

Youthful sex offenders plan uses variation of drug court

Posted: The Daily Gate City, Keokuk, Iowa, Thursday, October 15, 2015 10:51 am

By Cindy Iutzi dgeditor@dailygate.com

MOUNT PLEASANT – A program similar to drug court but instead tailored to youthful sex offenders is being organized by the Eighth Judicial District Department of Corrections.

Youthful sex offenders are ages 18 to 25.

The Eighth Judicial District includes the counties of Lee (North and South), Appanoose, Davis, Des Moines, Henry, Jefferson, Poweshiek, Keokuk, Louisa, Mahaska, Monroe, Van Buren, Wapello and Washington.

“This is a whole new idea for us that we started thinking about when (the federal government) sent this grant program,” said Vince Remmark, director of special services. “We’re still in the planning stages.”

The Eighth Judicial District is one of seven agencies in the nation and the only one in Iowa that received a three-year \$748,000 grant from the Department of Justice to set up the pilot program.

Some of the basics that have been decided include the involvement of the courts – specifically a judge who will meet with youthful sexual offenders monthly – a specially trained probation officer assigned solely to the program, and a high risk unit officer who will go through training by the Iowa Board for the Treatment of Sex Offenders.

The program’s HRU officer will check on youthful sex offenders with a high risk to reoffend at random times during the day or at night.

“I think this program is going to lower recidivism rates,” Remmark said. “This age group of 18 to 25 is a unique group to work with.”

The youthful offender would only be eligible for treatment if he or she has been convicted.

According to Remmark, prior to treatment, a case planning profile will be assembled that considers the nature of the offender’s crime and contains the results of screenings and assessments.

Each person will have his or her individual case plan.

“Some may not be ready for treatment and may go into a reasoning class. Others may go into orientation or pretreatment,” Remmark said. “They have to understand what is expected of them.”

A statutory offender – such as a 19-year-old dating a 14-year-old – will go into a different category, he said. Offenders with special needs will be on a certain track, and those identified as being at a high risk to reoffend will be on an intense supervision track.

“Right now we have one treatment group except for statutory,” Remmark said. “Low risk offenders are being placed with high risk, older offenders. They can contaminate younger offenders.”

All sex offenders will be monitored by the use of GPS ankle bracelets and regular, required reporting.

In addition to treatment for youthful sex offenders, training on basic life skills and social skills will be provided through the program.

“We have 35 (youthful sex offenders) districtwide, so we’ll fill our probation officer’s case load fast,” Remmark said. “There’s definitely a need. I can’t wait to see how this unfolds.”

He hopes to have the program positions filled by December, case loads transferred and new offenders referred so the program can be up and running in early 2016.

The program will be based in Mount Pleasant with officers likely traveling throughout the region to meet with offenders.

Remmark’s not sure which judge will be appointed for the program.