

*New Jersey Drug Courts*

*Stories of  
Recovery  
and Hope*



New Jersey Courts

Independence • Integrity • Fairness • Quality Service



**Chief Justice Stuart Rabner**

## **National Drug Court Month Stories of Recovery and Hope**

When New Jersey's drug court program first began operating on a statewide basis in 2002, it represented a bold, new approach to break the destructive cycle that connects drug and alcohol addiction to criminal behavior.

Drug courts gave non-violent criminal defendants an opportunity to overcome alcohol and drug dependencies and resolve related criminal charges against them. Defendants had to commit to a rigorous treatment and recovery program with intensive supervision for multiple years. Along the way, the program helped participants take steps necessary to stay clean and become productive members of society.

Less than two decades later, the results reveal a remarkable record of lives reformed.

Drug court graduates are far less likely to return to prison than other defendants. Within 3 years of graduation from the program, only 7 percent of drug court graduates are convicted for new indictable crimes. For that same period, 40 percent of defendants released from state prison are convicted of new indictable offenses.

More than 930 drug court graduates have had their criminal records expunged.

Only 15 percent of drug court participants have jobs when they enroll in the program; 89 percent are employed when they graduate.

Drug court graduates are far more likely to earn a valid driver's license, secure health benefits, and improve their level of education while in the program.

685 babies have been born to drug court participants or graduates who were

previously addicted to drugs. And 206 drug court participants regained custody of their children.

Yet the most compelling testament to the power of drug court to transform lives comes from the participants themselves.

In this booklet, drug court participants and graduates tell their personal stories of recovery and the lessons learned along the way.

Luana Cordeiro, once an abused teenager who tried to dull her pain with drugs, is now a confident woman who speaks to other drug court participants. She is finishing a college degree this semester on a scholarship she earned with the help of drug court.

Nira Skelton Jackson, an early participant in drug court, had abandoned her children to chase her drug habit. Now an ordained minister who has volunteered at the Bergen County Jail, she works as a facility coordinator at Integrity House and is a clinical case manager for Spring House for Women.

Landon Hacker used to spend his nights sleeping under the Camden side of the Ben Franklin Bridge. After completing drug court, he graduated Rutgers University in Camden with a 4.0 grade point average. He is now in his third year of law school at Rutgers with plans to eventually represent drug court defendants.

Behind each of these success stories stood an entire team of committed professionals: probation officers, rehabilitation and treatment providers, prosecutors and defense attorneys, drug court coordinators, Judiciary substance abuse evaluators, judges, and many others.

At a time when our state and nation struggle for answers to a worsening drug abuse crisis, these stories remind us there is cause for hope. I want to thank all of the drug court participants who generously contributed their stories so that others facing similar struggles might find inspiration. I wish each of them continued success in their recovery.

**Stuart Rabner**

*Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court*



**Judge Glenn A. Grant**

## **National Drug Court Month Stories of Recovery and Hope**

Chances are, you have a close friend or family member who suffered from addiction.

Tragic stories of lives destroyed and lost due to addiction are everywhere.

This booklet tells a different story. It tells the story of New Jersey drug court participants and graduates who have experienced the depths of drug and alcohol abuse and survived. It tells a story of recovery and hope.

This May, drug courts throughout New Jersey will join more than 3,000 such programs nationwide to mark National Drug Court Month.

Since 2002, New Jersey drug courts have demonstrated that a combination of accountability and compassion can save lives while also conserving valuable resources and reducing exorbitant criminal justice costs.

This year alone, drug court offered more than 150,000 individuals nationwide the opportunity to turn criminal charges against them into an opportunity to receive the treatment needed to repair their lives, reconnect with their families and find long-term recovery.

Since the first drug court program began in New Jersey, more than 5,800 participants have graduated from drug court, and more than 6,400 citizens are actively engaged in the program across the state.

Statistics only begin to tell the story. Each of those numbers represents individuals whose lives were changed or saved. In the pages that follow, drug court participants tell their personal stories of recovery in their own words.

I invite you to read their stories and observe the lessons they offer.

These are the stories of individuals who once felt they were without hope, living on the streets and committing crimes to support their habit, who are now drug free and debt free and reconnected with their families and society again.

You will meet drug court participants who are not just surviving but actually thriving. Many initially resisted the prospect of drug court and its strict requirements, agreeing to participate only to avoid a prison sentence. Today, they are a group that includes engaged and devoted parents, ordained ministers and new owners of small businesses. Others are college students who are moving on to law school or working toward a master's degree. More than one of the drug court participants in this book earned a 4.0 grade-point average.

Not surprisingly, many have turned to careers that allow them to help others who are dealing with the effects of addiction. One individual founded a non-profit to provide pro-bono legal services to the homeless and plans to represent drug court participants. Another became a licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor. And one individual is now president of the Drug Court Alumni Association, a resource available to all graduates.

As we commemorate National Drug Court Month, I want to recognize the many individuals – judges, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators, treatment providers, and others –who help our Drug court participants on their remarkable journey toward sobriety. I also want to thank all the individuals who participated in this booklet for sharing their inspiring and encouraging stories of recovery and hope.

**Glenn A. Grant, J.A.D.**

*Acting Administrative Director of the Courts*



**Judge Timothy P. Lydon**

## **National Drug Court Month Stories of Recovery and Hope**

I have the privilege of serving as the chair of the Drug Court Judges Committee and the drug court judge for the Mercer Vicinage. This booklet was prepared as a part of the Judiciary's Drug Court Month commemoration. It is a compilation of essays that describe the personal experiences of several drug court participants. Before you read them, I would like to provide a brief introduction and offer some reflections on the state's drug court program.

More than 20 years ago, New Jersey established drug court as a pilot program to provide an alternative to prison for defendants with substance use disorders. Its gradual expansion across the state has afforded thousands of defendants the opportunity to seek treatment and embrace recovery. As we commemorate Drug Court Month, it is a time to reflect on the success of the program and celebrate the accomplishments of the program's participants.

The state's drug court program has provided numerous societal benefits. It has reduced recidivism and generated millions of dollars in cost savings. More than 40 percent of non-drug court inmates who are from prison are convicted of new indictable offenses within three years of release and are re-incarcerated at a rate of almost 30 percent. The rate of recidivism for drug court participants is dramatically lower. Only 6.3 percent of drug court graduates are convicted of new offenses and less than 2.5 percent are sentenced to prison. Remarkably, the cost of providing treatment and other services to a drug court participant is a fraction of the cost of incarceration. It costs less than \$13,000 annually to supervise a drug court participant, while the annual cost of incarceration is approximately \$55,000 per inmate.

The program's effect on the lives of participants has been profound. Participants complete comprehensive inpatient and/or outpatient drug treatment programs and achieve a sustainable recovery. As a result, 95 percent of all drug tests in 2018 were negative. Participants also accomplish many personal and professional goals. Most participants obtain full-time employment, medical benefits, and their driver's licenses by the time of graduation. Some individuals work to obtain a GED, complete vocational training, or pursue a college education. In addition, they strive to become better parents and rebuild their

relationships with family members. Since 2002, more than 625 babies have been born drug free, and more than 206 participants have obtained custody of their children.

Although the statistics are compelling, only the stories of the drug court graduates can provide a full accounting of the program's success. The essays in this booklet provide a firsthand glimpse into the drug court program and its impact on the state. Many of the stories are deeply moving and reveal the devastation that is inexorably linked to substance abuse. Each essay, however, conveys a spirit of optimism. The essays are replete with examples of courage, triumph, and redemption.

I am grateful to all of the individuals who contributed to this booklet. Their contributions will inspire participants to overcome the obstacles to recovery and move beyond the limitations of their past. In the aggregate, the essays demonstrate to all drug court participants that they can escape the cycle of addiction and follow the path to a better life.

I trust that will you enjoy the stories that are contained in this booklet. I would encourage you to share these essays with anyone who is struggling with addiction. The stories of our participants and graduates might instill a measure of hope to those in the pursuit of recovery.

**Judge Timothy P. Lydon**  
*Chair, Drug Court Judges Committee*  
*Superior Court of New Jersey, Mercer Vicinage*

## About the New Jersey Drug Courts

New Jersey's drug court program assists individuals in overcoming alcohol and other drug dependencies while resolving their related non-violent criminal charges.

An effective alternative to state prison, drug court programs are rigorous, requiring intensive supervision based on frequent and random drug testing and court appearances along with tightly structured regimens of treatment and recovery services.

The drug court judge heads a team of court staff, attorneys, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators and treatment professionals who work together to support and monitor a participant's recovery. The program maintains a critical balance of authority, supervision, support and encouragement in order to provide graduates with the skills they need to stay sober and out of prison.

There once was a girl who was born in an exotic country to a set of young parents. This country was the beautiful Brazil, where the best soccer players in the world reside, and the annual Carnival Festival shuts down the country for a week. Her mother was 22 and realized it would be very difficult to raise a child in a country where only the wealthy have opportunities. So, her mother boldly left for the United States of America and left her young child behind. This young child did not see her mother again for three years.

That little girl was me, and I will tell you how I went from attending Kean University to shooting heroin, losing custody of my kids, and living on the streets of Newark.

By the time I was reunited with my mother, I was extremely happy and couldn't wait to begin our life together. The missing piece to my heart was now a part of me again. This happiness did not last long.

At the age of five, I was sexually molested by my mother's cousin. At the age of eight, my uncle sexually molested me, and I kept that a secret for more than four years. During those four years, I would continuously punch my stomach, just to make sure there wasn't a baby inside of me. I was never able to feel clean, worthy, accepted, happy or loved. By the time my big secret came out, no one in my family believed me. They just told me to get over it and stop talking about it.

I had a very tumultuous relationship with my mother. She was always working, always late, never kept her word, and never showed up for any of my sports or school events. My mother would tell me stories about a babysitter in Brazil that used to burn me with cigarettes and bite me. She also told me she doesn't remember conceiving me, that my father had his way with her while she was drunk. I felt like a victim, unwanted, and someone who was destined for horrible things. I couldn't imagine things getting any worse. I already felt like the universe was against me and no one loved me. I did have one thing ... my dad. He was my everything.

I was not ready for what was going to happen, but it did. My dad began sexually assaulting me, continuously for five months. Every single morning, he would crawl into my bed and kill what was left of an already broken 15-year-old girl. Again, when the news came out, nothing was done. The best idea I could come up with was drink alcohol until I blacked out and take prescription medicine. This combination made all the pain go away. I was pretty good at covering up the pain and the drugs. I also counted the days and seconds until I could move out.

ATLANTIC COUNTY

**Luana Cordeiro**

*Adoring mom,  
college student,  
survivor*



**Luana Cordeiro with  
her daughter**

That day finally came and I left for Kean University. I took out student loans and lived on campus. I was finally free from the monsters in my life. Unfortunately, I was not aware of the monster that was growing inside of me.



Luana Cordeiro

I was in the Criminal Justice Honor Society, a dean's list student and a cheerleader. On the outside, everything looked perfect. I had tons of friends and was having the best years of my life. During my junior year, I slowly started backing away from positive people and began hanging out with people who drugged and partied all night. During my senior year in college, I began shooting heroin and smoking crack.

I met all the requirements for graduation. I paid for graduation, received my cap and gown, but I did not go to my finals. My disease convinced me I needed more drugs to study, and I listened. I got more drugs, but I did not study. You see, I have a disease that is progressive, cunning and baffling. It will tell me I don't have a disease and the number of drugs and alcohol I put in my body is perfectly normal. Wouldn't you use drugs if you had all these horrible things happen to you? VICTIM.... that is the card I played for 15 years.

I will not go into detail about all the devastating things that occurred while I was in active addiction. I will tell you I lost everything, including my two small boys, Jayden and Devan. I did everything and anything I needed to get one more. I became homeless and lived on the streets of Newark. I was in and out of jail and made a trip to any state funded detox/facility several times a year. I was perfectly fine with dying a drug addict. Things got so bad that I began believing I had parasites crawling in my skin. This led to a constant state of psychosis and lesions all over my face and body.

In 2014, I was arrested by immigration authorities, who informed me they were going to deport me if I acquired another drug charge. They put me on an ankle bracelet and sent me on my way. This did nothing to stop me. I was also sentenced to recovery court and ran right out of the courtroom.

On Aug. 28, 2014, my mother turned me in to the police, and it was finally over. I knew this time I wasn't going anywhere. Something had to change, and I began to pray. I prayed every single day. I have to be perfectly honest, I did not believe my prayers were being heard.

Hello, my name is Luana Cordeiro and I am 34 years old. My sobriety date is Aug. 29, 2014. I am a mother of three, a recovery

advocate, recovery court graduate and a woman in long-term recovery from heroin and alcohol abuse. I work at Enlightened Solutions Detox, where I continue to carry the message to a sick and suffering addicts. Today, I am loved by many and no longer feel alone. I am a SURVIVOR, not a victim. Most importantly, I am God's daughter, so that pretty much means I am AMAZING. I have custody of my boys and had a daughter in recovery. I am committed to only surrounding myself with people who are taking the next right step and advancing their education.

The past few years, I have been repaying student loans that were in default since 2009. I turned a \$40,000 loan into almost \$70,000. It had been a struggle for me to try and go back to school. I call and I try and ask for loan forgiveness, I share my story, but it doesn't matter. They are charging me an absurd amount in fees and interests. I always felt that there wasn't help for someone like me. I am sure that I am not alone in this struggle.

I was unaware that God had my future all planned out and he was going to use recovery court to get me there. I was asked to speak at an opioid summit by recovery court. I wasn't sure what I was getting myself into. Prior to speaking in front of close to 400 people, I was back and forth in my head for many weeks. Consumed with fear and self-doubt, I didn't think that I could do it. A dear friend of mine said, "Just ask God to show you what he can do before going up on stage." Something inside of me kept saying, "Talk about not finishing school." I would then think, "I only have six minutes to tell my life story, NO WAY." I did listen to that inner voice, and boy did it make a difference.

After the opioid summit, the recovery court team got together with Stockton University and created a scholarship for me to go back to school. My dream had always been to finish school, and one day I got the phone call that changed my life. I used to get hung up over the fact that I never finished, and there were so many barriers that kept me from returning to school. Recovery court broke down all the barriers, and I was given the first recovery court scholarship at Stockton University. I had to repeat my entire senior year, but that's OK. I currently am in my last semester and will graduate in May with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. I am also working full-time as a CADIC intern at Enlightened Solutions as well as CADIC classes every Saturday. I have plans to start the MSW program at Stockton next fall. It has not been easy trying to juggle school, work, kids, recovery, and life, but I refuse to give up. The journey of a thousand miles begins with one small step. That is what I do each day, take the next right step.



Luana Cordeiro with her son

*"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one small step. That is what I do each day, take the next right step"*  
- Luana Cordiero

**BERGEN COUNTY** Today I am a grateful recovering addict with more than 16 years and 7 months of continuous sobriety.

**Nira Skelton Jackson**

*Ordained minister  
Sponsor  
Woman of honor*

Originally, I was sentenced to pretrial intervention (PTI) in 2000, which I violated as a result of my active addiction. I was non-compliant and avoidant for random toxicology screenings. In 2001, I was sentenced to probation, which I violated by absconding from an out-of-state program. In May 2002, while detained in the Bergen County Jail, I was offered a minimum of three years and a maximum of nine years in state prison. At that time, I declined the plea offer. I witnessed women coming in and out of jail on drug court sanctions, and they would give negative feedback about the drug court program.



**Nira Skelton Jackson**

I was blessed to have a pool attorney. My attorney was unfamiliar with the new drug court program in Bergen County. I requested my attorney file an application for drug court. An assessment was completed, and I was accepted to the drug court program. While I was awaiting a bed for inpatient treatment at Integrity House, a female Bergen County participant absconded from Integrity House; which in turn moved forward my sentencing and ability to enter treatment. I was sentenced and sent to treatment on Jan. 21, 2003. This was the best thing for my life. I completed inpatient treatment on July 21, 2003. I went to live in the home of my parents and children, whom I had abandoned as a result of my addiction to heroin. My continuum of care treatment plan was to attend a 12-step fellowship and outpatient at the Bergen Regional Evergreen Program. This time, the work really began. I had to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up and had to do it fast. I began working at Integrity House as the weekend overnight facility coordinator in September 2003. I began attending classes to become a certified drug and alcohol counselor. I decided on a project to fill my free time by checking on a friend who was bedridden in Bergen Regional Hospital. I checked in on Monday through Saturday. I then began studying for the ministry. While in drug court, my oldest daughter began college in Lancaster, Massachusetts. Due to my positive conduct while in drug court, I was permitted to leave the state for a few days to help my daughter move into college and adjust to being away for the first time.

I graduated from the Bergen County drug court with no sanctions on Jan. 26, 2006 as the first female to graduate from the Bergen County Drug Court Program. I have maintained employment at Integrity House since 2003 as a weekend night facility coordinator. I also have been employed at *Spring House* for Women as a clinical case manager since 2005. I have sat on the board of the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Subcommittee

and have volunteered at the Bergen County Jail's female unit. I have been an ordained minister since 2011. I have sponsored women in the 12-step fellowship. I am the founder of a 12-step group (My Sister's Keeper), which is now being held in one of Integrity House's sober living programs. I have been able to maintain a loving, caring relationship with a man who has the same values in life as I do. I am a mother to my now adult children, a grandmother to many grandchildren, and I have been able to establish a loving and caring relationship with my brother, who was emotionally unavailable during my active addiction. I am able to be there for events in my goddaughter's and niece's lives. I am a daughter who continues to follow up on all my parents' medical needs and care.

I am a woman of honor and dignity who was born at the sentencing of Bergen County drug court. I am a drug court graduate.



**M**y name is Landon Hacker. I was born on Aug. 10, 1987 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and I grew up in Voorhees, New Jersey. My clean date is Dec. 1, 2011, and I graduated from Burlington County drug court in September 2014. Not in my wildest dreams could I have ever imagined the places life has taken me. Prior to entering drug court, I spent a substantial amount of my adult life either homeless, in and out of jail, or in institutions as a result of my drug addiction. I had zero respect for authority, zero respect for the law, and zero respect for myself. I did not care what I did or what happened to me. All I cared about was getting high, and I did not allow anyone or anything to stand in the way of that. I once had no plans of living past the age of 25, and I was okay with that.

