

TITLE OF SESSION: Incentives, Sanctions, and Service Adjustments

Session description: Incentives and sanctions, also known as contingency management, are essential to treatment court success. When properly used, they are a powerful tool for improving client behavior and program outcomes. Treatment courts achieve better outcomes when practitioners understand the science behind behavior management and apply the principles. The research is clear—reliably impacting participant behavior requires both consistent reinforcement of positive behaviors and reliable responses to undesirable behaviors. Nonetheless, despite our best intentions (and perhaps the best intentions of the participants), sometimes incentives and sanctions don't work. For some participants, our responses to behavior seem to have no impact. To truly change behavior, we must understand and respond in ways consistent with decades of research and achieve the desired outcome. This requires understanding who the individual is, what risks and needs they present, and setting up programming that carries the best chance of lasting behavior change. We discuss the essential elements of effective behavior modification in a treatment court and reveal what actions a program should consider when its efforts appear futile. This session will examine the difference between compliance and behavior change, effective practices in responding to behavior, and setting up programming based on the individual's risk and need.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the science underlying incentives, sanctions, and other responses in treatment courts.
2. Understand the essential elements of effective behavior modification in treatment courts.
3. Discuss when contingency management doesn't work and actions a program can take to address those causes of failure.



Vanessa Matthews is the division director for the Treatment Court Institute (TCI), a division of All Rise. She was employed as a police officer with Oklahoma City from 1990 to 2012, working with the Oklahoma County drug court from May 1998 to September 2009. She was instrumental in the development of the drug court program, including policy manual development, budgeting, and staff training. Her training presentations and curriculum development include recognizing the signs of mental illness, identifying a subject under the influence of drugs, effectively communicating with consumers, strengths-based interviewing, team building, drug testing, program planning and development, grant writing, community supervision, cultural proficiency for consumers served, ethics and confidentiality in treatment programs, psychopharmacology of drugs for first responders, and community resource identification and development. In 2014, Ms. Matthews was appointed by the governor of Oklahoma to serve on the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board. In 2015 she was reappointed to a four-year term and elected chair of the organization.

She joined the staff of All Rise in 2016 to serve as the director of TCI. Ms. Matthews has an associate degree from Oklahoma State University in applied police science and a bachelor's degree from the University of Central Oklahoma in criminal justice. In July 2020, Ms. Matthews was elected to serve as a member of the national NAMI Board of Directors and re-elected for a second term. In May of 2023, Ms. Matthews was selected to serve as part of the IACP Mental Health workgroup.