

Helping people find life without drugs



Success means different things to different people.

Success sometimes has nothing to do with how much money you make, what abbreviations surround your name, or what kind of car you drive.

Sometimes ... success is all about getting back up after you've fallen.

To date, 64 people have enrolled in the Codington County

"Sometimes I think about him. I think about his wife. I think about his young children. I think about how Drug Court made such a difference to him but also for his family."

Judge Carmen Means, speaking about a Drug Court graduate

Drug Court program started in 2014. Twenty-one have graduated. Many graduates have maintained consistent employment and some have gone on to college.

"If they put in the work, the time and the effort, it shows," said Drug Court Coordinator Tiffany Barthel. "They are happy and healthy and on a better path."

Traditionally, offenders were arrested, incarcerated and forgotten, said Sgt. Chad Stahl of the Watertown Police Department, a Drug Court Team member for

three years. "The longer you work in law enforcement, the more you realize that arresting people and locking them up isn't always the answer," Stahl said.

Judge Carmen Means, involved with Drug Court since its planning stages in 2013, agrees.

"One of the things that has been shown as it relates to addiction is that if you incarcerate offenders with addiction, they leave with their addiction," she said.

The teamwork supplied by Judge Means and those at the state, county and local law

enforcement levels, as well as the client, prove a client's recovery and life can certainly happen.

One key to the Drug Court's success is community support from sources such as Watertown Area Community Foundation and United Way to employers who will hire Drug Court clients.

"I can't say enough about the community support," said Means. "We've grown so much since those early days. Any success wouldn't have happened if we didn't have the foundation grants and other support throughout the community. Financial support is fantastic. Those coming to Drug Court, investing their time, is another way of showing support."

Newly-formed nonprofit Brothers and Sisters Behind

Bars has also been instrumental, which Means credited for pro-social activities, housing and to the client.

"Their commitment to supporting sober, stable lifestyles is an invaluable asset to the Watertown community," she added.

Drug Court's goal is to develop sober, productive, law-abiding citizens who are also an asset to their community. They will be held them accountable but also given the tools to succeed after they graduate.

Barthel said graduating from the program is amazing.

"It's at least 14 months of vigorous treatment," she said. "They work on themselves and get the help they need to maintain a structured lifestyle. With that, eventually, everything falls into place as long as they show up, be honest and try."

Means said she'll never forget the second graduate, who was the first to start but not to graduate.

"He struggled in our program so much so that we were considering terminating him. Every day he woke up and told his wife 'I'm not going to use meth today.' The next day they would have to start over again, because he did use."

But he got back up again, stayed on track, got a job and stayed sober until he graduated. He still attends meetings and has been an inspiration to others.

"I still see him now and then and he continues to do well," said Means. "Sometimes I think about him. I think about his wife. I think about his young children. I think about how Drug Court made such a difference to him but also for his family."

That success isn't uncommon.

"They all have a story," said Stahl. "With Drug Court you look at their stories and why they are in the position they are in. As they gain your trust, you learn more about them and their lives — why they are the way they are. You get a better understanding when you take a deeper look."

After another recent graduation Barthel said the milestone is significant because of the change family members see.

"'Happiness' is the best word I can use to describe it," she said. "They have a new light in their world."

But graduation doesn't mean it's over. Means noted that graduates must continue to choose to be successful every day because addiction is unrelenting. And sometimes success doesn't continue.

"If half of our graduates are never arrested again, that's success," said Stahl.

The police department coordinates the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program give to children while they are in grade school.

"It's not successful for every child, but if it affects just one, in my mind, yeah, it was," Stahl said.

