



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Boone County Hosts Second Family Treatment Court Graduation

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JULIAN, W.Va. – Eight adults in seven families graduated Tuesday from the Boone County Family Treatment Court in the program’s second graduation ceremony, held in the picnic area of the Water Ways water park in Julian.

The families have a total of 14 children, who proudly stood by their parents as they received awards and then ran around the picnic area and playground. “If your heart doesn’t melt when you see these kids come up here, you are not human. The fact we can reunite these children (with their parents) is incredible,” said Twenty-Fifth Judicial Circuit (Boone and Lincoln Counties) Judge William Thompson, who oversees the Family Treatment Court.

All the children spent some time in state custody due to their parents’ drug use. Thanks to the Family Treatment Court, the children all have been reunited with their parents. Some spent as little as five months in state care, compared to the usual year or more that children in abuse and neglect cases normally spend in state care.

Family Treatment Courts serve individuals with substance use disorders who are also involved in a child abuse and neglect case. Family Treatment Courts are designed to return children to a safer home environment and achieve permanency faster and more effectively than traditional methods. The Supreme Court provides oversight, technical assistance, and training.

Judge Thompson praised each graduate, commenting on how they have changed since he first met them. At times he said he doubted whether some would survive the effects of their drug use, much less continue in the program to graduation. He thanked the graduates’ extended families for attending the ceremony.

“A lot of times, when they get to this point, they’ve lost their families and the families won’t take them back,” Judge Thompson said.

Graduate Jessica Stowers acted as a spokesperson for the group. She thanked Judge Thompson and the Family Treatment Court treatment team, especially Kelly Gadd, the Treatment Court Coordinator. When they offered her a chance to participate in the

program, “That was the first time in a long time I felt I wasn’t being given up on,” Ms. Stowers said. “I left the courthouse with the most hopeful feeling I had ever had,” she said. Gadd, she said, “is the real deal. I realized I had an advocate.”

Ms. Stowers also talked about the bond the treatment court participants have. “We formed our own support group,” she said. “We made mistakes, but we love our kids.”

“I’m excited about the rest of my life. I have my life back at 39 years old,” she said.

Boone County has one of five Family Treatment Courts in West Virginia. The others are in Nicholas, Ohio, Randolph, and Roane Counties. Three more have been approved to begin operating soon in Braxton, Logan and McDowell Counties.

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