In 2012, I took advantage of the opportunity to participate in drug court, which ultimately saved my life. I knew I wanted a better life. I knew if I went back out on the streets life was not guaranteed. I did not want to die on the streets or in prison, which is where my life was taking me. I did not want to feel the guilt and shame anymore. I did not want to hurt my family and friends anymore. I did not want to have to worry about where my next meal was coming from or where I was going to sleep. I sincerely wanted to change, and I was willing to do whatever I needed to do to make that happen.

The best part about being at the bottom is that there is nowhere to go but up. I had nothing to lose by trying, so I gave myself a chance. I applied the same attitude and mentality I used on the

*"I am a woman of honor and dignity who was born at the sentencing of Bergen County drug court. I am a drug court graduate."*

*- Nira Skelton Jackson*

**BURLINGTON COUNTY**

**Landon Hacker**

*Law school student  
Founder of non-profit*



Landon Hacker

streets to get one more bag and to survive one more day towards my new life. I was willing to do whatever it took to stay clean and do the right thing, just as I was once willing to do whatever it took to get one more.

Drug court provided me with an opportunity to better my life. More importantly, drug court instilled in me the values of accountability, responsibility, and discipline. Drug court provided me with the help and resources I needed to address my addiction and problems. While in drug court, as required, I obtained a job. As once certainly unemployable, I have maintained that job for almost seven years and have risen in the ranks multiple times. Also while in drug court, I decided to go back to school and earn my bachelor's degree. I started at Burlington County College and transferred to Rutgers. In 2016, I graduated from Rutgers with a degree in political science, with a 4.0 GPA, as the top graduating student in my major and as a member of the National Political Science Honors Society. I am now in my third year of law school at Rutgers. I tell you my accomplishments not to brag, but to show you that if you give yourself a chance and put everything you have into something, there is nothing you cannot achieve. There is nothing more powerful in this universe than our ability to believe in ourselves.

***“Drug court provided me with an opportunity to better my life. More importantly, drug court instilled in me the values of accountability, responsibility, and discipline.”***

*- Landon Hacker*

When I received my college diploma, I went to the spot on my wall where my drug court diploma hangs, and looked at the two side by side. I took my college diploma and placed it below my drug court diploma. I could not hang them side by side, because to me they do not hold equal weight or have equal value. I consider my drug court diploma a greater achievement. My drug court diploma represents my greatest accomplishment in my life—surviving the horrors of addiction. Undoubtedly, drug court provided me with the opportunity and paved the way for me to earn my degree. Graduating college surely would not have happened if it were not for drug court. And when I earn a law school degree next year, that too will be placed below my drug court diploma.

I intend to dedicate the rest of my life to helping others who are in the position I was once in. I truly believe that we are not bad people, but rather good people who made bad decisions, and those bad decisions should not determine our entire future. My goal is to become a criminal defense attorney, specifically a drug court public defender. I want to help those struggling with drug addiction get the proper help they need—the same help that saved my life. I know what it feels like to be homeless and struggling with a drug addiction. I know what it feels like to be hopeless and helpless. I know what it feels like to have no one care and to be just another file on someone's desk. I know what it feels like to be stuck in the

system. And most importantly, I know what it takes to get out. I want to give to back to others what was once so freely given to me, some hope and an opportunity to change for the better.

In the summer of 2017, I was given the opportunity to intern with the Camden County Office of the Public Defender working with its drug court program. This was by far one the coolest things I have ever done. I went from being in drug court to interning with drug court. I was able to see firsthand the behind-the-scenes workings of the program. Any program that can take an addict like me and turn him/her into a law student is truly a remarkable program. Unlike any jail or institution I have ever been in, drug court releases you a much better person and better situated than you when you came in. When I went into drug court, I was homeless, unemployed, and in active addiction. When I came out of drug court, I was sheltered, employed, in college, and in recovery.

In addition to my job and law school, I formed a non-profit organization dedicated to providing the homeless with pro bono legal services, employment opportunities, and permanent housing. I intend to continue to expand our footprint throughout New Jersey so we can help more people.

I truly believe that everything in life happens for a reason. Although the path I chose to travel was unfortunate, I would not trade my life experiences for the world. It was my path that has built the person I am today. Through adversity, we truly find out what we are made of. I learned that anything in life is possible, so long as you want it bad enough. I found that no matter the situation or task at hand, belief combined with determination, perseverance, and hard work will ultimately lead to success. Never forget that anything in life worth having is worth fighting for. Never let anyone tell you you cannot do something because of your past or who you are. Never give up on yourself. Never stop striving for success. So long as you believe in yourself and do the right thing, the sky is the limit.



**M**y name is Ashley Brown, and I'm a survivor. I'm 30 years old and grew up on the south side of Chicago as an only child. I went to school, graduated from college, and have a master's degree. I moved to New Jersey in 2011 to pursue a career in the financial industry but soon realized that I wanted to work for a purpose instead of a profit. I later switched to the public sector and started working in Philadelphia at a non-profit organization for kids. It

**CAMDEN COUNTY**

**Ashley Brown**  
*Debt-free*  
*Happy at work*  
*and home*



felt like my life was starting to come together and I was finally beginning to settle down in this new state by myself. However, at the end of the day, I was really suffering major depression. Inside I felt lonely, sad, alone, and helpless, and I truly believe that's what made me vulnerable to anyone or anything. I started hanging with the wrong people and doing the wrong things. It's very true what they say, "PEOPLE, PLACES & THINGS!"

It doesn't matter who you are, what you look like, what you've accomplished, or how much money you have; this disease does not discriminate. I believe that if you want to see the sunshine, you have to weather the storm. I absolutely regret the crime that I committed, but I truly believe that the crime saved my life. I had no control over myself anymore and it felt like everything was spiraling down.

***"I believe that if you want to see the sunshine, you have to weather the storm."***

*- Ashley Brown*

I'm a first-time offender and was given the option of five years in prison or drug court. I had no idea what drug court was about, but I was willing to take anything that would keep me from behind bars. It was an adjustment for me, and I was scared, nervous, and miserable. I knew I only had two options: I could either sink or swim. And I chose to swim! Today, I have my own apartment, new vehicle, I'm debt-free, financially stable, and have a great job that I love. I have a great support system, and my mom has been my rock and provider throughout this memorable chapter in my life. I have met some great people through meetings and learned many skills. But I couldn't have accomplished all of this without the help of some great people. The happiness that I have today has no limits.



**Samantha**  
*Nine years clean  
Graduate student*

I guess you can say that I grew up quite normal. I had a mom who stayed home with all four of us kids, she cooked dinner and did our homework with us; and a dad who worked as many hours a week as he could to make sure he gave us a comfortable life. I am one of four. I have an older sister from my mom's first marriage, an older brother from my mom's second, and then my sister and I from her last. We were all in sports, and my parents never missed a game. This is an important aspect of my youth, which you will better understand later. Having four kids in three different households who participated in extracurricular activities, including church functions, there was little e for much else.

Fast forward to freshman year in high school. I was 14. My group of friends was significantly older than me (seniors). My best friend was from my neighborhood, and we were inseparable. I had my first drink with this group, my first cigarette, got arrested

at an after-homecoming party and smoked weed for the first time. I truly believe that my "gateway drug" if you will, was my peer group and my environment. By this time, my mom had begun working, as we were all pretty self-sufficient. I had a lot of freedom, as did my friends, which we used to our advantage.

To describe myself at 14, I can say I was very insecure; I lacked self-esteem. I was a follower. I did whatever I could to fit in. Those characteristics began long before high school, but they were exacerbated freshman year.

As I continued to seek acceptance throughout high school, I sought attention from all of the wrong groups of people. To help you understand; I won "most likely to be late to graduation" by my class in my senior year, not my proudest moment. Smoking pot became smoking and drinking, which then became smoking, drinking and taking Percocet 30s. My parents never worried about me. I was an all-star soccer player. I was in the honor society. Like I mentioned earlier, this was a way that I stayed pretty invisible. My parents never expected me, of all the kids, to begin using drugs. They also had no idea about my feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

The first time I took a Percocet was at this house party in town. Four of us split one, then two of us split one and before you know it, I was taking five, six, seven, eight a day, depending on how much money I had. I remember the sensation of just feeling okay. I didn't care what anybody said or how I felt; it was all irrelevant. Another moment early on that I remember vividly was the day I began to understand that I was an addict. We were picking up our 30s from Drexel, where our dealer was. I began talking to him about how weird I was feeling. I couldn't sleep, was shaky and sweaty. He looked at me and said, "That's just withdrawal," like it was nothing. I was terrified. Shortly after that was my first attempt at getting clean. I went to my mom and dad's best friend's house. I confided in them, as I was too ashamed to tell my own family. They let me stay there for three days before calling my parents and letting them know that I was safe. They came and picked me up and were just as shocked as me. They took me to get ice cream and I detoxed for the next couple of days on the couch.

I did not know about meetings. I did not know about triggers or what was underneath my using, so I went back to the same people, the same places and ended up doing the same thing; insanity. I was working two jobs to support my addiction, both still not being enough for me. I began to steal from the registers

and purses at the bakery and from the pretzel money and school fundraiser money at the elementary school. I was also taking way more than I had ever before. One specific evening, I had sniffed eight OxyContin 80's and only remember waking up. I was so far gone that being high was the only way I could manage.

***“People come to me for advice and trust me with not only their purses, but their children. I am blessed.”***  
- Samantha

This is a pivotal moment in my addiction. I was using with my brother, and we were driving around looking for Percocet. There were none around town, but one guy I called said to me, “I don't have any 30s but my boy has heroin.” I said “no thanks, I'm good” and hung up the phone. My brother looked at me and asked what he had said, and I mentioned the heroin. My brother said, “It's like the same thing.” That was the first day I did heroin. That was the day I met my ex-boyfriend, who was also my heroin dealer. That was the day, unbeknownst to me, that a lot of things would change in my life.

Heroin became my drug of choice. My drug dealing boyfriend was also using, so we were barely getting by on my two jobs. Of course, it started with one or two bags and turned into a bundle each, sometimes more. I was introduced to a new lifestyle when I met him. At this point, both jobs were catching on that I was stealing, and I was inevitably let go.

The first time I sold jewelry was at a little store in town that has since been shut down. My ex said, “Here, sell this.” I was 17; I had no idea of the severity of what I was doing. I used my license. This continued for a few months. Then I committed my first burglary. I honestly cringe writing this now. By this time, I had become privy to the fact that I should not use my license, as I fully understood that I was committing a crime. I didn't care. All I wanted was to get high.

I committed more burglaries after that, and when I was too dope sick, I robbed my parents, sister, brother and close family - I even sold my parents' wedding rings. This lifestyle caught up to me quickly. I was arrested, placed in jail and was released after my parents hired an attorney. While out on bail, I could not resist the allure of my ex and the idea that I could use again and not become an addict. Within weeks, I was committing more burglaries. At this point, my lawyer had no choice but to try and get drug court as an option. The judge at that time was not very fond of me.

I was released again and was to begin drug court soon after. I showed up to my hearing high and was held and then sent to a short-term inpatient program. I still didn't get it; I would relapse a few more times in drug court. I also picked up a crack habit after becoming employed at a Heritage's with an ex-crack addict. I have

always been good at manipulating people to jump if I jump. This is something I use for good now.

On April 30, 2010, I went to probation and knew I was going to be positive for drugs. I was held again. This time, they weren't letting me go home. I was incarcerated, and within 30 days was sent to a long-term inpatient in North Jersey called Discovery. I spent six months there and was then sent to Crawford House in Princeton. Crawford House changed my life. I learned how to be an independent, self-sufficient woman. Most importantly, I learned that I was capable and that I was good enough. I made great friends who I still talk to today. After that, I was sent to an Oxford House. I was away for over a year. I spent six or so months in that Oxford House and learned more skills about paying bills and budgeting my money. All of these things taught me a new way to live.

There are many other parts to this story that I left out and there are still things that I remember today. I am in the process of getting my expungement. My expungement has been pushed back multiple times at this point, but once was for a charge that I had no recollection of. I had paid it off but had no clue that I got it.

Today, I am a 30-year-old woman coming up on nine years clean. My life is not at all what I planned it to be, but I would not change a thing. I was meant to be where I am today and experience what I had to experience. I had two officers and a counselor who saw something in me that I sure did not see in myself. They gave me my life back.

Not only did I live to see 30, but I am working on my Masters of Science degree in behavioral health and counseling, with a focus on addictions counseling, from Drexel University, the same university I used to get my drugs at. I received my undergraduate degree from Drexel, too. I am one approval away from receiving my CADC that will be an LCADC when I graduate in 2020. I have been working at an outpatient drug and alcohol treatment facility since 2015. I get to work with individuals who are in drug court, ISP, parole DCP&P and other court programs.

Today, I have many friends who are in law enforcement. As of April I will no longer be a felon in the state of New Jersey, my parents never have to check on me in my sleep to make sure I am breathing, and I am a good person and friend. People come to me for advice and trust me with not only their purses, but their children. I am blessed.

About a year ago, I stumbled across a box in my basement. In it, I

found my drug court workbook. There was one question that said, “What do you want for yourself in five years?”

Everything, and I mean everything I wrote down, I have today: A degree, trust, I bought a new car, happiness among others. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity I was given. Drug court saved my life.

I will conclude with one of my favorite quotes (on the previous page) to this day and the one that I read at my drug court graduation.



**CAPE MAY COUNTY** Hi, my name is Letie, and I’m a grateful recovering addict.

**Letie**

*Truly grateful*

I am a recovery court participant, soon to be graduate. A little about me: I grew up in a loving home, with loving supportive parents, and a younger sister, in a nice neighborhood in Cape May County. There is minimal crime or violence in the town where I grew up. I rode horses and played sports. I was a C student. I went to church and participated in youth group. I was a “normal” kid.

A normal kid, normal family, normal upbringing, and still at the age of 12, I started using alcohol and drugs. By the time I entered high school, I was an alcoholic and a drug addict. I sold drugs and used drugs, I rarely went to school unless it was to make money off my fellow students. When I was 16, I officially dropped out of school.

I joke now and say I went from a normal girl to a criminal enterprise literally overnight. My choices in friends and my choice of a lifestyle was not really a choice at all but the path of a teenage drug addict.

My drug addiction continued into my adult life. I worked and maintained employment, mainly in the restaurant industry because that allowed me to continue a certain lifestyle. My choice in friends and boyfriends was the same – only people that allowed me to live in addiction.

Fast forward to when I about 30 years old, I had done opiates and had been prescribed opiates off and on for years, but then I was introduced to heroin. Heroin became the be-all and end-all in my story. Heroin took me to the depths of hell and made me do things I never thought I would do. I quickly lost all sense of self, any dignity I ever had. I lost all motivation to work. I lost my family,

I literally lost everything. In the grips of my addiction to heroin, I didn’t care. I was in and out of county jail on misdemeanor charges. Finally, I was caught and charged with theft while on probation, which violated me.

That day was Oct. 22, 2015. My clean date is Oct. 23, 2015.

I wasn’t arrested, I was rescued. I was put in county jail and held there for four months, during which time I was offered recovery court. I didn’t hesitate in taking the offer, I was ready to leave the life of addiction, crime, lying and manipulation behind. I knew in my heart it was the best choice. It was a choice that I made with my family’s support. The day I was arrested and detained was the same day my family stood behind me and said if you get clean, we support you on the journey 100 percent. They never have left my side since.

In February 2016, I entered long-term treatment in North Jersey, and I entered ready to accept the help I needed. I was defeated and ready for change. I learned how to be a human again in that program. I learned how to be a woman. I learned how to talk about what brought me down and learned how to rebuild myself.

In July 2016, I lost my mother while I was in treatment. I didn’t run from treatment. I didn’t use. I faced my emotions and grief head-on, with the support of the treatment facility and the women I was in treatment with.

In August 2016, I left long-term treatment and went to a halfway house. There I learned to be a part of society again, to live in a community with less restrictions and to be accountable for my own actions. I was able to work, attend outside AA/NA meetings, and again make friends with other people in recovery.

In February 2017, I came home to Cape May County, to my family. To start my own family. I gave birth to my son in August 2017. I am forever grateful to recovery court. It gave me the tools to save myself. It helped me to become a responsible adult.

I hold a job now. I’m a full-time mother and an aunt to my nieces. I’m at all school functions for them, all sports events and their horseback riding lessons. I have a bank account. I have a credit card. I have a driver’s license and a car. I am entrusted with not only my child, but other people’s children every morning when I put six of them on the school bus. I help my dad, who has Parkinson’s disease. I attend AA meetings regularly and guest speak

***“I continue to recover for the loved ones of addicts still suffering, to give them hope that we can and do recover.”***

*-Letie*

at meetings. I am active in my community. I'm a contributing member to society, to my family and to my friends. Recovery court gave me the tools to make that possible.

I continue my journey of recovery not just for myself, but for the still sick and suffering addicts out there, I continue recovering for those who lost the battle to this addiction, I continue to recover for the loved ones of addicts still suffering, to give them hope that we can and do recover. My name is Letie, and I'm a grateful recovering addict.



**CUMBERLAND COUNTY**

**M**y name is Kay Carty. This is my story. It all started in my teen years with experimenting. I began smoking weed and drinking as a junior in high school and would only associate with people like myself. By the age of 20, I was in an abusive relationship and I desperately wanted a change in my life. So a while went by and I met a loving and understanding man who was and still is there for me. I can admit that I have an impulsive addictive behavior. All the drinking and drugs were put down briefly while we were pregnant. My life was "normal" or so I thought. My father passed away, and that put me into a deep depression. I still had this deep urge to have something to cover up all of the pain and weakness I was feeling. I didn't like who I was and the path I had chosen.

**Kay Carty**

*Future social worker*

***"Love and letting my fears go is key. I feel like all of my pain and sorrow is being healed through changing the way I think and staying positive."***

*- Kay Carty*

I was introduced to crack cocaine. I felt like I was untouchable and pain-free, physically and emotionally. Boy did my world turn very dark very quickly. As time went by, I needed more and more to numb the raging inside of me. I couldn't keep up with my children, my family, my job, my whole life. It was so bad that I started doing burglaries to maintain my habit. I ended up with three felonies as a result of my actions. I remember laying on the couch crying and praying to God for him to get this crap away from me. I kept praying and nothing in my life was changing because I didn't want to change. I was so sick of this life of chasing and lying. So in my sick mind, I figured I could substitute the crack with alcohol, which was a huge mistake that brought more problems in my life. One day, after all the dirt I've done to myself as well as to others, I felt that it was finally time, the willingness to change, not to mention all the times in and out of jail.

A miracle came to me: drug court. It was my last chance or I was headed to prison. As time went by, little by little, I felt better and better, thanks to the pushing of my PO and the team who showed me how to live without drugs and alcohol and to have structure in my life.

