



## Lessons Learned: A Look Back

**By Ellen Zehnder  
Sixth Circuit Court  
Adult Treatment  
Court Coordinator**

Over the course of almost six years of operation, the Adult Treatment Court team has learned many lessons, probably so many that it would be impossible to put them all in one article, so, I will focus on some of the important ones.

The first, and not necessarily a lesson learned but just logic, is that the participants in the drug court are human beings first and foremost and deserve respect as such. They have unique problems, as many people do, that need to be addressed in a different manner.

We have learned that the problem of addiction knows no class distinction. It affects people from all walks of life, all races, genders, age groups and religions.

With regard to true lessons, and in no particular order of importance, we've learned to not give up on our participants too quickly, as they are too used to doing that with themselves.

We've accepted the reality that these are very difficult cases and try not to be dismayed when our clients stumble on the road to becoming a productive citizen again.

We understand that substance use disorders are life threatening as we have, unfortunately, lost an active and a former drug court participant to overdose.

We continue to strive to reach that delicate balance between treatment and sanction, which at times is challenging. Having come from distinct philosophical positions, we as a team have learned to collaborate putting any differences, gracefully, aside.

We've also learned to view our participants as people with drug and/or alcohol issues rather than see them as the problem.

One of the most rewarding lessons we have learned is how talented our participants are once they are clean and sober. They play instruments and sing (quite well too), write poetry and essays, speak well, and some are artists with talent that is second to none.

This brings about a lesson that they need to learn as they travel the long road to recovery, that *they* have a lot to offer.

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### Special points of interest:

- ODCAP Seminar October 5 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- July 18 - Adult Treatment Court holds 17th commencement with a record 7 graduates

# My Name is DJ: A Graduate Remembers

## Written by a 2003 graduate of the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Adult Treatment Court

I was one of the first graduates of the Oakland County Adult Treatment Court. The date of my last brush with the law is also my sobriety date. While I take some pride for the latter, I am still coming to terms with the former.

I had made a mess of my life, and cocaine was at the center of that disarray and chaos. An addict's life is an unholy hell of self-deception, lies, and fear. My biggest fear was not dying, it was going to prison where I would be deprived of my freedom and the mood altering chemicals that I had come to depend upon to mute the unbearable feelings that I had about myself.

Along the way, I had lost my hopes and dreams, wasted vast amounts of money, opportunities and time. I also caused great suffering to those around me. This was not only to those who had loved and cared about me, but to the anonymous strangers who were innocent and undeserving of my selfish need to get more money to buy more drugs. That is the sole obsession of the addict, and it is a mentally and spiritually empty life.

I also knew that although the future was very dark, others that had come before me had recovered. This is the small ray of hope that shines at odd angles in front of the addict, just as the sun does in the twilight and the early morning, refracted through windows and reflected into the mirrors in which I was no longer able to look. I knew that I had run out of chances and that I had used the detachment and alien-

ation that I felt as the motivation to take an honest and unflinching look at what I had become and where my decisions had taken me.

I knew that I was not very good at being a human being. People are judged by the sum total of the choices that they make, and I had made shameful and dishonorable choices in life.

Getting high had all started out as a bit of fun among friends, and part of the attraction was that it was illicit and subversive. We were getting away with something that our

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parents and the authority figures had warned us not to do, for fear that we would get into trouble and sabotage our futures. The future, however, never looks brighter than when you are 18 years old and it is all right there in front of you. I never expected that things would turn out as badly as they did and that I would one day be looking at a long custodial sentence as a direct result of my declining morals.

There is never a day that goes by that I do not regret the things that I have done in the past to cause such harm to others and myself. I am able to look at these experiences today with a changed set of eyes, and to try to live, to the best of my ability, with honor and respect for the trust and the faith that the few who did believe in me had.

The first person who comes to mind, besides my heartbroken parents, is my former Oakland County Probation Officer, Charlie. In the past, I had usually managed to stay under the radar when I was on probation. An addict is clever, if nothing else. I knew when I had to report and how long cocaine stayed in my system, so I never failed a drug test.

What I did do, however, was to commit a property crime when I was already on probation. I had many prior convictions; I was facing prison this time. Charlie actually went out of his way to speak to me as a man and not as a criminal. He made no bones about the fact that stealing to support a drug habit was not going to be tolerated and that the jails and prisons were full of these types of people. He also went to bat for me to get me into drug court. Undoubtedly, part of the reason that I was accepted was the ATC was a new diversion program that needed participants and I fit the profile. I have also always felt that Charlie believed that, if I could quit the drugs once and for all, I could become a human being again. I do not forget the people in my life who have given me another chance. This is the thought that I hold onto when things get difficult and unhealthy thoughts and behaviors start creeping into my mind.

Staying the journey in recovery is not easy. People will continue to use your past mistakes against you. They will label you. They will use your status as a recovering drug addict against you. It happens to me as it happens to all recovering addicts. My wife is fond of using this as her trump card whenever we

(continued on next page)

## My Name is DJ: A Graduate Remembers (continued)

have a heated argument. And if these words, hurtful and unkind as they might be, are allowed to hit home and plant the seed of self-pity and resentment, then you will not stand much of a chance.

