ministries, Mercy Care, and the City of Mesa Homelessness Project.

<https://www.mesaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=30166>

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