Although I knew I had to start my life from scratch, I was still a very scared, negative, selfish and a very manipulative person. The temptation was still too great and I knew this chapter in my life had to close. Honestly, what helped me was being mandated to attend IOP and meetings. I deeply feel that working the steps with my sponsor made me take a closer look at myself.

Love and letting my fears go is key. I feel like all of my pain and sorrow is being healed through changing the way I think and staying positive. I am so grateful to say I will be graduating from college in May 2019 with a degree in social work. I hope to help others in addiction. I still attend meetings and try to help the newcomer. I am sober and clean and finally understanding the whys. With the willingness to change, my worries and fears were transformed into serenity. If this reaches one person and gives them hope, I will be truly thankful.



**G**rowing up had always been a struggle for me, never feeling like I fit in with kids from school and having no friends. My immediate family was dysfunctional, and I never knew what to expect when my father would come home from work; most nights it was late. He would be drunk and would abuse my mother. I have an older brother, but we were never close, and he would beat me daily. Most weekends, my brother and I would be shipped off to stay with family members, and that is where things became a real nightmare for me, as an uncle molested me and threatened if I told that he would hurt or kill my parents. The sexual abuse continued. I did not know how to stop it and thought that I had been at fault somehow. I was alone and scared to tell anyone.

When I got older, I became resentful that I had no structure at home. My brother always beat on me, my innocence had been taken, and I thought I knew everything. Running away became a routine for me, as it gave me a sense of control and a way to hurt my parents for not being more involved. I had met my children's father and believed I was grown and left town so the cops could not find me and make me return to the chaotic home I grew up in. I ended up pregnant at 14 years old and again at 16. My boyfriend was controlling and he would not let me finish school. As time went by, I began to realize that my kids' father was also an alcoholic and that his control issues were only getting worse, so I left him. I got my GED but could not afford to go any further with my education. I had struggled for years, moved back home with my parents and exposed my boys to an atmosphere I tried so hard to protect them from. My brother was an addict. I

**Stephanie Stowe**

*Drug-free  
College student*

***“The life I am living today is by the grace of God and the help of the drug court team and my network through NA, which all believed in me when I did not believe in myself. Your past does not have to define your future.”***  
- Stephanie Stowe

was taking care of his children along with my own, and I ended up in another toxic relationship where the man emotionally abused me and accused me of using drugs. I smoked pot but did nothing else.

The emotional abuse began to wear me down, and the environment just seemed to get worse. By the age of 27, I started using crack and then heroin. I felt so beaten and broken that the numbness of the drugs took me to a place I never imagined I would go, but I did. I was unable to be a productive person and gave in to the disease of addiction, leaving my children to live with my parents while I lived in the streets doing whatever I had to for the next fix. I did not even know who I was. I tried a few years later to get clean and reconnect with my family. Things were going good for a while, and then my kids' father came back in the picture, but that did not last. My oldest son at 15 was in a relationship, and they had a baby. We all lived in the same household and it was crazy. I was doing everything right, reconnected with my kids, stayed clean, and then my youngest son took his life one night after a huge fight with his brother's girlfriend. I was so lost, mad, devastated, and empty that after my son's funeral services I found myself on a drug dealer's doorstep and buried myself in addiction again for years, going through the motion of life and wishing to die.

I wanted to change but did not know how or what to do. Then my house got raided and landed me in drug court, where I was angry and thankful at the same time. I got on a maintenance program for methadone and got up every day to go to my program, went to meetings and reported weekly to the courts. I faced a lot of emotions and painful things that I believed I would never overcome, but with some guidance and a support network that I built through the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, I began to feel better, gained some stability, and decided to further my education. I enrolled in college and applied myself, continued taking suggestions, doing what I needed for the courts and realized it was all bettering myself. I graduated from drug court in October 2017 and continued moving forward, stayed involved with my home group and finished getting off methadone, which I have been off for a year now. I remained focused in school, graduated with my associate's degree in social science for social work and received my certificate in alcohol and drug counseling. I am now attending Stockton University, working on my bachelor's in social science for social work and getting ready to start an internship working with mental health and substance abuse issues.

The life I am living today is by the grace of God and the help

of the drug court team and my network through NA, which all believed in me when I did not believe in myself. I am thankful that I was given another chance to flourish in life, and although I have had some traumatic times in my life, I am a productive person in society and building a career for myself. Anything is possible, and your past does not have to define your future.



I am the owner of Truth Be Told Barbershop in Mays Landing. My staff and I have only been in business just over a year, and we've already been awarded second place as the best barbershop in Atlantic County "2018" by the *Atlantic City Press*. Furthermore we've been selected for the 2018 Best of Mays Landing award in the barbershop category by the Mays Landing award program. Sounds great, right?

Let me introduce myself. My name is Corey Bard. I am a former participant of the drug court program and a recovered addict. I started using drugs and alcohol at the age of 23. I later found myself using more hardcore substances such as cocaine and heroin. By then, I was already subconsciously self-destructed. I was getting in trouble with the law more frequently and committing crimes. At that moment, anything could and would trigger me to get high. I felt as though I needed to get high every day, sometimes just because.

In November 2013, my life came to a halt after I got arrested and faced 13 years in prison. By then, I had already hit rock bottom. As an alternative to prison, I was offered the opportunity to participate in drug court. I was accepted into drug court in 2014 and saw it as an opportunity to get help and a second chance at a better life and to become a more productive member of society.

After several months in county jail, I was sent to a long-term treatment facility called Straight and Narrow. Six months later, I was recommended to a halfway house called Hendricks in Vineland. I was sent home four months later to complete an intense outpatient treatment program at a facility called Crossroads in Egg Harbor Township. I was able to complete each phase by accepting my flaws while making peace with my past. I was sentenced to five years of drug court terminating in 2019, but I got an early release in 2017 due to my willingness and drive for change. I also had the privilege of regaining my driver's license. I still attend AA and NA meetings because it's vital to my recovery.

**Corey Bard**  
*Barbershop owner*



Corey Bard

**Desirae DeChamp**

*A fresh start*

Drug court changed every aspect of my life! There was really no other way to begin but by saying that. I had an amazing life. I come from an amazing family and I was always provided with more than I could ever want or need. But just by taking a painkiller that I thought was harmless took me into a downward spiral I thought I would never get out of. Yes, I took one painkiller and I was hooked. I was at work when I was 18 years old and I was given a Percocet. I thought it was no big deal. After I took that one, I felt amazing! So I started by taking one every day that I worked. But naturally my tolerance built up more and more. Then I started taking them on my days off. Then came the day that I couldn't find any. I felt absolutely horrible! My body ached, and it was safe to say that the withdrawal symptoms had taken over me. I continued taking the Percocets for the next 10 years. I started stealing from my family and from whatever job I worked at. I did any and everything that I could to make sure I could keep up with my addiction. I had my first son at 23 years old. I was able to stop taking the pills during my pregnancy but after I gave birth, I was given a prescription for Percocet. So needless to say, that took me right back down the road of addiction.

***“You have to want it and really work at it, but I promise it’s more than worth it. I wouldn’t be where I’m at today if it wasn’t for the drug court program!”***

*- Desirae DeChamp*

It came to the point where I didn't have any Percocet and money was tight. One of my coworkers suggested that I try heroin. I was so against the idea at first, but the withdrawal really started to set in so I became desperate. At 28 years old I tried heroin for the first time. That started me down a road that would change my life forever! Things got worse and worse as time went on. I couldn't keep a job. I stole more money from my family and then I started shoplifting. I got pregnant with my second child. I was homeless and living on the streets. I was shoplifting to survive, and in order to feed my addiction, I continued to rack up felony after felony. At 30 years old, I gave birth to my second-born son. I didn't care about anything but my next high. I signed custody over to the paternal grandmother. I continued to run the street and I continued to get felonies day in and day out. I was in and out of the county jail. I was incarcerated on Aug. 19, 2016. I had no idea that this time in jail was definitely different from any other time. I was offered drug court and I had finally gotten to the point where I had enough. I officially hit my bottom. On Oct. 20, 2016 I was sentenced to drug court. Part of one of the requirements is that in order to remain on the program and be released from jail, I had to have a valid, stable place to live. I tried to go to my parents, but after all I had done to them, they weren't ready to have me back into their lives at that time. I was released to the homeless shelter on Oct. 25, 2016. Once I was released and after I arrived at the shelter is when reality hit. I had to report to drug court the next morning. I had no money and no transportation to make it

to drug court. I called my probation officer and told her I didn't know how I was going to make it to court, and she proceeded to tell me that I better find a way. I went out on faith and called my mom and asked her if she would take me to the courthouse the next day and she agreed to make sure I got there. Needless to say that is my clean date – Aug. 19, 2016!

The day I was sentenced to drug court was the day my life was forever changed! I went through the program and did everything that I was supposed to do. The program added the structure that I needed in my life! I would not be where I am today if it wasn't for drug court. My probation officer was very efficient and she truly did her job! I graduated from drug court on Oct. 30, 2018. I am so thankful for that program. I had another baby on Oct. 3, 2018, my first girl. I have held down a job and got my driving license back. I got custody of my oldest son, and I plan on going back to school to obtain a nursing degree this year. I even met an amazing man I plan on marrying. I have even mended the many relationships I destroyed throughout my addiction.

My sobriety date means the world to me. I know that I will have to work on my recovery every day for the rest of my life, but that's something I'm prepared to do. None of this would have been possible if it wasn't for drug court! You have to want it and really work at it, but I promise it's more than worth it. I wouldn't be where I'm at today if it wasn't for the drug court program!



**M**y childhood was great. Loving parents, three sisters, a beautiful home with a nice yard along with a dog and a swimming pool. I loved to play softball at a young age. I had a lot of friends who played ball and some that didn't. I had two best friends, Joni and Debbie. We were inseparable. Life was awesome!

When I was 14 years old, things were going to change. One of my friends had older brothers. They were in their late 20s. The one brother sexually molested me over and over for the next two years. I didn't know it at the time but he liked young girls. So when I "aged out" in his mind, he went on to another. I was young and didn't know what to do. I never told a soul that this happened to me. At this point in my life, I didn't know how to handle it, so I turned to the bottle. At 16, I started drinking, thinking it was fun, but I was really drowning my feelings. I went to parties and was very promiscuous. It was after I graduated high school I turned to drugs.

I did speed or crank, whatever you want to call it, all the time. I

**Cindy P.**

*Six years sober*

***“My life now is so good. I am not looking over my shoulder or spending so much time trying to get the drug of my choice.”***

*- Cindy P.*

didn't stop until I was pregnant with my first child. I was married with a nice home. It all seemed great. But my husband at the time had his own problems. I had two children, a girl and a boy. After my son was born, I left my husband. I didn't drink for a long time. When I moved out, I started taking pills, opioids and Xanax. This went on until I was 51 years old.

I was living with my now-boyfriend of 26 years. He raised my children like they were his own. I had a lot of problems with my daughter and still do to this day. I have custody of her three sons. But that is another story. I started stealing from the place I worked at. I was then smoking crack. I stole tens of thousands of dollars. When I was arrested, this was my low point. My rock bottom.

I went to rehab in Bergen County. It was the best thing I ever did. I had been to rehab twice before, but as I look back, I wasn't ready to be clean and sober. When I was in rehab, the psychiatrist asked me if I had ever been sexually molested. For one brief second, I thought if I don't tell him, I will never get better. So I blurted it out to him, and at that very second, I felt the world being lifted off my shoulders. From that point on, I have been clean and sober. It has been six years now and my life is great!

I was sent to drug court for my sentence, and I will tell you that that was one of the best things that I have completed in my life! My life now is so good. I am not looking over my shoulder or spending so much time trying to get the drug of my choice. This program is wonderful. The people who work for drug court are very good at what they do. This was the short version of my life!



## ESSEX COUNTY

### Robin Shorter LCADC



Robin Shorter with former President Barack Obama.

Robin Shorter is currently the senior director of Outpatient Services at Integrity House. She is a recovering addict who has been clean from drugs and alcohol since 2004 after 20 years of active addiction. Robin earned a master's degree in addictions counseling in 2011 and became a licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor in 2013. She has a tremendous love for people and a passion to help suffering addicts implement healthy changes in their lives. Robin has more than 15 years of experience with a unique base of knowledge to address the special needs of women in treatment. No matter what the circumstances and with the right support system, people can change, get better and recover. Robin is a successful graduate of the Essex County Drug Court program (2009). She credits her success in life to God, drug court and Integrity House, where she received support, guidance, encouragement, love, hope and a second chance at life!

My name is Patricia Anne Schaffer Clark, born in 1960 to James George and Rose Marie Schaffer. I have one older brother, and one younger brother. Mom was a stay-at-home mom; dad worked as many as three jobs at times to support his family. I thought my childhood was all right, though my father never showed me real love and nothing was ever good enough for him when it came to me. I was an honor student in school and worked as soon as I was able to.

My father drank every day, though he was able to function. My last year of high school, I met a man who was 12 years older than me who I was infatuated with. Dad said I had to leave him alone or move out once I graduated high school in 1978, so I moved out and in with him. Because I was naïve, I thought in order to be with him I had to do what he did, and he introduced me to heroin. This wasn't my first introduction to drugs or alcohol. From the age of 15 I was drinking, smoking a joint here or there, taking an upper or a downer. At first, I used to fit in and thought it was how to have fun; later my reasons for using changed to numbing myself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I wasn't living; I was merely existing. My drug of choice was heroin, with cocaine and crack running close behind. My other addictions included, but not limited to, shoplifting, credit cards, checks, men, money and the streets. Though I started experimenting and using at 15, it got seriously out of control at the age of 31, when I was using anywhere from a half-bundle to a bundle and a half of heroin, mixed with cocaine, and smoking crack. I lost control and became very obsessed and compulsive. My addiction separated me from my family --with my parents raising my children -- and life in general. Once the children went to my family, I had nothing to do but use, use, and use some more. I learned how to boost (shoplift) and sell the items to corner stores (bodegas) in Camden. I thought I was good at it until I started getting caught and wound up incarcerated. I used other people's credit cards and I stole checks. All the things I said I never would do, I was doing, including jumping in and out of cars and working for a pimp, all to get one more. I thought I was doomed, a failure. The only thing that mattered was getting high and finding ways to get and stay high. The vicious cycle of insanity. Being hospitalized for malnutrition, dehydration, almost losing my leg from abscess; it was suggested I get help before I died. I thought death had to be better than the so-called life I had, putting myself in harm's way many times. In was in a car that rolled three times, suffered seizure-like symptoms and have various scars from abscesses. I used where I could in Camden, alleyways, abandoned houses, backseats and front seats of cars, public bathrooms, under the bridge. Running the streets at all hours, I had guns pulled on me, was jumped, robbed, and almost raped on more than one occasion.

## GLOUCESTER COUNTY

### Patricia Anne Schaffer Clark

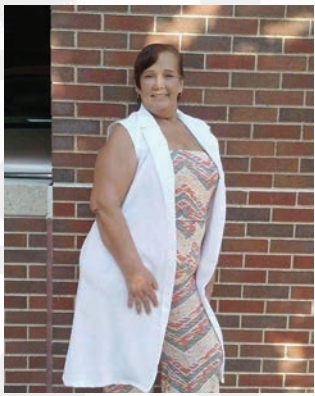
*New car*

*New apartment*

*New life*



Patricia Anne Schaffer Clark



Patricia Anne Schaffer Clark

I remember leaving good jobs due to my addiction before they found out. Nothing mattered except the drugs and the lifestyle. It got to a point where I thought I was hopeless and helpless. I wasn't worthy of anything or anyone good in my life. A decent life for me I thought was impossible. I didn't know who I was or what I had become, a monster!!! I had no family and no job, at least where a real paycheck was concerned. My job was 24-7 ripping and running to get drugs and stay high. It was the hardest job I ever had. Drugs started my day and ended my day. Dope and coke were my boyfriend and girlfriend, the best of both worlds, or so I thought. I lost everything. I was in jail more than 30 times, in prison twice, and was on my way back again.

On Oct. 14, 2011, I was arrested once again for having a van that didn't belong to me. Getting ready to take the cops on a high-speed chase, I said, "God either let me die today or show me how to live." With that, I pulled over and was arrested. It was at this point I had to do something different or I was doomed to die on the streets of Camden. I was beat and tired and begged for help. Prison wasn't what I needed. The only thing I learned through many incarcerations were new crimes and other drugs. I sat in a holding cell in Gloucester County for 12 days before being transferred to Salem County Jail. I was looking at some more prison time.



Patricia Anne Schaffer Clark

It was at this time I surrendered and knew I had to do something different. I begged for drug court, and after being evaluated, I was admitted into the drug court program. I participated in my own recovery and got involved with a 12-step program. From John Brooks Recovery Center, I went to Hansen House, where I became employed. It was my first real job for the first time in many, many years. I was doing things with my peers and actually having fun, starting to live and not just exist. After being released on Feb, 10, 2013, I started the outpatient program at the Family Care Connection and did everything that was asked of me. I attended 12-step meetings on a daily basis, sometimes more than one a day. My life was at stake. I obtained a job at Duke Teleservices within two weeks of being released. I excelled and became the number one sales person. I knew I had a lot of wreckage to take care of, besides making amends to my family and children, I had amends to make to about 30 different municipalities. My middle son was so excited to have his mom back. My oldest son was not so accepting, I hold on to faith that that will change. My youngest son, who I didn't raise, was back in my life, and I had met a man with substantial recovery time. I was living and not just existing! In 2015, my boyfriend and I moved into an apartment together. My name was on the lease. My name

wasn't on many things for a long time but tickets and green sheets. I graduated drug court on May 12, 2015 with my boyfriend and my younger brother present. My children weren't able to be there, and my parents were deceased before my last incarceration. Though we didn't have much of a relationship for many years, I do believe they would be proud of the woman I am growing to be.

Now that I have graduated, I choose to live life to the fullest. I stay committed to my recovery, I have a sponsor, a home group and I am in service. A few months after graduation I left the teleservices position and started as an administrative assistant for a substance abuse facility in Camden. A year later, I obtained another job at a homeless shelter in Camden. I love the work I do!

After a lot of hard work and a lot of money, after having no license for more than 26 years, I regained my driver's license in April 2018 and I own a 2012 Mustang convertible. I still stay connected to the people who have helped me along the way, including the Gloucester County Drug Court, the program I was in, my network of awesome men and women who believe in me.