I know what I am today. I am five years sober and clear headed. I am comfortable in my own skin, and I am a person who does not live in the past, but someone who chooses to live in the process of life and recovery. It is a lifelong climb that is not without its obstacles.

After I completed my legal commitment to the People of the State of Michigan, as directed by the Oakland County Circuit Court, I made a few changes. I had gotten married while I was working hard at my recovery in the ATC program. It is a program that gives you some rope, but you had better use that rope to climb back up and not to hang yourself.

My wife stuck with me through the worst of times, and we moved to somewhere outside of the United States. I have made a new life for myself in my wife's homeland, and we have a beautiful son now who has never seen me under the influence of drugs.

I also finished my university degree after my drug court experience. I had flunked out during my first collegiate attempt, immediately after high school. I managed to not only graduate, but to pull my grade point

average up to 3.5. I only mention this to encourage others who find themselves looking into the black pool of addiction and prison. You can and should envision a better life for yourself, but you have to empower yourself and stop seeing yourself as a victim of bad luck and the legal system. The first thing you have to do is cut short all excuses to keep using. The next thing is stay on course and to keep doing the next right thing. You will soon discover that you will instinctively recognize what this is.



I had this experience only last week. I arrived home from work and the weather was fabulous. I set off on my mountain bike to get some fresh air and exercise. I went for a long ride, through the town and down towards the beach. I was riding carefully, as there were pedestrians along the footpaths. An old man, of about 70, was walking a small white dog on a leash and clutching a blackthorn walking

stick. The sidewalk was wide enough for both of us, and I got as far over as the adjoining road would permit. Traffic was heavy and coming in the opposite direction. He glared at me as I slowed down to pass him and jostled me as I tried to pass him, giving me the shoulder. Cane in hand, he chided me, "The road is over there!" with obvious disconcert for my own safety. I reacted and said, "You could have moved over a step."

I rode another hundred yards or so, bothered by the confrontation. I

then circled around and rode back towards him. He was standing there holding his dog's leash while his dog relieved itself on the sidewalk. He had a suspicious look on his face as I approached him. I said, "I didn't mean to be rude sir, I just came back to apologize". The apprehension in his eyes quickly turned into a twinkle as he replied, "Apology accepted."

One of the lessons that I have learned is that sometimes life will give you the shoulder. Some-

times it will jostle you, even when you are going about minding your own business and have broken no laws. Don't be afraid to circle back and say you're sorry if you have reacted unconstructively. Don't ride away with malice, and don't give negative thoughts the time of day. Be a human being, just be careful where you step and avoid the excrement on the footpaths.

## Lessons Learned: Team Concept and Accuracy a Must

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**By Corene Munro**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court Juvenile Drug**  
**Court Coordinator**

OPTIONS, the Oakland County Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court program was launched on June 5, 2001 with 5 juveniles ranging in age from 13 to 16. The Honorable Edward Sosnick was and still is the presiding judge.

Since that first court hearing, the program has experienced many

growing pains and learned many lessons along the way: some easy, some more difficult. Two of the many are the importance of team cohesiveness and maintaining accurate and complete documentation.

Although there was never any doubt that documentation is important, until one begins juggling the myriad of grants, each requiring different statistics, and other reports to county officials, judges, etc., one cannot realize how important that most insignificant number may be

down the road. It is imperative to keep accurate and complete records.

Regarding the team, members come from many different milieus; thus vocabulary, focus and philosophy can be and is usually dissimilar. It is incumbent upon the team to assure that each member thoroughly understands the mission and philosophy of the drug court program, as well as terminology, goals, etc.

## Alumni Group Offers Support and Guidance

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**By Ellen Zehnder**  
**Sixth Circuit Court**  
**Adult Treatment Court**  
**Coordinator**

The Sixth Circuit Court Adult Treatment Court was initialized in August 2001. Holding its first graduation ceremony in October 2002, and subsequent ceremonies in March and June of 2003, prompted the court to form an alumni group to act as an aftercare component for graduates of the drug court. It would also provide another option to graduates who are feeling they are in danger of relapse or are having a troublesome life situation, and feel the need to connect with people in their same situation.

Initially, the alumni group was headed by Judge David Breck, the first ATC judge, with the assistance of a drug court team member. Realizing that this was probably not the most comfortable situation for graduates to be placed in, it was decided that the leaders of such an

organization should be drug court graduates. In December 2004, the alumni group was placed in the capable hands of two ATC graduates which proved to be the right decision. The alumni group now thrives, meeting every four weeks and having anywhere from 20 to 30 members in attendance.

The group has adopted a mission statement which is as follows:

*The mission of the Oakland County Adult Treatment Court Alumni Group is to assist graduates in their ongoing recovery and to serve as role models for current participants in the program.*

Members make themselves available to give open talks at residential facilities, court sessions, and graduations. Alumni graduate members are also used as mentors for active program clients who are in the early stages of the program and need extra support and guidance.

