



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

Administrative Office
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East
Bldg. 1, Room, E-316
Charleston, West Virginia 25305
(304) 340-2305 Jennifer Bundy
(304) 340-2306 April Harless
(304) 558-1212 FAX
Web Site: www.courtswv.gov
Facebook: [wvjudiciary](https://www.facebook.com/wvjudiciary)
Twitter: [WVCourts](https://twitter.com/WVCourts)
SmugMug:
<https://wvcourts.smugmug.com/>
Email: Jennifer.Bundy@courtswv.gov
Email: April.Harless@courtswv.gov

Family Treatment Courts Celebrate Two Years in W.Va.

For immediate release Friday, October 15, 2021

[Meet Cassie, A Family Treatment Court Graduate \(courtswv.gov\)](http://courtswv.gov)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Since West Virginia’s first family treatment court opened in October 2019, the program has expanded to 10 courts serving 11 counties. There have been 43 graduates so far among 175 family treatment court participants with 241 children served.

“Each participant’s story is unique, and each graduate is a triumph,” said Chief Justice Evan Jenkins. “Family treatment courts are an important way to reduce recidivism and keep families together. It takes a team of dedicated professionals who can provide the right help at the right time.

“All five Justices of the Supreme Court care deeply about the juvenile drug courts, adult drug courts, and family treatment courts. The judicial system’s purpose is to ensure justice is served, and sometimes that requires treatment more than punishment,” Chief Justice Jenkins said.

Family treatment courts serve individuals with substance use problems who are also involved in child abuse and neglect cases but have not permanently lost custody of their children. Family treatment courts are designed to make homes safe for children to return to and can achieve permanency for children faster and more effectively than traditional methods. Participation is voluntary.

“Evaluations have consistently found that, compared with parents receiving conventional child welfare and dependency court interventions, parents participating in family treatment courts enter treatment more quickly, stay longer, complete treatment at higher rates, receive more court review hearings, and reunite with their children more often,” according to the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare.

The program has expanded quickly in West Virginia because of the high number of child abuse and neglect cases and high rate of opioid use in the state, said Chautle Haught, the Supreme Court’s Family Treatment Court Specialist.

“Our state has been ravaged by the opioid epidemic and we needed something positive to hang on to,” she said. “Child Protective Service workers were exhausted. We had to try something different.”

The number of child abuse and neglect cases increased 27 percent in West Virginia from 2016 to 2019, while decreasing 13 percent nationally during the same period, according to National Center for State Courts' data based on information from 45 states.

In 2019, West Virginia also had a higher than national average number of both opioid prescriptions and deaths per 100,000 people. In that year, there were 59.4 opioid prescriptions per 100,000 people in West Virginia, compared with 46.7 for the nation, according to the amfAR Opioid and Health Indicators Database.

In 2020, there were 1,291 overdoses in West Virginia, up from 877 in 2019, an increase of 49 percent, according to the state Department of Health and Human Resources.

"I was alive but not living (before this program)," Mary Beth Leslie told her treatment court team at her graduation from the Nicholas County Family Treatment Court. "I am so glad there are people like you all that reach out and embrace us. We are broken and we have our histories and journeys but, when people believe in you and fight for you daily, it turns all that around."

The first family treatment court opened in Boone County, followed by openings in Nicholas, Ohio, Randolph, and Roane/Calhoun Counties as part of the initial pilot project. The project then expanded to Braxton, Logan, and McDowell Counties and then to Wetzel and Wood Counties. More than half of the total family treatment court graduates so far completed the program in 2021, and the number will keep growing as more counties open family treatment courts.

"Family treatment court provides us the opportunity to change people's stories and that is very powerful and worth the effort," Twelfth Circuit Court (Fayette County) Judge Thomas Ewing told a crowd at the opening of his circuit's family treatment court on August 30.

Fayette County Circuit Judge Paul Blake said, "All of us that work in the criminal justice system know this is interconnected: drugs, alcohol, crime, abuse and neglect, delinquency. If we can work together to develop these tools, it will save families and keep them together."

Most of the funding for family treatment courts comes from a 2019 state settlement with McKesson Corporation. Under the terms of the agreement, McKesson's \$22.5 million is to be used in support of state initiatives to combat the opioid epidemic, including rehabilitation, job training, and mental health.

The Boone County Family Treatment Court is funded separately by a grant from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

##