No matter what goes on in my life, I haven't found a reason to use. I still have faith that God will bring my oldest son back in my life, in his time. I am truly grateful for where I am in my life, a responsible, productive member of society, living life on life's terms one day at a time!



Hello, my name is Andrew T. and I am a 22-year-old business owner with a credit limit and score that may resemble your grandparents; facial features that can stun, and intelligence that can overcome any type of mental barriers as far as the mind can comprehend. You're probably thinking "Wow, this kid must really be full of himself" or "What a way to open a story, jerk!" Yes, I guess you could say I'm a bit confident at the least, but it wasn't always like that. Today, I want to take you to a time where it was actually the complete opposite, and how I overcame that obstacle of my life through drug court.

It all started in June 2014. I just graduated high school and was getting ready for college. I was so excited, energetic, and determined to make that year my best year yet. I remember thinking "OK, I'm not going to mess this up like high school, let me just live up this summer, and that's it." That summer ended up being the worst summer of my life. During that time, I began experimenting with drugs of all types and began distributing LSD to supply my own habits of using. Just a few months later, I got

***"After a lot of hard work and a lot of money, after having no license for more than 26 years, I regained my driver's license in April 2018 and I own a 2012 Mustang convertible."***

*- Patricia Ann Schaffer Clark*

**HUDSON COUNTY**

**Andrew T.**  
*What's wrong with being confident?*



***“Take the leap of faith and decide if you’re willing to change.***

***Because maybe that one decision may just simply be the best decision of your life.”***

*- Andrew T.*

arrested for a DUI. With no signs of slowing down, I continued to distribute drugs and act recklessly. I would wake up, take a hit of LSD, and sell drugs while hallucinating. This unfortunately went on for months.

However, in January 2015, I finally got dealt my last hand when I was arrested for distribution of LSD. It was easily the worst day of my life. Imagine how I felt at the time looking back to only six months ago, in a high school room celebrating my last month of torture to being interrogated by detectives. After feeling defeated, destroyed, and even suicidal, I was desperate for change and help. That’s when my attorney suggested drug court. I wasn’t aware of it at the time, but this decision was going to change my life, forever.

I began drug court the following year in March and was ready to do my part of the work to help transform my life. I was very accepting of the fact that in order for me to complete drug court, I had to change completely as a person. Whether it was doing drugs or being home by a certain time, certain things had to change for me to live an overall better life, and that’s what drug court taught me. And that’s what I would like to leave you with today. As I said before, I took control of my life at 19 because I was sick, tired, and hopeless of that version of me. If you’re feeling similar in any way, I ask you to take the leap of faith and decide if you’re willing to change. Because maybe that one decision may just simply be the best decision of your life.



**Damon Z.**

*Living his suburban dream*

Growing up, I can say I was never in a stable household. From my parents’ drug and alcohol use to foster homes to relatives and back with my parents, there was never any stability. I wasn’t your model student in school. I had a very bad behavior problem and always wanted to be the center of attention, but in a bad way. I had my first drink when I was 12 and never looked back. My dad passed when I was 14, and somehow and some way, I graduated from grammar school, but my drinking and experimenting with drugs got worse. High school was a blur for me. Cutting class all day and just drinking and smoking. It wasn’t too long before I was expelled. When my dad passed, so went the discipline, and I basically did what I wanted with my mom, who was my biggest enabler. The streets became my new school. I got a Ph.D. in misery and heartache.

At the age of 16, I tried heroin for the first time and found what I was looking for my whole life: my best friend. For the next 20 years, me and this best friend went through hell. From homelessness to institutions to prison until I finally realized this

wasn’t my best friend. In 2010, after one of my many burglary arrests, I was offered a chance at the drug court program. I jumped at the chance. Honestly, the reason was because I just didn’t want to do another prison stretch. The first two years on the program were hell because I still wanted to do what I wanted to do. What followed were countless sanctions and programs. It wasn’t until my last sanction that I realized I had to change. My mom passed while I was in jail, and that crushed me. When I lay in that cell crying, I said to myself, “That’s it, I can’t do this anymore.” It was right there and then, at that moment, that I made the best decision ever. I decided that I was going to change, but I was going to change for me. Not my PO, not the judge, and not my family, but for me.

Once I made that decision, my life has done a complete 180. I started listening and working the criteria of the program instead of fighting it. I realized that the program was meant to help. It became simple. Once you are doing the right things, this program will open a million doors for you. It got me into a halfway house that led to a 3/4 house that ultimately saved my life because it stopped me from going back to the streets and what I grew up with. Even when two more years were added due to my screw-ups in the beginning, I still was grateful to be on it because I knew I was doing the right thing. Eventually I graduated, and I can say that was one of the best feelings I have ever had.

I never in a million years thought this would be my life. I have gotten married, moved to the suburbs, have a family and take vacations to Puerto Rico and Key West. None of this would have been possible without drug court. They never gave up on me even when I was ready to give up on myself.



My name is Herb. I have been involved in active addiction for many years. I had no clue how to escape the disease I have encountered. I went through many struggles in life due to my addiction. It all started after I left high school. I went to work on Wall Street. I don’t think I was ready for the New York pace of life. I fell right into the fast lane. I tried everything that made me feel good. I didn’t realize I was digging a hole for myself. After four-and-a-half years working in New York, I became a prisoner to my addiction. I suffered many hardships down the road such as loss of jobs, relationships, and self-worth.

I didn’t realize it then, but I was involved in a private war within myself. Moving forward, I suffered with a few legal matters throughout the years, all due to my involvement with drugs. I was

***“I decided that I was going to change, but I was going to change for me. Not my PO, not the judge, and not my family, but for me.***

*- Damon Z.*

**Herb**

*Leading by example*

so caught up I didn't realize how bad I was. Throughout many years of battling with being addicted to substances, I lost myself, feeling that I was going to live this way forever. I tried going to detox four times and rehab five. I finally realized that each time was the same message.



**Herb**

I finally realized I had a closed mind. When I started listening, I started believing that there was a solution to my behavior. I was involved in a legal matter that had me as a participant in drug court. I didn't want to be a participant at first, but after all was said and done, it was the best situation that happened for me. I was able to embark on an unbelievable journey of recovery. I would like to see more input in my area to share my experience with others. I am involved in the process of recovery where I live. I have developed into a productive member of society today. I choose to lead by example.

I have embarked on a journey that I did not think was possible. I have realized that it's never too late to start over again. I find that every day I see the challenges that I must face without the use of anything that alters my thinking. I must thank my county for showing me through the legal system that there was a better way to live. I attend outside support groups to enhance my recovery. After active addiction, I was lost on how to live life without the use of a substance. I hold a steady job today. I have my own vehicle and I pay my bills on time. I am a participant of the alumni association in my area, and I would like to see it grow so that it can show society how lives can be turned around.



**John M.**  
*Staying on the  
right path*

I was born into a middle class family in 1964 and I had a normal childhood. I didn't have everything I wanted but always had everything I needed. My dad went to work every day, my mom stayed home and took care of the kids until we were older, then she went to work as well. My father worked and didn't take his check to the bar, didn't beat his wife, or us kids. I had no trauma or abuse growing up. Yet, for some reason I never developed any coping skills and always felt like an outsider in school. I was a chameleon, able to be around but not in any group of people, the jocks, the burnouts, the band kids. I could get along with any of them. I just didn't really identify with any particular group. I smoked cigarettes in high school, though never tried any drugs there. One day at a family friend's picnic, all the kids snuck up to the keg and we filled cups with beer. That was the day I found the answer that I didn't even know I was looking for. It made me feel like everything was all right, like I had no problems, and like I could fit in anywhere. I then proceeded to gradually drink more

and more, slowly, over time. That was my answer for everything.

Fast forward to the age of 21. I had drank so much I got acute pancreatitis. Once they figured out why I was in so much pain, they got ready to operate on me and that's when I was introduced to morphine. That really made everything better. My progression was relatively slow, though I used one drug or another (yes, alcohol is a drug), until I was about 35, when I started sniffing heroin because I couldn't get pills consistently anymore. Then I started selling other drugs to support that habit. My best friend and I got arrested and went to jail. We eventually bailed out and he kept using, though he got clean shortly after that and is still clean today. I called a place called the Freedom House, went there, got clean and did all the right things, but not for the right reasons. I ended up staying clean for nearly five years but for everyone else, not for me. I met a girl, moved to Maryland, and got married. Then I accumulated all the things I could never accumulate when I was using, including a house and car. I had my own business after a bit. The dog, the cat, cool electronic gadgets, everything you could want really. Then I decided, I was smarter than every other addict in the world, and based on all the things I had learned, I thought I could use successfully, just once in a while. I was wrong.

Gradually I stopped working the program, stopped going to meetings, started turning left to go to the spot instead of turning right to go to a meeting. Long story short, my wife at the time, though it took her a while because she is not afflicted with this disease, eventually caught on, I went to a 30-day program and lied about taking and then tapering off of Suboxone and just continued to use. At that point, I genuinely wanted to stop for me, but, it was too late and I couldn't stop. My marriage disintegrated and I got divorced. I said "OK, I am moving back to New Jersey to work." That didn't go so well because wherever I go, I take myself with me. I ended up getting arrested again and then violated probation twice and got a new charge. I got to the point where I had a no-bail warrant for VOP and had to go to court for the new charge.

After much deliberation, I decided to go in to court and agree to be arrested and thrown in jail for what I knew would be months at least. I was done, I couldn't stop for more than a day on my own. So I went to see the only one who ever stopped me successfully -- the judge. After some months, about five and a half, I took drug court instead of prison, because I was done. I couldn't do it anymore, I wanted to live. I was taken by the sheriff to a long term inpatient program, then a halfway house, then an Oxford House. Transferring my drug court probation from Hunterdon County to Hudson County. I knew I just needed that accountability to

someone else besides myself to guide me and keep me on the path until I could do it on my own. I was fortunate to get a great probation officer who stuck to the rules, but actually cared and wanted to see me succeed. I started doing everything drug court told me to do, even when I didn't want to. Drug court gave me the guidance and help I needed to stay on the path. Was it uncomfortable sometimes? Yes. Was it unreasonable? No. I went to IOP, I went to NA meetings, I did service, and my life continued to get better. I moved up in phases by doing everything that was asked of me.

**"We do recover."** I still go to meetings today and still do service. I was even allowed to graduate a little early. I still have a good relationship with my former probation officer and the rest of the drug court team. I stop by on occasion just to say hi and see how everyone is doing. I am unable because of my work schedule to attend the drug court alumni meetings, but hopefully that will change in the not-too-distant future. So thank you to drug court for helping me stay on the path. Now I stay on the path because I want to. I am employed. I pay taxes and I am a responsible, respectable, and productive member of society today. As of this writing, I have a little more than five years and three months clean. Just for today. We do recover.

- John M.



**Judith**  
*Drug court  
alumni president*



Judith

My name is Judith and I was born and raised in Jersey City. I come from a large family and I'm number 10 of 11 siblings. My dad was a Jersey City police officer and well-known in the community, and my mom was a hard-working woman. Although they were strict about our comings and goings and who we associated with, my parents instilled good values in all of us.

My escape was track and field. I got a natural high from winning and I loved the attention from my parents and the community. Although I was loved and appreciated, there was an uncomfortable feeling that I kept to myself. The secret I was hiding was that I was afraid of being and accepting that I was gay. I found that by drinking alcohol and smoking weed, I was able to deal with this part of me, this secret I was keeping, and smoking and drinking lessened my fears. What I didn't know was that this feeling would lead me to years of spiraling down a road of self-destruction.

I used drugs over a period of time that brought me to my knees in desperation and in need of a complete change of my thinking and restoration of my spirit. I began using drugs back in the late 1980s. In the beginning, it was a part of a lifestyle and fun

that quickly turned into unmanageability, institutions, and jail. I left Jersey City in 1991 and stayed clean for many years. My disease lay in waiting until, once again, it was released and the progression was fierce. All my fears came true. I was hooked on heroin and I did whatever to get one more bag. Six years ago, I was arrested for selling drugs, something I never thought would happen. After my arrest, I was desperate for help. I was given an opportunity from drug court to be part of the solution as opposed to the problem. I eagerly agreed to the strict program, and because of the opportunities drug court offered me and my hard work and dedication, my life has since been transformed. Today, I can proudly say that I'm five years and two months clean, feel good about myself, and have a sense of inner peace. I've also had my record expunged.

Today, staying clean comes first! I've had many emotional and sad events that I have endured and got through without the use of drugs!! I'm forever grateful to drug court for introducing me to a new life. I will always give back what was so freely given to me. That is known as the 12th step of the NA program. Also, currently I am the drug court alumni president. My goal is to invite as many graduates I can and keep sharing the message of hope and possibility.



My life before entry into the drug court program was one long slow burn of every one of my personal relationships as well as any tangible resource that I was able to beg, borrow, or steal. I think when people imagine hell, they imagine some form of explicitly violent or demented torture. This is not what I imagine because I have not only felt its flames, I was committed to remaining there. Not because I enjoyed it but because I felt like I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this mundane hell was the best I could hope for.

On July 16, 2015, a group of Hunterdon County narcotics detectives arrived in the early afternoon at my father's home in Califon to collect me for questioning. I was in bed, sweating, and shivering on the sharp edge of heroin withdrawal. I had not showered in days and was somewhere around a sickly looking 150 pounds. I was unemployed and was disappointed every day that I woke up. If it was not for my father's compassion, I would have been homeless. I left the house without socks in rotting tennis shoes, and a few hours later, I was arrested for the sale of heroin. When I eventually returned home, my father was momentarily relieved because I was alive but quickly returned to his normal resting state, which was a mixture of disappointment, anger, fear,

**"Today, I can proudly say that I'm five years and two months clean, feel good about myself, and have a sense of inner peace. I've also had my record expunged."**

- Judith

## HUNTERDON COUNTY

**Chris Malecki**  
*College student;  
4.0 GPA*

and utter emotional exhaustion. I made a half-hearted apology for worrying him and lied about where I was and what had happened. He did not believe me, because I was incapable of being honest with anyone, but he was tired and did not want to argue about it. I went upstairs and crawled into bed while it was still light out and laid there neither awake nor asleep. Suspended in shame, heroin sickness, and apathy, I prayed to a God I did not believe in for a quick and painless death that I did not deserve.

I describe this day not because it is somehow remarkable but because aside from the arrest, it is the best description of a day in my life before the drug court program. I had no goals in life other than to feel the loud hum of self-annihilation through the abuse of whatever drugs were available. I was completely incapable of maintaining a job or personal relationships because I was absolutely unreliable, and my pathological desire for drugs was insatiable and took priority at all times. I was aware of the pain I was causing my friends and family and I hated myself because of it, while also believing that I inherently deserved to suffer because I was worthless. I believed that I had done so much damage to my life and relationships that all of it was unsalvageable. And after telling myself that for long enough, it becomes true. And all of my actions and thoughts at the time reflected and magnified that narrative.

Before the drug court program, I really had no educational plans or goals. My personal outlook on my viability as a student was completely based on my scholastic experience in high school, which was also the same time period that my addiction to drugs and alcohol began. So it should come as no surprise that I graduated from Voorhees High School with a 1.3 GPA. But after addressing my mental health problems through counseling at Hunterdon Drug Awareness and my involvement with the Alcoholics Anonymous program I was ready to give school another try, and in the spring of 2017, I enrolled in one class (*Intro to Philosophy*) to test the waters and see if my fears were legitimate.

After receiving an A in that *Intro to Philosophy* class, I realized that not only could I pursue a college education, but that I wanted to. The next semester, I started chipping away at the prerequisite classes for a liberal arts degree because I still wasn't sure exactly what I was actually passionate about learning. I increased the amount of classes I was taking to three, and through the developmental math classes I needed to take in order to progress to college level math classes, I found that mathematics was something that I really enjoyed. This came as a surprising

development because I had originally thought that I would end up in a social science such as a counseling or psychology. But studying math felt so rewarding that I realized even if I had to start at the absolute beginning I was ready and willing to put in the work necessary to succeed.

If my recovery has taught me anything, it's that anything is possible as long as I remain clean and sober. I never could have imagined myself living a happy life without drugs and alcohol, but at the behest of the drug court program, I was firmly encouraged to try, and it was the push I needed to go the distance. This radical shift in my personal narrative gave me the optimism to believe that I should pursue a subject that I found truly rewarding regardless of the difficulty. If I can stop doing heroin after 13 years of use, I am pretty sure I can do anything.

And every semester since then, I have enrolled as a full-time student and maintained a 4.0 GPA while pursuing an associate's degree in math and science. I hope to move into a bachelor's program from Raritan Valley Community College. I would like to ultimately see this journey end with a Ph.D. program, but first things first. In tandem with this program, I have also been independently learning Python, which is a computer language mainly used in STEM. All of this is ultimately a way to help me achieve my eventual goal of being involved with machine learning algorithms and the ever-evolving field of artificial intelligence.

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Fear and insecurity is what directed my life from as far as I could remember. I was raised in a two-parent household. My parents loved me unconditionally and provided us with everything to be successful in life. Even with a stable home environment and love, I always had this feeling of dread, a fear of the unknown. In school, I always felt out of place. My parents wanted me to strive for good grades, but all I could think about was how to fit in. They suggested that an engineer, doctor or lawyer would be great professions to pursue. I love my parents immensely and wanted to make them proud, but a career as an engineer, doctor or lawyer was not happening. School didn't do it for me. It always felt like a social experiment.

For me, when something doesn't do it for me, I'll try to find something else to do so I can escape the feeling of being uncomfortable. Since school wasn't my thing and my parents were not the type to accept me ever dropping out or bringing home bad grades, I had to figure out how I could make school worthwhile.

## MERCER COUNTY

**Dudley D.**  
*Finding strength  
through faith*

Organized sports were not something encouraged, but I found it a great way to fit in at school. And it worked. I had my own clique, teachers were my coaches, and I was actually good at something.

It's funny when I first started running track, it wasn't a big deal. It was just something to do so I could fit in. I can't tell you when it became my identity. All I wanted to be was good at something. But it seemed that no matter how good I got, I wanted more. Sounds familiar. I have a couple of issues. In my mind, I thought I was one of the greatest track athletes to be placed on this planet. What a shock when only one school offered me a full ride. That was definitely a blow to my ego. Nevertheless, I accepted it. Now when I got to campus, I thought this would be a great chance to reinvent myself. The university I went to was predominantly Caucasian. Coming from high school, where there was a mix of ethnicities. This made me feel uncomfortable again. Fear crept back up, and now I needed to find another escape. That's when I had my first drink. I finally found the solution to life: Do something you're good at and supplement it with alcohol. That was my life – track and alcohol.