It is a practice of the ATC to send participants who have moved into Phase III, as well as Phase IV of the program, to alumni meetings. This provides more support for them, and helps to encourage regular attendance at the meetings after graduation and, hopefully, after probation has ended. The ATC has also considered sending new participants to just one meeting, during the first phase of the program, to familiarize them with the group and to assure them that people do succeed in this program.

As of June 2007, the ATC adopted the practice of having new participants sign a form committing to 12 months attendance at alumni meetings, post-graduation. The alumni group would someday like to merge with other Oakland County drug court alumni groups. This would increase the numbers, allow for new thoughts and ideas, and still maintain that common bond among the participants.

# A Letter of Goodbye From an Adult Treatment Court Participant

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Dear Drugs,

I'm writing this letter in an effort to help myself deal with the loss of you. I feel that by putting my true feelings down on paper I will be able to put the relationship we've had in the past, so that I may be able to move forward.

The times we had together when we first met were some of the best times in my life. When I was with you I felt like I could do anything and everything I wanted. You made me feel like I was the best person in the world. Everything was perfect. No matter where I was, you were always with me. When I was having a bad day you were there, comforting me, assuring me that everything was going to be ok. When I was having a good day, you were there, making my day even better. No one and nothing has ever made me feel the way that you have. I loved you with all my heart. Every fiber of my being was unequivocally devoted to you.

And yet you betrayed me. You purposely turned me into someone I didn't want to be. An ADDICT. How could you do that to me? I gave you all my money, time, and energy. Everything I had went to you. Your wish was my command. You even had the nerve to steal from me. You stole my family, friends, and everything else that was dearest to me. Worst of all you stole ME! After everything we've been through throughout the years, I would have never thought it was going to end up like this.

Because of you I don't know how to live. I have to have several people controlling my life in order to recover from your NARCOTIC charm. These people tell me where to live, who I can and can't talk to, and what I have to do every day. It's like being a child again, and these people are my parents.

But you know what I've realized. Even on my worst days now, it's still better than some of my best days with you.

Today I feel free. I am no longer controlled by you. Even though I don't control my own life now, I know that my time will soon come. I am getting better, and stronger as each day passes.

So I guess I want to say good bye. I've thrown out all of our toys. All the needles, all the stems and pipes. Everything that reminds me of you is gone. Now there's plenty of room for me.

I love myself now. More than ever. I'm happy to be alive. And best of all, I've found God, and he loves me too. Together we're gonna live happily ever after.

I'll never forget you though. How could I? Sometimes I even talk about you with my new friends. My friends from NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS.

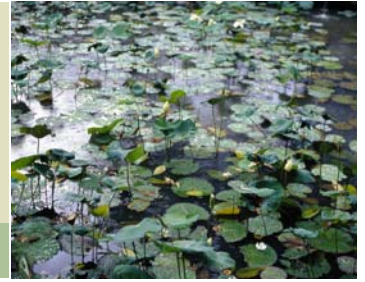
Goodbye heroin, crack and everything else. I never want to see you again.

Sincerely yours,

*Carl Olson*

P.S. I will succeed.

# ODCAP Update



OAKLAND DRUG COURT ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONALS

## About ODCAP . . .

### ODCAP Contact Person:

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ODCAP (Oakland Drug Court Association of Professionals) was founded in March 2003 by 6th Circuit Judge Joan Young for the purpose of sharing information and ideas that would benefit all drug courts in Oakland County. It is not mandatory that a court have an operational drug court in order to attend ODCAP meetings. The meetings are open to anyone who is interested in learning about drug court and knowing what the drug courts in Oakland County are doing. The next **ODCAP Seminar** will be held on **October 5, 2007 from 9:00 to 11:30** and will cover driver's license issues and hearing procedures in the Driver Assessment and Appeal Division. Speakers from the Michigan Secretary of State will be present.

## Treatment Providers in Oakland County . . .

Oakland County Health Division's Office of Substance Abuse Services (OSAS) funds and monitors substance abuse treatment and prevention programs throughout Oakland County. For a list of treatment and prevention programs, please go to the following link on the Oakland County Health Division's website:  
[http://www.oakgov.com/health/program\\_service/osas/osas\\_programs.html](http://www.oakgov.com/health/program_service/osas/osas_programs.html)

## Lessons Learned by the Probation Officers of the 51st District Court . . .

*"Relapse is a part of addiction"*  
*"Nyquil will not result in a positive PBT"*  
*"Prescription drug abuse can be just as bad, or worse, than illicit drug abuse"*  
*"Second-hand smoke does not cause you to be positive for marijuana"*  
*"90 meetings in 90 days can be a lifesaver"*  
*"It's amazing how many people can test positive without ever using  
(fill in the blank) for their drug of choice"*  
*"Accountability appears to be the key to participant success"*  
*"It is important to use three digits in preliminary breath testing"*  
*"Having a Sobriety Court helps court employees become more involved  
in Probation and see the positive results of their work"*