During my four-year tenure in college. I amassed a lot of accolades. School records, conference championships, All-American and various international awards. When college was over, I was invited down to Austin, Texas to train to be a professional.

My drinking got worse. But I managed to get third at the U.S. nationals championships in 1998. If I didn't drink so much, I probably could've won. Go figure; put down alcohol and things might actually get better. Anyway, because it was an off year with no Olympics or world championships, we had to go to the Goodwill Games. I did horribly. Injuries started happening and I needed a means to keep the dream alive. So I switched nationalities and began to run for Haiti. In 2000, I went to my first Olympic games. Making the finals was very unexpected. That same year, I was hospitalized for my drinking and drug use. At this point alcohol and drugs were part of my coping tools. New injuries, new drugs. That's how it was for a very long time.

My athletic career came to a very unceremonious end. No fanfare. No one to say good job. It just ended. Now I have to deal with life without the perks of being an athlete. At this point, I have no clue how to live without drugs. My fear of life enveloped me. I needed that drug-induced euphoria just to get through the days. Things got worse. I got arrested for things you get arrested for. Rehabs and institutions were the norm, the new norm for me.

After my last arrest in December 2015, I was sentenced to drug court. When I first got to drug court I was still unsure on how I was going to live without drugs in my life. Surprisingly, I did pay some attention during my stays in rehabs. There was this fellowship of men and women who found a new way to live without a drink or drug. They claim they found the answer, a power source that could help you overcome your fears and cope with life on life's terms. I did the things they suggested.

Slowly I developed a relationship with that power which is greater than me. That power was Jehovah God. It wasn't easy, but it's definitely possible. With some work, I am able to get a *daily reprieve* and I mean *daily*. Today I have a spiritual and physical routine that affords me freedom from self. I live a life of service. For so long I worried about Dudley. Today I have faith in Jehovah God. HE will provide me with everything I need. So when and wherever possible, I do what I can for someone else.

Today I pray and supplicate HIM for the qualities of his Holy Spirit that reflects HIS personality. I pray for faith, goodness, joy, kindness, love, mildness, patience, peace and self-control. As I cultivate the fruits of HIS spirit, my relationship with others improves. Situations that use to cause me anxiety and baffle me don't anymore.

Today I have a great life. My family is happy and they know they are loved. What the future holds for me, I don't know. I do have many aspirations and goals. These would've kept me up at night in the past. Now I'm happy to know that with faith in HIM, I can have all that I could ever hope for and more. True happiness and freedom is possible.



**M**y name is James Thomas and I am a recovering heroin addict, but this is not a story about me. I am writing to tell you all about my best friend's dog, whose name is Sugar. I believe the date was Jan. 13 or 14, 2019. We were in the Arctic blast, the wind was blowing 25 to 40 mph gusts and I was coming off the beach with Sug.

After walking her and upon leaving the beach, we saw a young lady stop her car in the parking lot exit. We watched her exit and run to the garbage can. The dog kept pulling me in her direction. It was very cold outside. I told Sug, "There's no puppy there," but she kept pulling me, wanting to get to her. I turned around and looked again. She was getting into the car slowly. She put her seat belt on and her head went slowly down. She was hanging out of

***"Today I have a spiritual and physical routine that affords me freedom from self. I live a life of service. For so long I worried about Dudley. Today I have faith in Jehovah God."***  
- Dudley D.

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY**

**James Thomas**  
*Half of a lifesaving team*



Sugar

her car, her left hand almost touching the ground.

Sug is now going nuts, pulling me towards her, I can see she's in trouble. We run to her, and me being an ex-addict, I can see she is overdosing. Sug is now pacing back and forth and crying, so I pick up the young lady's head and I can see she is losing color. I can see a needle in the car. I don't have my cell phone with me so I flag down a park worker and tell him to call 911 because the girl in the car is overdosing. He does and in about 35 to 45 seconds, there's three of Old Bridge's police cars. They come, they see she is OD-ing and they hit her with Narcan and bring her back. One officer turns to me and says, "You can take credit for saving her life" and I say, "No, Sugar saved her life because if it wasn't for her pulling on me like a nut I would have just gone home. Smart dog, a very strong dog."

News travels fast in my town – friends are coming up to me and saying, "I heard you saved a young lady" and I tell them, "No, Sug saved her life. She's the hero, not me. Good girl, Sug."



**Brittany Jamieson**  
*Progress, not  
perfection*

There was once a small girl; we'll call her Rose, and she was a wide eyed, sheltered girl until one day she had to grow up and got a harsh dose of reality. Things can change at any time. She was an only child, didn't have close cousins like some families do, so she was pretty much mommy or daddy's second shadow. Rose enjoyed reading and watching soap operas with Mom and going to work in the big tractor trailers with Dad. Rose was always a happy child and never wanted for anything. She always had everything she wanted, which usually meant anything pink and everything Barbie. She was born in 1991. The best present she ever got was her Barbie Lamborghini she got when she was six. She proceeded to try to run over the little boy next door, by accident of course, a lead foot at a young age. Rose was always very mischievous; she would get reprimanded for something and wait for you to turn your back and try to do the same thing over again. She knew the power of innocent eyes and a smile very early in life. Her behaviors would follow her for the rest of her life. A natural manipulator.

School wasn't always easy for Rose. She was skinny for the first 10 years of her life. Then she reached that awkward, chubby phase, and it seemed to stay with her for a while. Rose loved to sing, so she was always in chorus. She hated math class, and always paid attention in history because it was interesting. She was a cheerleader for a few years, but then she saw how catty it got, and the closer she got to going to high school, she decided

it wasn't for her anymore. She got made fun of for being the chubby girl with glasses who didn't have the name brands. When I say she didn't want for anything, it's true. She had what she needed, but not the things that she exactly wanted. That was always enough for her, but she did envy some of the girls and boys who had the best of the best. Her mom would read her *The Coat of Many Colors* by Dolly Parton when she was little. The moral of that story is the coat she was wearing may not have been fancy, but she had a coat nonetheless. That ideal stayed with her all her life, built in humility.

In the beginning of seventh grade, her whole life changed. Her dad left, and her parents got divorced. Nobody in her class had divorced parents. She felt more alone than ever. Mom was in bed for months, losing weight and drinking wine. Rose took care of herself and mom. She grew up overnight and became an adult at 13 and had to be strong so that mom wouldn't fall apart more. Trauma. Soon she found that a razor was able to give her a feeling of control that she otherwise didn't have. Some at school saw her cuts and sent her to the doctor, Mom finally got out of bed and got a job because dad stopped bringing money to them. Rose thought things were going to be okay now that mom was out of bed and was being a mom again. Dad stopped coming around as much, and Rose would cry at night quietly in her bed so Mom wouldn't hear her. A daily feeling of loneliness.

High school held a lot of changes in a small amount of time. Rose didn't know that it was the beginning of her descent. Rose started smoking weed with Mom because she wanted to know why Mom loved it so much, and Mom thought it was okay because at least she was home with her. Rose started making friends in school because everyone heard that her mom was the coolest person ever who always had beer and vodka in the fridge and let Rose smoke! Score! The house became the party house, and suddenly Rose had a bunch of friends who always wanted to be with her. She thought she was so cool and loved all the attention. She never really had to be alone anymore. Rose fell in love with a boy who would never love her back the way she wanted him to, and she still holds him in her heart even now. She started trying other drugs and loved the feeling of being outside of herself, the warm feeling inside her cold heart, and the fullness she felt in her empty soul. She understood quickly why Mom drank. It just made things better because you didn't have to deal with anything, and that was great. Slowly she felt herself falling deep under the wave but didn't exactly care, as she let it roll her over and over. She liked the false sense of security. The switch was flipped.

Senior year was the worst. Rose and Mom lost their apartment and were living in a motel. But no matter what, they were together, and Mom always took care of them. Rose barely graduated high school. Then there was just nothing left to do except smoke weed in the bathtub and go to work. One day she met a man, we'll call him Jack, who promised to take care of her. She was about to be 19 in four months, and this man was old enough to be her father. Daddy issues are a real thing. The man did take care of her, her drug habit, took care of Mom when she wasn't too drunk, but quickly things changed. Rose went to school with Jack's son, who was engaged to Rose's childhood friend. The four of them were inseparable. Good times, bad decisions, and Mom was always there for the ride because Rose couldn't and wouldn't ever leave her behind. Jack's son and his fiancée, we'll call him Harry and her Kate, were secretly doing some harder drugs. One day they brought them a little wax bag and said it was way better than the pain pills Jack and Rose were taking, so they tried it out. It was the beginning of the end for many involved in this story. Heroin took over all their lives. A living hell.

The progression was quick and devastating to everyone. By the time Rose was 21, she was shooting heroin and was only working jobs that wouldn't drug test and most of the time for cash, Jack managed to keep his license the whole time and always worked decent paying jobs; he was just better at hiding than Rose was. Mom was going downhill, still in the motel, jumping from man to man because she just wanted someone to love her, and she was getting thinner from the alcohol poisoning her organs. Rose was getting skinny too, just from being too high to eat. She liked getting skinny. She loved seeing her collarbone coming from her neck. Nobody really noticed how bad it was. Rose was good at the innocent eyes and smile. Liar.

Here comes 22, the worst year of Rose's life. Mom dies and Rose finds her, and she is never right again. The next year and a half are pretty much a blur for Rose, so we'll jump to 23. Jack is dead of an overdose, her whole world is crashing around her and she officially gives up on living and is okay with being next on death's list, everyday praying for it, angry every morning she woke up. A walking dead girl, alive in body, dead inside, asking God or whoever is up there to just end the pain and let her go. She would get her wish, just not in the way she thought or wanted at the time. Rose moved in with someone who supported her habit and gave her whatever she wanted, but it came with a price: black and blues all over her face and body every week. Cover up and long sleeves became her best friends;

don't leave home without them. Rose's family started really seeing the disease inside her and nobody would let her close out of fear that she couldn't be trusted. Seeing the disappointment in her family's eyes when she lied to their faces while she was slit-eyed, saying she was clean, was too much, so Rose stayed away. Denial.

God gave Rose the answer to her prayers in the form of a jail cell for not going to court, and since she was a flight risk, she wasn't allowed to go home. That was the best thing to ever happen to her. She would be dead, either with a needle in her arm or that man's hand around her throat. Rose sat in that cell and went through the withdrawal and vowed never to feel that way again. Rose went through rehab, got put in drug court, and has been clean ever since. Rose is three years and three months clean as of present time. It was a really hard road for her, and she has to be vigilant of her resting monsters inside her all the time. They can come back out full force at any time. Rose works very hard to keep them at bay and to work on making them less scary. Rose works a program, has a sponsor, has commitments, and does one thing every day to make herself better than the day before. Rose started school, works, finally is getting her license back and has a genuinely amazing man in her life who supports her dreams and goals instead of fueling her bad decisions. Progress, not perfection.

Did you figure out who Rose is yet? Yes, it's me. With "Rose," "Jack," "Harry" and "Kate," life may have shown me the worst of itself, but I still believe in fairytale endings and love stories.

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**M**y story starts with me being accepted into Rutgers University. I recall being very relieved that day, as I was unsure if I would be accepted. What I had not known was that it would have been the start a journey filled with my greatest highs and lows.

When I started Rutgers, things moved rather normally. I went to class, socialized with people, and did a few extracurricular activities. During my first semester, I even earned one of my highest GPAs throughout my entire college career. Soon, however, I started to smoke marijuana, and that was really the start of my inevitable doom. I quickly became addicted and found myself unable to stop.

Within less than a year, I had started to be high every hour of the day and even started to sell. For the rest of my freshman year and my entire sophomore year, I spent almost every day in my house constantly getting high on various drugs. I had become an entirely different person. My relationships with people were falling apart,

***“Rose works a program, has a sponsor, has commitments, and does one thing every day to make herself better than the day before.”***

*- Brittany Jamieson*

**Daniel T.**  
*Learning from mistakes*

***“Today, however, I have worked multiple jobs, own my own business, and most importantly, rebuilt my relationships with my friends and family.”***

***- Daniel T.***

including ones with my family. I had also become very depressed. I wanted to stop, but I couldn't.

One normal day early in the morning, my house was raided by the police. This led to me applying to drug court and eventually being accepted. I now know that the day I was accepted was a pivotal day in my life. I started drug court not knowing what I was getting myself into. I took it very seriously from the start because having my house raided and seeing my parents so hurt with what I had become was a big wake up call for me.

I cruised by a large portion of drug court with a flawless record. This however led me to become too comfortable and allowed myself to make a few mistakes that I still regret to this day. Wanting to learn from my mistakes, I quickly refocused my time and dedication towards drug court. Things have been better since, and I plan on continuing to improve. Ultimately, I can confidently say that drug court saved my life. Without it, I would most likely still be doing the same things that eventually would have led me down a much more unfortunate path. Today, however, I have worked multiple jobs, own my own business, and most importantly, rebuilt my relationships with my friends and family.

#### **MONMOUTH COUNTY**

**Omar D.**

***Five years sober  
Proud father***

Written by  
Kamla Bhalai  
Senior Probation Officer  
Monmouth Vicinage



**Omar D.**

Omar's drug court journey is a true testament of faith. His probation officer recalls their first meeting at Hansen House in which he expressed eagerness to return to Monmouth County and regain custody of his children. The probation officer remembers advising Omar to take things slowly and to avoid being overwhelmed.

Omar did just the opposite. Within less than one week of returning to Monmouth County, he acquired a residence in an Oxford House, obtained a sponsor, took on a commitment, and was gainfully employed. His probation officer could not have been happier.

Omar's consistency and perseverance within a four-month period resulted in his ability to regain full residential custody of his children, without any external assistance. As a single working father of two teenagers, Omar faced challenges like experimenting with hair color, dress shopping, parent-teacher conferences, homework assignments, sporting events and even baking. Omar met these tasks with enthusiasm as a statement to his children that he was never going to give up on them.

It was apparent to his probation officer that Omar's actions did not

go unnoticed to his daughter and son. His children appreciate his presence as well as his recovery milestones. His devotion to his children is symbolized by having them as keepers of his "coins" and key tags.

At the time of the drug court graduation ceremony in December 2018, Omar had been clean and sober for more than five years. During that time, he welcomed a beautiful baby boy to his family and obtained a managerial position with his employer. Besides being a proud father and soon-to-be husband, he remains dedicated to helping new drug court participants on their journeys in the program. Omar is living proof that, with faith and perseverance, anything is possible. The Monmouth Vicinage Drug Court team is extremely proud of his achievements and wishes him continued success and prosperity.



**M**y name is Anthony Justo Jr. and I am 27 years old. I was born in Morristown, however, I grew up primarily in Brick. It is my own belief that I was an addict long before I took my first drink or drug. My reason for saying so, is because from as far back as I can remember, I had intense feelings of isolation. There were times that I would be among family and feel like a total stranger. Over the course of my sobriety, I have spoken with countless men and women who report feeling the same. I think that is one of the underlying symptoms of addiction. There are, however, events that can exacerbate the disease. The episode that really provoked one of my earliest binges was a car accident.

I was 14 years old and got hit by a car going 40 miles per hour in Brick. I was comatose for a week and spent about half a year in the hospital learning how to walk again. Feeling as though life was impossibly unfair, I indulged in drugs for the first time upon my release. Within one short year, my father had to ask me to leave the house because my addiction was causing me to do some appalling things. After being asked to leave home there was zero accountability and I got kicked out of school. All of these events made the feelings of isolation much more intense, so I dove deeper into addiction, hoping that the high would provide me with the feelings of comfort I so desperately longed for. Within eight years of that first hit, I lost everything. I had become a homeless, uneducated, convicted felon, and drug addict.

One night while I was staying in a random drug den, I asked God to let the madness stop. The next day, I went to steal some electronics from the nearest Rite Aid, and I got arrested. I was afforded the opportunity of drug court through what can only be

***“It was apparent to his probation officer that Omar's actions did not go unnoticed to his daughter and son. His children appreciate his presence as well as his recovery milestones.”***

***- Omar D.***

#### **MORRIS COUNTY Anthony Justo Jr.**

***Helping others  
recover***



**Anthony Justo Jr. with  
his daughter**



***“The most profound and probably greatest thing I gained through early sobriety was a feeling of unity and connection to society”***

***- Anthony Justo Jr.***

described as absolute grace. I knew that I had to try this process of recovery or I would simply die this way. I wouldn't say that this was by any virtue of my own. I would say that the grace and kindness of others brought me into recovery and helped me to stay. My sobriety date is Oct. 9, 2013. In the beginning, it was very difficult to go through life without a numbing agent. It was difficult applying for jobs with six felony convictions. The idea of applying for schools seemed almost comical. Going from sleeping in a shelter to renting my first house seemed unfathomable. Everything seemed so far out of reach until they weren't.

All of the aforementioned challenges were overcome within my first few years of sobriety. It was only possible because of the generosity and help of many of the people I regard as my best friends today. The most profound and probably greatest thing I gained through early sobriety was a feeling of unity and connection to society (something that had always eluded me). Today as I sit here and type this email, I am surrounded by my wife and my 2-month-old daughter. I have a job that allows me to spend time with my loved ones while also paying the bills. I attend multiple 12-step meetings weekly and that, within itself, has done more for me than I could possibly type. I try to be of service everywhere that I go. I facilitate a recovery group for drug court and I am on the board of trustees for New Bridge, a non-profit focusing on addiction, senior housing, and mental illness. I speak publicly around six times a year to bring awareness about addiction to the community. I love living today. Thank you.



## OCEAN COUNTY

**Lauren**  
***Overcoming a disability***

Written by  
Kimberly Knapp  
Court Services Supervisor II  
Ocean Vicinage

At a young age, Lauren was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and suffered immensely. During her teen years, Lauren started associating with the wrong crowd and turned to drugs. Lauren was kicked out of her family's home at 19 and she found herself couch surfing, living in a car or on the streets. She was the victim of multiple violent incidents, including sexual assaults. Lauren attended numerous rehabilitation facilities and also stayed in a few psychiatric hospitals. Like many addicts, Lauren would often obtain some clean time and consistently relapse.

She knew she had to change when she ended up in the Ocean County Jail. Lauren was petrified of being incarcerated and knew this was the last time she ever wanted to be in jail. Lauren was accepted into drug court. During her first couple of weeks in drug court, Lauren maintained her steadfast focus to never be incarcerated again. She attended and completed all aspects of outpatient treatment and attended many self-help meetings. While moving through the drug court phases, Lauren enrolled in school to work with children and adolescents who were on the autism

spectrum. Lauren maintained a 3.98 GPA and graduated magna cum laude with a degree in psychology and a minor in behavioral neuroscience. After graduating from Stockton University, she enrolled at Georgian Court University. She will be graduating this May with a master's degree in applied behavior analysis. Upon receiving her master's degree, she will complete her New Jersey State Board program and will then be a board certified behavior analyst. In addition, she is working with an agency conducting in-home case studies for children on the autism spectrum.

Lauren attributes her success to putting her sobriety first, her tremendous family support and those who believed in her most. Lauren is achieving everything her doctors told her was previously impossible. Lauren has been clean and sober since June 2013.



Ashley C. is a recent drug court graduate (2019). I had the pleasure to be invited to attend the 2019 drug court graduation held at Passaic County Community College. I witnessed one of the females who had been in the Passaic County Jail between 2010 and 2015, and during that time I had the chance to minister and provide a variety of counseling and guidance to Ashley in the areas of individual and group counseling sessions, which included substance abuse, life skills, spirituality, family reunification and positive reentry programs. She had the opportunity to enter into drug court in 2016.

During Ashley's incarceration, she also was remanded to state prison, yet in spite of her oppositions, Ashley managed to be given the opportunity to enter Spring House, which is a recovery house for women in Paramus. Ashley successfully completed drug court and proudly graduated in 2019 with the support of the love of her life, her infant son Sam, and her grateful and supportive family members. Ashley is now engaged to be married. She completed cosmetology school and is now working two jobs; one in the field of cosmetology and the other as an opiate recovery certified specialist at Eva's Program. She is involved in AA/NA H & I commitment services with the hope of being able to come back in the Passaic County Jail to share her newfound life of strength, hope and experience.

Ashley states that without God's guidance and miracles and the love, guidance and support of her family and friends, including so many amazing newfound people, places and things in her life, she realizes that today could have never been possible. Ashley is so grateful for the regained life and happiness that she can live without the use of drugs. "With God all things are possible."

***“Lauren maintained her steadfast focus to never be incarcerated again.”***

***- Kimberly Knapp***

## PASSAIC COUNTY

**Ashley C.**  
***Cosmetologist and counselor***

Written by  
Chaplain Dr. Judith Foster

**Christine D.** Before coming to Paterson in May 2015, I was beat down and broken. I was without my three oldest children. My 3-year-old baby was in foster care, and for the second time in my life, I was homeless, hopping from hotel to hotel. This was not my first attempt at getting clean. But this time, it was different.

*No excuses*

I was walking into S&N while high on methadone. I was still using, yet ready to get clean, detox and gain custody of my younger child to keep him from being adopted. I had no hope or faith in myself that I could ever get or stay clean. At that point, I can honestly say that even with no hope or faith, I at least wanted to try. I wanted to be clean.

***“We are going to be okay...if you keep an open mind, stay positive and have a positive group of people behind you.”***  
- Christine D.

In September 2015, I was completely off of methadone and was offered drug court. I chose to take it, still unsure if I could fully make it through. Soon afterward, I regained custody of my son. Shortly after this, I was offered a bed at Eva’s Mommy and Me Program. I knew that if I were to go home, I would have never stayed clean, so I chose to take this opportunity and stay at Eva’s. While there, I started to learn how to live clean and become a better mother all over again. I was then offered to move into transitional housing. I thought this was a good start and that everything would be smooth sailing from there, but like they say, “You are the company that you keep.” I did not keep good company. I hung out with the wrong people and made a bad decision. As much as I felt like giving up, I had more than me to think about. I could not watch my son go back into foster care again, so I had to make some serious changes.

I graduated Eva’s in October 2017. I moved into my apartment with just me and my son and transferred to Passaic County. Soon after that, I became pregnant with my 1-year-old son. I then completed culinary school at Eva’s right before giving birth to him. Then until now, I have maintained a full time job, with both of my sons.

I have experienced a lot of ups and downs over the last 18 months. Siblings still active in an addiction that I am trying to keep away from me and my children. Losing my stepfather to the same addiction and watching the father of my son go back to the same addiction he once escaped, and my father having stomach cancer and starting treatment today. I say all that to say I can use any of these things as an excuse to use again. But I sit back and think where would the two beautiful children that I have worked so hard to get custody over be? That is something that I am just not willing to risk.

Today, my main focus is on myself and my boys. Waking up every

day and seeing their faces is what reminds me of how lucky I am to be where I am. Seeing their smiling faces reminds me that just for that moment, we are going to be okay – that being said -- if you keep an open mind, stay positive and have a positive group of people behind you. Whether a sponsor or a network of people to talk to, you can achieve any goal you set for yourself.



**W**hen I got into drug court, I really didn’t have anything. I didn’t have any of the things I have now. I didn’t have a connection with my family. I didn’t have a connection with my brothers. I didn’t have much for myself at all.

As time went by, I started getting the trust from my family. I started getting everything. I never thought I would be able to work. I am happy. I filed taxes. I never filed taxes before. I never thought I would, not a day in my life.

Now I look back. If I was doing the same things I was doing before, I would be a statistic. Right now, I am not a statistic. I put myself in position to have a new start. I am not in the same boat I was in when I was younger. When I came into drug court, I was 19 years old; I am 24 years old now. People thought I would not make it. I stuck it out. Now the counselors say they are proud of me. My mother is proud of me now. That is the person I care about the most. My mother never thought I would change, but I did.

I have to thank Officer Scully. If it wasn’t for him, I would still be running the streets, smoking weed, drinking and not caring. I am not doing any of that anymore. I don’t even care about those things anymore. I have changed!

**Jermaine C.**

*Not a statistic*

***“I put myself in position to have a new start.”***

- Jermaine C.

**Sasha S.**  
*Grateful survivor*

When I began this process, I knew in my heart that I would give it my best shot! I was beyond tired emotionally, physically and spiritually. Even though I wanted to get clean, I was still upset I was still looked at as a criminal rather than the victim I was. I felt no one truly understood what happened that caused me to end up in drug court. I was a victim of domestic violence for more than 10 years. I had finally had enough. I was going to stop feeling sorry for myself and actually do something about it. Drug court was my ticket out. Today I am no longer the bitter victim. I am now a grateful survivor. This program taught me my addiction is what kept me in an abusive marriage. Year after year, my addiction was the blindfold that kept me from seeing my worth as a human being. When I first started, drug court taught me once I could heal from my addiction everything else would follow. And guess what? They were right!

*“Year after year, my addiction was the blindfold that kept me from seeing my worth as a human being.”*

- Sasha S.

Today I am dependable, responsible, spiritual, self-confident, a good mother, a hard worker and most importantly, I am a person who practices self-love! I could not wait for the day I finally completed drug court! Now that day is finally here, and shockingly I am deeply saddened. I love you, drug court team, and I will forever be grateful to you for all you have done.

**Rachel D.**  
*Another chance*

Allowing drug court to work for me in my life was not an easy task. I fought drug court for a year, hiring a private lawyer in hopes of getting probation. My lawyer could see what a mess I was and what a mess my life was and actually was in support of drug court.

I accepted drug court over prison and violated my second week. I also had a baby and went on the run during that time. My family turned me in and I went to jail. As I sat in jail waiting for my VOP court date, I just wanted to give up and take prison. Everyone in jail was saying how impossible drug court was and I figured I would end up in prison anyway.

Having a baby while in active addiction also caused me to have a DYFS case. Going to prison would do more harm for my DYFS case and I knew that. The day I was in court for my VOP, my lawyer asked me what I wanted to do. I told him I didn't know. When the judge called me up, he also asked me what I wanted to do and I still didn't know. To help me make my decision, he had some people in the courtroom tell me how much drug court had helped them, so I asked for another chance.

After being given another chance, I went back to jail to wait for a

bed in rehab. I ended up going to John Brooks for five months. I really dug deep into my core issues so that I could learn how to stay clean. I completed John Brooks and moved on to Eva's Mommy & Me for six months. I regained custody of my baby and my DYFS case was closed.

After Eva's, I moved onto Auburn Street. I was not familiar with Paterson, so I didn't know it was a bad area. I continued my treatment at Eva's outpatient. The things I saw on Auburn Street were insane. The way people were living due to drugs was really an eye-opener, and it made me more sure that a life on drugs was a life I did not want to live.

After completing IOP, I stayed connected with the recovery center, doing my Work First activity there. After being there for several months, I was offered a part-time job, which I happily accepted. That part-time job turned into a full-time position.

During my time in drug court, I got my GED and my license back and a car. I have had two children while in drug court. I got married in drug court. I survived living on Auburn Street for three years with no relapses. I finally moved. I have the trust of my family back. I am a productive member of society. I am a mom, a wife, a good employee, a good sister, and daughter, and it's all thanks to drug court.

*“I have the trust of my family back. I am a productive member of society.”*

- Rachel D.

My life has always been rather difficult; I felt like I didn't fit in. I came from a very dysfunctional household with divorced parents, which is why I went to the streets and the streets raised me. I started smoking pot and drinking around age 15. The only time I felt like I fit in was when I was committing crimes or getting high. I was never a leader - was always a follower. As a juvenile, I was arrested for assault and battery on a teacher. They sent me to private school for behavioral issues. I didn't have much of a consequence at the time, or it was very minimal, and I believe it's because my family knew someone in the town. At 17 years of age, I was adopted and felt totally abandoned. For the next 20 years, I lived a chaotic lifestyle - robbing, stealing, fighting, and total disregard for authority. The crowd I started to hang with was into more dangerous activities and heavier substances. I began using and selling cocaine and heroin in addition to the marijuana and alcohol I had used since I was 15. Things were more out of control for those next 20 years.

In 2009, I was arrested for eluding. At that time, I did six months in the county jail, which led to probation afterwards. During probation, I had three violations of probation for using illegal

SOMERSET COUNTY

**Mike C.**  
*A leader, not a follower*

substances. I would report to my officer weekly and sign the admission of drug use form because I wasn't hiding anything and I didn't care. Probation was a joke to me. I was actively using drugs and was charged with three additional felonies - burglary, receiving stolen property, and selling stolen property. For the next year, I was in and out of county jail. I did go to a 28-day substance abuse treatment program, but was too busy trying to fraternize with the girls so I did not stay sober very long. I was reporting to probation and was occasionally using and admitting the drug use to probation. My probation officer gave me an ultimatum of either going into a program or to the county jail. I went to another program for about a week right before my court appearance. I thought I would try to show some effort. While there, I was receiving withdrawal medication. I was released on a Friday and reported for court on Monday. I tested positive for the withdrawal medication they had given me and was instantly remanded to the county jail. At that point, I sat in county jail for a couple of months and drug court was offered by the state. I was facing my third violation of probation while sitting in the jail with a recommendation of drug court or state prison. When my lawyer tried to convince me to take drug court, I told my lawyer I would have to think about it because while I was in jail, I heard drug court was a setup. I made a phone call from the jail to two different drug court participants who were doing well at the time and they said if you are ready to be done with that lifestyle, drug court is a breeze. At that point, I took drug court with 5 years of state prison over my head.

***“Today, they are calling on me for help and I am willing to be there.”***  
- Mike C.

I accepted the plea offer for drug court but I was still willing to hold onto my bad attitude. At this point, I was playing God. On my first day, I told who I thought was my probation officer to shut up and sit down and let the judge ask the questions. I wanted to do it my way. I wanted to show probation I was the boss. At that point, I was told to sit down. Come to find out I was not the boss - I was just a self-will run riot, still wanting to argue with probation and anyone with any authority. Being on drug court, I was mandated to do an intensive outpatient program and attend three self-help meetings weekly. I fought the 12-step fellowship, and did the absolute minimum required of me. At some point, I realized that my way only got me into jail and other institutions. I finally started to become willing to try the AA program and got a sponsor and immediately jumped into doing step work. I realized a big part of my problem was playing God. I had to surrender to the disease and also to the idea that I was playing God. I had to find my version of a higher power, that wasn't myself. In early sobriety, my higher power was Mother Nature and through time, my higher power has evolved. At this point in my sobriety, I choose to call my higher power God.

Through the AA program, I learned honesty, integrity, and accountability. This led me into service work, speaking at meetings, completing step work, and working with others. I have made recovery number one because I know now that anything I put in front of my recovery I will lose. I completed drug court in 26 months. It's kind of cool how today I can pick up a phone call from probation and I am not worried about being in trouble. Today they are calling on me for help and I am willing to be there. I go above and beyond to give back, because drug court went above and beyond for me. They believed in me when I couldn't believe in myself. AA loved me when I couldn't love myself. Through this process I have gained my family's respect back, I have true friends today, and I am now a leader not a follower. I couldn't be more grateful.



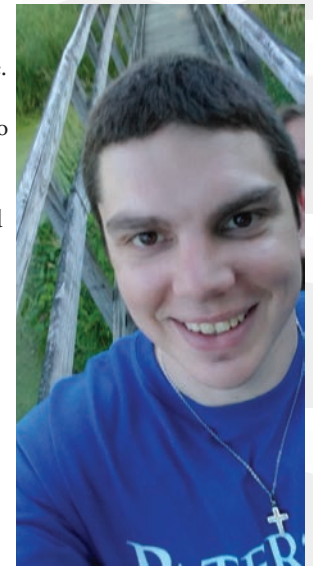
My drug use started at a young age, I was first introduced to marijuana and cocaine at 15 years old while I was working as a dishwasher in a restaurant and was hanging out with the cooks who were in their 30s. I would hang out with them after work and drink, and one night the one cook asked to borrow some money and I asked what for and he said “come on, ride with me.” He went and bought cocaine and I tried it for the first time. I fell in love. That's all I wanted to do after that was sniff cocaine. Shortly after, I was hanging out with one of the other cooks and he smoked a lot of marijuana, so he took me to his connection. I had a lot of money saved. I had been working since I was 12, so I bought a quarter pound. For a while, I was selling marijuana to fuel my cocaine habit. I would be sniffing cocaine day and night. Marijuana was never really my thing so I just stuck to the cocaine.

During the start of my cocaine use, me and my stepfather got into a huge altercation. I was unaware but he was using cocaine too. After this altercation, him and my mom separated shortly after. Once they separated, my mother went into a deep depression and was prescribed Xanax that she would let me have sometimes. Not long after, I wanted more and more of those, too - anything to block out the world, I didn't want to deal with anything. I was selling marijuana and meeting new people all the time. My mom was out of it too, so I basically did what I wanted. My house was like the party house where anyone was welcome whenever.

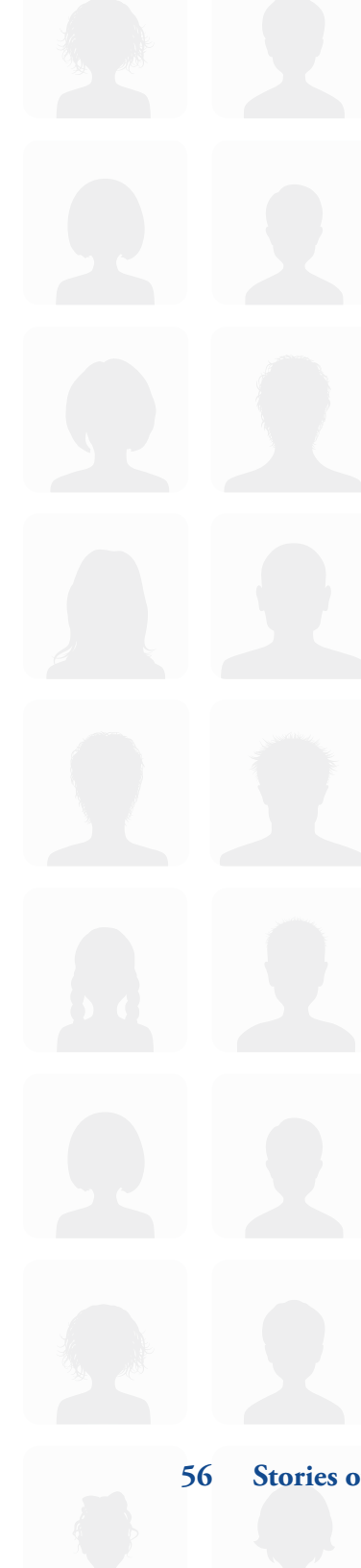
Well, not long after that, I was introduced to crack cocaine, and once I smoked that for the first time, I was done sniffing coke. The only way to do it was smoke it. Once I started smoking it, I lost my job and eventually I was smoking more crack than my drug sales would pay for. I was like 16 years old at this time.

## SUSSEX COUNTY

**Ryan Space**  
*A second chance at life*



Ryan Space

A vertical column of ten grey silhouettes of people's heads and shoulders, positioned on the left side of the page.

Slowly things got worse. I would wake up in the morning and drink beer and try to find money for crack. After a while, my mother got sick of it and threw everyone out. I still continued to smoke crack but started taking pills to come down from the crack high. Not long after, my real father got out of jail and he came to the house and I was caught by my sister smoking crack with him. The cops got called, and that was the first time I went to the juvenile detention center. I was there for 14 days, which felt like a lifetime. I went home and started doing the same things. I stopped reporting to probation, so a warrant went out for my arrest. I had just finished smoking crack and went home and the detectives were there to serve the warrant. I went back to the juvenile detention center and the judge ordered me to go to Daytop, a juvenile rehab facility. I stayed there for three months. Then I left with my family on one of the family weekends. I came home, got a job, and got all my ducks in a row and I finally got picked up on the warrant for running. I sat in juvenile detention and waited for court, and in court, the judge terminated my probation and let me go.


After that, I stayed good for about a month. I had a job and had money and I wanted to keep smoking crack, so that's what I did. One day while hanging out with my old crowd, smoking crack, I was introduced to heroin. I didn't want to do it. I just wanted the money it made. After a few days of selling it, I tried sniffing it, and at the time, it was the best feeling I ever felt. I continued to sell heroin; at this time I was about 17 years old. One day, I needed a ride to Paterson and got a ride from this girl. This was the day I shot up for the first time. Then I was off to the races and that's all I wanted to do. I would go to Connecticut on the weekends and steal shaving razors to sell and smoke crack. After the third weekend I got caught in Target and got charged with grand larceny. I made bail and was re-arrested two days later in Morris County with 47 bags of heroin. My family put up the titles to their cars and bailed me out with a bail bondsman. After this, I really didn't get in legal trouble for a few years. I just continued to work and use heroin and get money for heroin any way I could.

I moved out of my mom's shortly after and met my boss, who continuously tried to help me get clean. He would push me to go to detox and rehab and tell me I had too much potential to be doing drugs. I still continued to use. Me and my boss got into an argument, and I quit and moved back in with my mom. I was still using, and we were fighting one night because she wouldn't give me her keys so I could go buy drugs. She called the cops and I was caught with 37 empty bags and placed on PTI. While on PTI, I still continued to use, and I would report when I felt like it. One night, I was supposed to report but didn't because I had dirty urine. The sheriff's officers came to the diner looking for me that same

night, my boss's diner, and they pulled a needle out of my pocket right in front of him. I later told them I had two bags of heroin in my wallet and got charged for all of it.

That was my first time in Sussex County Jail. I was there for a month and a half. Then I was placed on pre-drug court and released. I continued to use and failed a urine test before sentencing. I was sent to Sunrise House, where I was then kicked out for using crack cocaine in the program. I was placed back in jail, where I sat for four months fighting a program. I then somehow convinced the judge to release me. I was out for 30 days before I gave another dirty urine. I was placed back in jail. They transported me to Integrity House and I ran as soon as I got there. I went back to jail and refused a program and finally got sentenced to three years in prison in February 2014. I was sent to Annandale, a youth correction facility. I was there for five months and then I got paroled, but I had to go to Connecticut and deal with my grand larceny charge. I was there for two weeks and got sentenced to probation there. Then I was sent to Straight and Narrow in Paterson, where I was caught using heroin, so I ran from there while on parole. I went back to my mom's and was picked up by U.S. marshals. I was placed in the county jail and sent back to CRAF to fight my parole violation. I was sent to Yardville to await the results of my hearing. I was there for three months and then I was paroled to Connecticut, where I was sentenced to a year for my probation violation. I maxed out my sentence on Nov. 30, 2015.

I was home with nothing. It took me about two weeks to start using again. I got caught with 12 bags of heroin. I was processed and released. But I had a court case pending now. I was still using excessively. I was in Newton buying drugs and my mom called the State Police and they arrested me at Exxon with one empty bag. I was placed in the jail with \$5,000 bail, but my family bailed me out after a month. I was out for a month using drugs and violated my bail and went back to jail. I bailed out again and was out for seven days and went back to jail. I sat in jail for four months and bailed out again. I was out for 45 days and got rearrested with new charges for 12 bags of heroin. I was offered drug court and refused it many times. I signed a three-year prison term but was sentenced to drug court on Aug. 25, 2017. I was sent to Integrity House on Sept. 1, 2017 and ran and got picked up by a girl I met in jail. I was out for a week in Paterson and got arrested by Passaic County sheriff's officers and went back to jail and was sent to Straight and Narrow in October 2017. I ran after two weeks and I was running for a few days and got picked up by the Passaic County sheriff's officers again. I was back in jail. It was the end of November and I just realized and thought to myself

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***“I just realized and thought to myself how tired I was of living this lifestyle. I wanted to change.”***

***- Ryan Space***

how tired I was of living this lifestyle. I wanted to change. I wanted it to be over with. I went to court and pleaded and told them I would do whatever they wanted me to. I was sent to Damon House, which I successfully completed with no issues on June 7, 2017. I then started IOP at the Center for Prevention, where I was a leader in the group and kept striving to make changes in my life.

I completed IOP at the end of August and moved to Phase Two in drug court in September. I have always maintained a good relationship with my sponsor and attend meetings now. I try to give back what was so freely given to me. I now have 15 months clean and I have never felt better in my life. I have a great job. I have my own home. I have a fiancée and a step daughter who I consider my own. I'm working on getting my license back, and I just couldn't be happier with my life right now. I am so thankful for drug court now because I got a second chance at life.



**Jason Preziosi**  
*Newfound  
freedom from  
addiction*



Jason Preziosi

***"I used to wake up every day hoping I would die, but now I wake up grateful every day that I was able to get this opportunity."***

*- Jason Preziosi*

My name is Jason and this is my story. I guess it all started for me when I was 9 when my parents separated. My father raised me and my three older brothers, and they thought it would be funny to get me drunk and high on marijuana. I was a very introverted child, but I came to find out by using alcohol and drugs that I had a newfound confidence. Since I had older brothers who could get alcohol and drugs for me, I became very popular.

Since my father was never home because he had to work, my house became the party house. My first arrest was when I was 12 for smoking a joint in a car with two older girls. By the time I was 14, I was sniffing and shooting cocaine. When I was 16, my father moved us to Florida and my drug use became even worse.

By the time I was 19, my daughter was born, and I started selling crack to support my family and my habit. In my 20s, I moved back to New Jersey and started working for a garbage company. I was in an accident where I got run over by a garbage truck that I was working on, and that's when I was introduced to pain killers. I went to prison for two and a half years for selling crack to support my habit. You would have thought that would have been a wake-up call, but not for me. I continued smoking crack and taking pills for years and was in and out of jails more times than I can count. I was introduced to heroin when I was 45, which almost killed me. I was arrested Dec. 7, 2015 and I was released on bail Jan. 14, 2016. When I went to court, they offered me drug court.

Looking back, it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. I've learned so much through this program and AA that I have a newfound freedom from my addiction that I never thought was possible. I used to wake up every day hoping I would die, but now I wake up grateful every day that I was able to get this opportunity. It truly is a life beyond my wildest dreams today.



My names Dylan Torres, I was born and raised in Elizabeth. I'm 26 years young, but this story starts from as far back as I can remember. My life story until a few years ago is all about drugs and jail.


During my childhood, my family made sure I never wanted for anything. My mother was 16 years young when she had me. My family's from Uruguay, and when my mother was pregnant they were all living in Uruguay, but my grandfather lived in the United States. He used to send money back to them, but when my mother told her mother she was pregnant, my grandfather flew everyone to the United States. He wanted a better life for me. My family asked my father if he wanted to come along, but he turned down the offer because he was young and was frightened of going to another country.

My whole childhood, I always had a resentment towards my mother because I couldn't understand why I never had a father figure in my life, and my mom had all these guys coming in and out of my life. So that brought a lot of problems for me, and my mother and I don't have a motherly connection as a result. We have a friend relationship instead. I wish it was different, but I've learned throughout the years how to be grateful for what or who is in my life today and just take it for what it is.

The first time I ever got high I was 9 years young, and I smoked weed with my older cousin. It was the best feeling I've ever experienced. It showed me there was more out there. Granted, I didn't get high again until years later, when I was 15 years young and I was a freshman in high school. My high school had a football field behind it so whenever we had gym outside, we used to go to the top of the bleachers and smoke weed and cigarettes. I remember the first time I smoked a cigarette. I was walking home from school and only had a quarter of one and had to throw it away and sit down because my head was doing backflips. I hated the way it made me feel, but for some reason the next day I went to school, I still found myself smoking another cigarette even though the same exact thing happened. I continued smoking until I was able to smoke the whole thing straight through. I truly believe

UNION COUNTY

**Dylan Torres**  
*Looking  
forward to  
the future*



that's when I realized there was something different about me.

So throughout high school, I partied every week, smoking weed and drinking, because the feeling that it brought me made me feel amazing and I loved it. I ended up doing that until I was about 18. Then Percocet came into my life with drinking and smoking, and I found a new love. It only lasted so long then "percs" became "roxys," then "oxys," then "opanas." I stayed with pills for nearly three years, and it eventually got to the point where I couldn't afford them because my habit got worse and worse. One day, one of the people I used to call a "friend" mentioned heroin, and I was all in before I even ever tried it. It was so much cheaper, and I was able to do less to get even higher than I was ever on pills. It was hard to stay employed because I wasn't able to stay away from the drug for more than a few hours at a time. So robbing and stealing became my job for years, and I even got really good at it.

***"Drug court saved my life. I know without a doubt in my mind if I never stopped getting high and was still living on the streets I would definitely be dead already."***  
- Dylan Torres

In December 2015 on my birthday, my grandparents wanted to do something with me. I wasn't able to stay away from heroin for as long as they wanted to do whatever it was they wanted to do. So I had to compromise. I went over their house that day to just eat dinner, then I had to leave so I barely spent time with them that day. The following day, they thought I had a job, but the truth was I wasn't at work. I was seven blocks away in a car that didn't work in the winter getting high with the first man my mother ever married. During the afternoon, my grandmother was calling and calling me, but I didn't answer. Eventually my mother texted, saying something happened to my grandfather and for me to call my grandmother. So I called, and she told me the ambulance was on the way and he's going to the hospital. She told me to get there right away. I told her I was working and I'll try to get there as soon as possible. I stayed in that car for a good three more hours of getting high until I finally made my way to the hospital. When I finally saw my grandmother, she told me that my grandfather had died. Honestly, it didn't faze me because I was so high. This was the only man who ever raised me or who I ever truly cared about. My first reaction was to get high, so I asked my grandmother for money so I can go get something to eat at the hospital. I had my drug dealer meet me outside the hospital, and I went straight to the bathroom to get even higher, if that was even possible. Then I sat there and just looked at my grandfather while nodding off. A couple days later at his wake, I started shooting heroin, and I was so messed up I nodded out three different times talking to my grandfather while he was just lying in the coffin. That's how heartless and numb the drugs made me. About a week later, my grandmother's sister came from Uruguay

to be there and help my grandmother through the situation. The day before New Year's, she came into my room and told me that it was my fault that my grandfather died, that I helped speed up the process. As soon as she said that, I jumped out of bed and I had every intention on punching that old lady in the face. I guess my grandmother heard what she said, and she came into my doorway and she kicked me out of the house. So as of Dec. 30, 2015, I became homeless, and I went straight to the man my mother married and stayed in his car that didn't work in the middle of the winter. I stayed with him in that car throughout the whole winter without any heat. It was honestly at the time the best thing that could have happened to me. I didn't have to tell anyone where I was going or try to hide being high. This was all in Elizabeth. When the winter ended, I had this bright idea - that it would be better for me to be homeless in Newark because the drugs were cheaper and a lot easier to get. So I went from living in a car that didn't work to sleeping in an abandoned building.

While I was homeless in Newark, I used to ride a bike in the middle of the night about five miles to a few towns over and broke into houses and cars to get my money for the day to get high. This became my routine for months and months, and honestly, there wasn't anything I was able to do about it at all. My addiction had such a hold on me that I ruined every single relationship that I've ever had with anyone. So this was the lowest that I ever been at, and I literally had no one in my life.

On Aug. 27, 2016, I was arrested and charged with 12 felonies. I was sent to the county jail, and that's where I spent the next six months of my life. This wasn't the first time I had been locked up and nor was it my last, but it was the longest time I ever spent being locked up. The only times I ever detoxed from drugs were always in jail, and it was honestly the most horrible and most painful thing I've ever experienced. While incarcerated, another county came to charge me with more felonies. I was still withdrawing at the time and I wasn't able to stand up for too long without my body hurting.

While I was in county, drug court was offered to me, and honestly, it wasn't even a thought in my head. I only contemplated it as it was a way to get out of jail. I had every intention of going straight back to the old life I used to live because I wanted to get high more than anything. So when I was released from jail that same day, I had to report to drug court. Luckily, it was only a few blocks away from the county jail. I was about to meet my PO for the first time, and my first experience of drug court was one of the officers that wasn't mine wanted to

give me a hard time and I wasn't in the mood for it. So I gave him just as hard of a time he gave me, and it ended up with me having to write an essay on "the importance of following orders." At this point, I wasn't sure I made the right decision; that I should have stayed in jail, because I've always had a problem with people in authority because most of the people I ran into always abused it towards me. I went six months straight without getting high, so I knew I could wait a little longer before I went out to get high again. I was new to drug court, so I wanted to get a feel for the way things were and try to find a way around the system. After a few months had passed, the only thing I found out was I was able to do was drink on Fridays, so I was clean on Monday for my drug test. I got away with doing this for months and months, but eventually you get caught. The weekend before July 4, I got caught for drinking and did a few days back in the county. I went right back to the same thing, drinking every Friday, until just one random Wednesday I went out to drink with one of my cousins and got drunk. We went back to her house, and while we were watching TV, she just pulled out heroin, and without a thought, I reached out and did three bags. I ended up overdosing, but this wasn't my first time nor was it my last time. This was actually the third time it happened to me. So that following Thursday in the morning I went inside Wendy's restaurant to shoot two bags of heroin. While walking out of Wendy's building I overdosed once again, and this time I fell backward and hit my head on bricks. When I woke up, the EMT hit me with Narcan, and I was lying in a pool of my own blood. Drug court makes you attend three meetings a week, and for this whole time I was in drug court, I attended all the meetings that I had to make. Even though I was going just to go, I ended up hearing some things that stuck. So even though I passed my drug test that Monday, I told on myself, and got myself locked up, because I knew in my head that all my old ways were coming back and I was about to be back on that drug like if I never left.

So I ended up having to do a month in jail, and then they sent me to a halfway house, where I had to stay for six months. That was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. I met some people that changed my life. I ended up living with one of the guys at the halfway house that helped me get a job in the union, and I actually even met the girl that I am with still until this day. She has a 20-month-old son who isn't mine. I treat her son like he's my son, I love him like he's my son. I've made some friendships during drug court that will stay lifelong friends. Until drug court came into my life, I was never able to hold onto a relationship, especially a healthy one. Today I am here for her and her son whenever needed, and that's something I've never been able to say about myself.

Honestly, drug court was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. Drug court saved my life. I know without a doubt in my mind if I never stopped getting high and was still living on the streets I would definitely be dead already. Drug court has shown me what it's like to be a responsible member of society and showed me how to be responsible for my actions. Drug court helped me get my family back into my life. I could never express how grateful I am for what drug court has done for me. Drug court gave me a new life; it opened my eyes to a new way. This is just the beginning of my story, and I am finally looking forward to what life awaits for me in the future.



My five years with Union County drug court was a blessing, not a harsh sentence. In retrospect, it wasn't a sentence at all. Drug court has given me an opportunity at life that I never thought was possible, a chance at a life more fulfilling and enjoyable than ever before.

**Jessica M.**  
*Better than ever*

By June 2013, I had a raging, intravenous heroin addiction. I had only accepted drug court as an alternative to prison time. I knew I wasn't built to survive jail time. At this time, I had seven drug charges, and quite a few of them were felonies.

I had attempted two treatment centers in New York City and was placed on a high dose of methadone. Drug court was willing to work with me and allow me to titrate off of the methadone before going to treatment here in New Jersey. However, I continued to use street drugs. I was remanded due to a dirty urine. I spent three weeks in the Union County Jail. I had every intention of splitting from treatment the day I was finally released, but that's not how my story goes.

While I was doing my time and detoxing, my drug court TASC evaluator was hard at work getting me accepted into the treatment facility of my choice. I knew many success stories from addicts who had sought treatment there. My back up plan was, if all else fails, I will already be in Newark and won't be far from my drug of choice. My TASC evaluator had already thought of that, and I was sent to their other location in Secaucus.

I remember thinking on my ride there, in the back of a squad car, how long of a walk it would be down the turnpike; I should spend at least one night there and conserve my energy and make the decision to leave the next day. I also thought I would be greeted with smiling faces and welcoming hugs from fellow addicts. I could not have been more wrong!



I was greeted by a woman whom I thought was all of my bad karma coming back to get me. She was tough. She was impenetrable. She was my counselor. She was my angel. She guided me through the first part of my journey. Miraculously, I completed inpatient and was transferred to a halfway house. This is where my true experience with Union County Drug Court began.

***“Drug court didn’t hinder me from living it ENABLED me to live.”***  
- Jessica M.

I met my probation officer a few times in court but didn’t really get to know him until this point. I heard horror stories about POs and was pretty nervous about the expectations of my probation officer and of drug court itself. Fortunately, I had a great PO and had become very close to him. In addition to treatment and a full time job, I had to report to court and to my probation officer on a monthly basis, daily calls to the urine line, three meetings a week complete with signed meeting sheets. It was intense and grueling. It didn’t get easier either; the pressure increased after completing the halfway house and moving into transitional housing.

As difficult as it was, drug court had yet to fail me. I had been thriving in sobriety and in my new job. I fought for legal custody, to be reinstated with my children. I was able to have my driver’s license reinstated. I had gained my family’s trust back, I was even able to take a Disney vacation. More importantly, I started to gain my self-confidence back.

It was about this time that I was called in to speak with the senior probation officer. She had advised me that I was being assigned to a new probation officer. I was shocked. I once again felt nervous and apprehensive. I was confused and didn’t have any answers as to why I was being reassigned. I had finally made it to transitional housing and had just entered phase four.

I was ecstatic to learn who my new probation officer was. She was someone I felt comfortable with and was confident in her abilities to guide me through the next part of my process. She focused on my emotional well-being and really prepared me for life after drug court. She helped me focus on financial matters as well and assisted me with a payment plan for my drug court fines. She realized how fearful I was to complete drug court and she continued to encourage me. She made me feel confident and motivated. She made me feel like I was the only person in her caseload when we met. She would remind me of how far I have come and how much further I could go. She helped me become excited to complete drug court.

After gaining her trust, I was also able to go on another two

vacations, something that I thought that was impossible in drug court. Drug court didn’t hinder me from living, it ENABLED me to live.

Although I didn’t have any relapses, I completed a full five years of drug court. I am grateful for every day that I spent in Union County drug court. I was blessed with the opportunity to complete this program.

In June 2019, I will be celebrating six years clean and sober. Drug court has given me a second chance at life and has given my two daughters their mom back to them. I am better than ever. I am now expecting my third daughter in a few months. I work for the largest global entertainment company, assisting celebrities backstage. None of this would be possible without Union County drug court and my amazing probation officer.



“Crack,” the door smashes in. The time is 5 a.m., the location Union County. My heart sank because I knew this wasn’t a gang member, I knew this wasn’t a paid killer (they would have been quiet). It was the police. It was only a matter of time with the way that I was living. Selling everything under the sun like an apothecary from the medieval ages. It all started when I was a child. I discovered that my father used to be an addict, I didn’t understand it then but, when I started smoking weed, I believed I had found my place in the world.

My place in the world wasn’t cheap, as I noticed at a young age, so I learned very quickly that I needed to learn the “game” of drug dealing in order to just feel normal with money. I was a hard worker and a better charmer, so this seemed like the life for me. Fast forward back to the date of the house raid; they caught me red-handed and I was ready for prison.

I was ready for the fights, terrible food, isolation from family and loss of money. What I wasn’t ready for was drug court or sobriety. I got into drug court after hearing from other people in the same position as me that drug court was a “set up,” that it was just another way for the government to hold you longer. At first, I really believed these people.

While I was pending drug court, I was “testing the waters” for lack of a better term, still smoking weed, still popping pills and sometimes getting away with it. I had passed every single drug test up until the day I got sentenced. My addiction finally caught up with me, I popped dirty and served my first sanction. I was bitter,

**Tim H.**  
*Grateful for freedom*

upset, and now obsessed with beating the system. Jail is a terrible place to let your thoughts and emotions stew.

***“Drug court has helped me become a real man and stay away from being an ignorant street thug. I was just a crazy drug addict who didn’t care about life.”***

*- Tim H.*

Upon leaving, I now knew that I had it down pat. Well, would you believe it? I was wrong and ended up serving two more sanctions over the same drugs around Thanksgiving. It was my third strike, so I knew my time in jail would be longer than the first time and that I wouldn’t be spending time with my family over the holidays. I flipped out on a certain PO that ironically I gained respect for later in life. I said vulgar things that I regretted, and it soon landed me in a place worse than jail for an addict: A program.

Now I am in the program, and I learned many things while in there. To this day, I hate that place and haven’t gone back, but I loved what it did for me. I learned extreme self-discipline and to be grateful for your freedom. I also learned that AA is more useful than any program in the world because it is free, loving, and everywhere.

I am by no means perfect, and drug court still tests me on a weekly basis. But now I have a job, my girlfriend is happy, my parents can trust me, and I am sober. I only served one sanction upon leaving the program (for marijuana), which was another reminder that people, places, and things are truthfully important to replace and I am still working on it.

In conclusion, drug court has helped me become a real man and stay away from being an ignorant street thug. I was just a crazy drug addict who didn’t care about life. Now I am grateful for all of the little things, and I still struggle sometimes. Somedays, I’ll go to a meeting and feel as if I am wasting time, but sometimes I’ll walk out of a meeting feeling divine.



**Michael M.**  
*Alive and happy*

**M**y life was full of anomalies. Living in a single-parent home in an upper-middle class town, I was one of the few that didn’t have both parents at home. My childhood encountered very little struggle externally, but my will to fit in started early. Telling lies to my friends about family trips and cohesive gatherings as a whole family became my first form of escape. The smiles on other people’s faces made me feel complete. Consistently trying to fit in did little to help me build my own self-awareness, and I became lost during important years of life. When I became old enough that drugs were present at parties, I found another “in” with the cool crowd. To make matters worse, when I took these drugs I actually felt better. My answer was right there in front of me.

From then on, drugs were a mainstay in my life, an escape from truly learning who I was. None of that mattered though, because the image I portrayed to others was accepted. Thankfully, I was able to graduate from college and set up a career I thought I’d love. The only problem was I never learned who I was, so how could I know what I actually loved. These were all other people’s goals I thought would fit into my life. I hated waking up every day so, like most times in my life, I went to what would comfort me most: drugs. Only this time it felt different. I couldn’t get enough. Opiates became a daily habit, and it quickly escalated to more than I could afford with my paycheck. I needed a supplementary income just to keep up, which led to committing crimes. My life became out of control and trust from those closest to me vanished. Lost in the haze of drugs and that lifestyle was only leading me to death or incarceration. Fortunately, incarceration became my chosen path. I know I needed a change because short-term programs and jail sentences were doing nothing for me. I had never heard of the drug court program until it was presented to me, but it sounded like exactly what I needed. I needed this program, long-term intervention with high consequences.

My start was rocky because I believed I could still manipulate the system. Once I saw that was wrong, I knew I had to change. Growth was a gradual process, but with each step I become more confident. As I completed obtainable goals I began to learn my true identity. With a clear mind, I was able to learn about myself and assess what I needed to change. Being in drug court took the drugs out of my life so I was able to mature and grow the correct way. This process was extremely challenging but, most importantly, not impossible. After graduating in good standing and getting approved for my expungement, I am proof that this program works. With the work of a caring probation officer, I learned how to respect authority and understand their much needed role in my life. I was able to repair relationships with my loved ones, learn how to be a beneficial employee, build strong friendships and give back to people whose shoes I was once in.

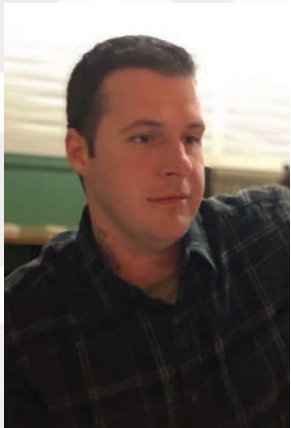
I was once asked if I thought drug court was beneficial. The short answer is definitely. In my opinion, you won’t find a more caring program associated with the legal system. Most are looking to catch you doing wrong; this team encourages you to do right. So my real answer is that I’m alive and happy. So not only is it beneficial, it’s lifesaving.

***“Growth was a gradual process, but with each step I become more confident.”***

*- Michael M.*

**William Bozza**  
*Breaking  
the cycle*

I think ever since I was a teenager, I found myself walking a very fine line to a life of self-destruction and self-misery. I always seemed to enjoy partying a bit more than all my friends. When the party ended for them, I would just find new friends to continue the party. At this point in my life, the how and the why is irrelevant. At this point in my life as I think of it like this, most addicts reached their addiction through the same mental issues and motivation, went through a hundred justifications but in the end, we all got there. That place of misery, that place of personal hatred. I was in so deep, it wasn't a party, not anymore. There was no clear path out and no reason to leave. The odd thing is when the addiction takes over, you find comfort in your misery. In the end, you need a very big shove to push you out of your miserable comfort zone, push you away from the places and things that created that misery. It takes a shove and a change of mind to push you to a place where you are willing to change and grow.



**William Bozza**

I wound up in drug court the same way most of us did. I was a junkie and didn't care to be anything else. I didn't care what I was doing to the people who still cared about me. I didn't care about my nonexistent relationship with my son. I started viewing myself as the underdog. Everything was happening to me. It wasn't my fault, I was a strung-out, lying junkie. It was the world giving me a bad hand. That being said, I also didn't want to go to prison. I already destroyed my chance at pretrial intervention and probation three times.

I signed for drug court, figuring that at worst it was a way out of county jail, I could get clean for a while, all before I got caught again. In my backwards thinking, that's how I thought this program would work. I was different. I was unique. Hundreds of people have gone through this program before me. I thought they only stayed clean because they had things I didn't have, mainly support. In my narcissistic mind, I also thought people weren't hooked on heroin like I was. They were marginally hooked. These are the things I remember saying when I signed the paperwork.

In retrospect, I was so arrogant and just so self-consumed it was insane.

My first year in drug court, I was a master manipulator and liar. I literally tried ANYTHING to work the system both ways. I wanted to get high and destroy my life and myself. I wanted the people tasked with trying to help me become a normal functioning adult to cosign my lies and deceit. I wanted them just to let me do what I wanted. Because clearly, I knew what I was doing. They just needed to see it my way. Thank God they didn't believe my lies and manipulation. I created a pattern, I would manipulate; they would

call me on it. I would get high; they would catch me and send me to county jail to dry out and then to a program. It went on and on like this for months.

My final straw, my final dig, came Memorial Day weekend in 2016. I pushed too hard. I received four sanctions into the new year. Sensing my time of dodging the system and not having to do any real work to better myself, I made the decision to go all in, all or nothing. I committed myself to a suicide wing at a hospital, figuring that would give me the three days to dry out. I would be able to pass a drug test. I was released in 12 hours. This clearly didn't go as planned. I went to my automatic default. I would lie my way out of this.

Realizing this, like many addicts, I thought the world revolved around me. Without sounding too overzealous and self-absorbed, my probation officer took a special interest in showing me I wasn't as clever as I thought I was, right in the middle of trying to get my fix and constructing this elaborate lie to get out of going back in to an inevitable violation and prison time. My PO called me, asking where I was. I was supposed to be in the hospital. Panicked, I said "at the food court." I heard the aggravated response, "Oh yeah, I'm outside." I folded, I told her I knew I was going to be dirty and was not in fact at the hospital. I was given two hours to report to the courthouse; I was taken back into custody.

I tell that part of the story specifically. I firmly believe I needed to be put in my place. YOU'RE NOT AS SMART AS YOU THINK YOU ARE AND YOU'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING NEW. I needed that push to show me that being a junkie, an addict, doesn't make me special. It doesn't give you power to manipulate your life, at least not manipulate it into anything positive, unless the goal is to go to prison or die, because that was the only place my cunning abilities were taking me. I needed that push to break the cycle and start to accept that maybe, just maybe, there was something else in this life. It didn't happen overnight for me. I was sent to jail, where I pushed boundaries and learned there are just as many self-absorbed people who made it a point to show me. Then I was sent to a long term TC program (TC is for therapeutic community) which is code for druggie boot camp. Oddly enough, it was the last TC in the state.

I spent eight MONTHS in that place. I learned a lot about me and how to be an adult. In order to keep yourself from playing the victim and using it as an excuse to destroy yourself, you first must be willing and able to accept that sometimes things are going to go bad for absolutely no reason.

***"It takes a shove  
and a change  
of mind to push  
you to a place  
where you are  
willing to change  
and grow."***

- William Bozza

Accepting the bad and letting it go is probably the biggest step leading me to my success. The ability to not view every single inconvenience in my life as something worth being miserable. Believe me, they would throw punishments your way for no reason, just to see how you would react. Over time, I slowly learned, you don't have to react at all. No matter how severe the screw up or how bad the consequence, you always have time to let go of the emotional aspect and think of how you want to handle the situation that will best serve you. It's not instant service. I'm talking long term. What is the best course of action for what's been pushed your way that will benefit your life? Your future for not just you, but the people in your life. Just keep moving forward and make a note of where to improve.

That mindset changed everything. I was able to take the positive out of almost any situation. I left the negative and emotions out of it. I was easily able to remove negative people from my life and surround myself with the people who would help push me forward rather than hold me down.

And mostly due to my soon-to-be wife, who at the time was just a very good friend, I was able to accept direction and follow the path that people were showing me to live a life worth having. Between this, meetings and helping others, I live the dream I have always strived to achieve. I have a family that I put before anyone in the world. I have a career, a home, and I love who and what I am. I get to enjoy everything life gives to me and everything I earn because I worked for it. My fiancée and I have a relationship like I have never experienced, and I now have an amazing relationship with my son, who I can care for, and I have a stepdaughter I can care for. I know I'm a son, a brother, and a man I can be proud of.

I guess the biggest take away on this is that life can be as simple or as hard as you make it. If not for Union County drug court and Officer Benjamin being as straightforward and as harsh as she and they were, I may not be here today. I may not have made it, and that would have been a shame, because I am truly happy.



**WARREN COUNTY**

**Terrence O.**  
*Valued employee, father,  
and companion*

I didn't grow up in a bad environment or come from an abusive or broken home. I came from middle class, hard working parents who did everything they could for us. My mom was a nurse and my dad owned a telecommunications company. We lived in Andover. I have one brother and two sisters. I'm the oldest.

Early in my life, I was trouble in school. I was classified ADD and given medicine, which I always refused to take. I passed every year in school mostly because the teachers wanted me out of their classroom. I was a respectful kid but I was mischievous, and made a bad name for myself all through grade school. I excelled in soccer – that was my saving grace. At the age of 12, I was training in Olympic development and I spent six months in Germany at 13, training and being groomed to play professional soccer.

At home, I hung out with a rough group of older kids than I grew up with in my neighborhood, and by the time I was in high school, that group of bad kids meant more to me than school or soccer or basically anything. I was loyal to all the wrong people and things, and at the age of 16, I was charged as an adult in New York and sent to a penitentiary called Valhalla, where I was one of the youngest in the jail. It was a hard year for me. I fought on a daily basis and lost more than I won. I was a child. Upon my release, I continued to hang out with the same troubled friends. We were into partying, stealing and all types of bad things. From the age of 18 to 35, I racked up more felonies than I could count and 13½ years in prison in total. My life was a complete mess. I didn't care. I was a total disappointment to my family and my son, who I had when I was 26 years old. I developed a pain pill addiction and was in and out of jail for a long time.

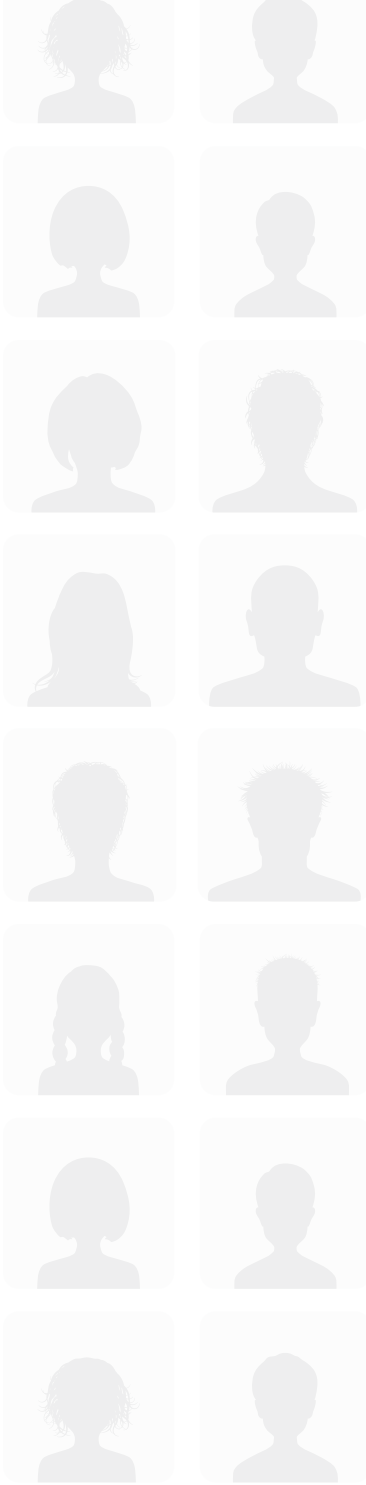
My last case - I was charged with robbing an antique store and I sat in the county jail facing yet another state prison sentence - and the judge was adding an extended term and labeling me a career criminal. I remember being up in my cell at night feeling totally helpless. I was tired of my lifestyle and every morning I woke up I was mad that I hadn't died in my sleep. I had lost all hope. Everyone I knew I had disappointed. My family. My son. Myself. I had hit rock bottom. I lost myself.

My attorney explained to me what drug court was and said he thought I would be the perfect candidate for it. At that point in my life I was willing to try anything; I knew I would die if I continued with my old lifestyle. I agreed to the drug court program and was sent to Damon House. While I was there, I battled a lot of my demons and was trying my hardest to change. I hated that place, but I also knew that if I could do what they told me and take their advice I would have another chance at life.

I left Damon House at the top of the chain of command, and I came home on drug court with a new hope in my heart. The drug court program was hard and I wasn't perfect. In my second year, my father developed cancer and died within six months. It hit me

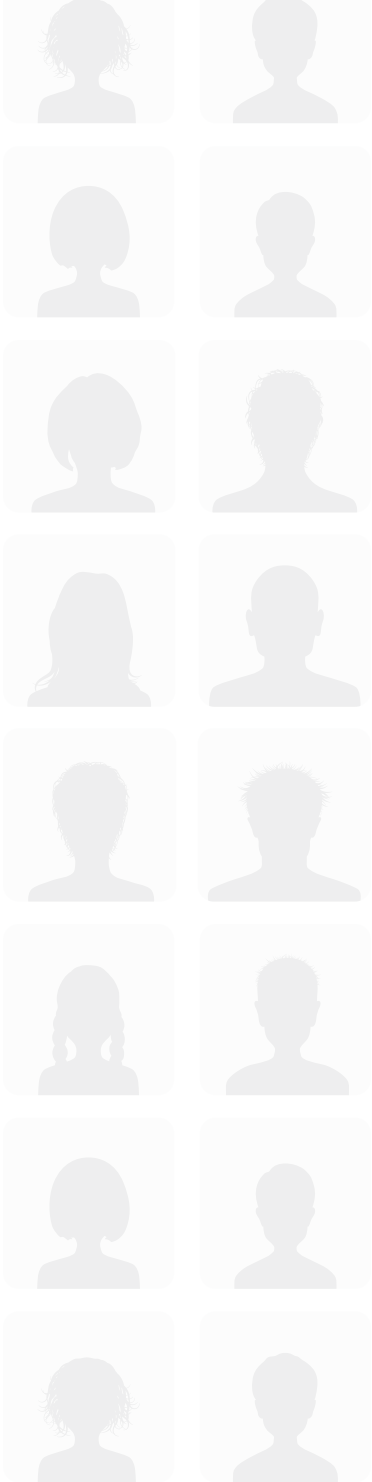
***“I wake up every day with a positive outlook on my life and I am grateful for all the beautiful things that I have today.”***

*- Terrence O.*

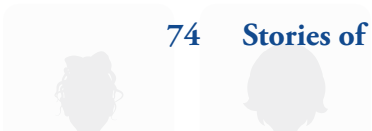


hard and I drank alcohol. I was sanctioned. I grieved the loss of my father in jail. It was rough but I got through it. While my dad was sick, I met an amazing woman whom I fell totally in love with. She put a spark for life into my heart that I didn't know existed. She made me want to become a better man, and she believed in me while giving me unconditional love. She saw something in me even when I saw nothing in myself, and I made a vow to myself that I would never jeopardize my life again. I moved to Warren County with a fresh outlook on life and I never looked back.

I have been through all phases with not one issue, and I can honestly say that today I have a life that I never dreamed possible – not in a million years. Today I am the father, the partner, the son and the citizen that I always should have been. My life is filled with love, laughter, and happiness. I am a valued employee, father and companion. I wake up every day with a positive outlook on my life and I am grateful for all the beautiful things that I have today. I worked hard to get to this point in my life and I am proud of who I am these days. I know that if I keep myself on this positive road, life will only get better, and that is a beautiful thought. I know that my father is looking down on me from heaven and he is proud of the man his son has become, finally. That, to me, means so much. I will continue to strive for greatness, and I am thankful for the drug court program for giving me a last chance at life. Without drug court, I would still be wasting away in a state prison. It helped me become the man I always wanted to be. I am forever grateful and appreciative.



*For more information about the New Jersey drug courts, visit [njcourts.gov](http://njcourts.gov).*





**STUART RABNER**  
CHIEF JUSTICE

**GLENN A. GRANT, J.A.D.**  
ACTING ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COURTS

**MAY 2019**