

Drug Court Begins Vivitrol Pilot Project

The Shelby County Drug Court has been selected to participate in a pilot program that will allow heroin addicted clients to receive a medication designed to curb cravings. Vivitrol, a shot that is given to a client once a month for six months, is designed to interfere with opiate chemical signals and receptors in the brain. The drug stops the release of endorphins, completely preventing the pleasurable effect of opiate use to take hold.

Numerous studies have shown that Vivitrol can greatly reduce relapse and promote long-term sobriety when combined with effective counseling. The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services chose SCDC as one of several drug courts to begin using the medication on a trial basis. Shelby County is in the midst of a heroin epidemic; over 40% of SCDC clients identify heroin or opiates as a primary drug of choice. Court Administrator Angela Parkerson is hopeful that the pilot program will be successful. "Our hope is that Vivitrol will help clients manage cravings and reduce the risk of relapse while Drug Court provides them with the tools to maintain long-term sobriety."

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Another Chance for SCDC Mom

Shauna Ammons lived a life surrounded by family and friends who did drugs. It was all she knew. And after being prescribed pain pills, she found herself in their shoes.

At the age of 29, Shauna was abusing prescription pills when she got arrested and charged with possession and theft. Initially, she was offered Drug Court, which she turned down because she was talked out of it by individuals she thought were friends. They said Drug Court should not be an option and that it would be too much for her to handle.

But then Shauna was arrested again, this time for aggravated burglary. Shauna had to spend 20 days in jail, but was then given another drug court offer. Shauna says she believes drug court was an answer to her prayers. "The 20 days in jail allowed me time to reflect on what was going on in my life and what I really needed. I was looking for an answer to my prayers, and realized Drug Court was it." Shauna decided to take the offer and was accepted into the program in May 2015.

Judge Dwyer released Shauna from jail bond and placed her in residential treatment for 38 days. Things started to take a turn for the better quickly. "Within the first month of sobriety, I got my four children back, got my driver's license, a car and car insurance. Everything just fell into place." Shauna reconnected with her children's father and started seeing the love and support from the family whom she once thought was against her.

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Determined and ready to stay clean, Shauna took her recovery seriously, maintained a completely abstinent lifestyle and was never sanctioned for relapse or non-compliance. In October 2015, she delivered a healthy baby boy, her 5th child. Unfortunately just days later, Shauna suffered from the loss of her mother to an overdose. Despite this, she maintained her sobriety and compliance with Drug Court.

Now with her 6th child on the way, she plans to graduate in November, live a sober life and maintain her relationships within the recovery community. "I don't have to put something in my body to get through the day. I prayed for an answer and Drug Court was the answer. Drug Court has given me a life I've never known."

DUI Program Continues Success

The Shelby County Drug Court DUI Program continues to be successful at rehabilitating drunk driving offenders according to new statistics. Created by Judge Dwyer in 2006, the DUI Program has graduated 187 DUI offenders. These offenders had been flagged for treatment due to multiple DUI convictions and a consistent history of non-compliance while on probation. The primary goal of the DUI program is to stop future drunk driving from occurring by addressing substance abuse and decision making patterns.

As of September 2016, Shelby County Drug Court has only had 23 DUI graduates arrested for a new DUI. The 23 arrests constitute 12.30% of the population, meaning that 88% of DUI program graduates have not been arrested for a new DUI. Judge Tim Dwyer and his drug court staff feel that the DUI program has been extremely successful in rehabilitating offenders and creating lasting members of the addiction recovery community.

The DUI program remains a special focus for Judge Dwyer. "I believe that all of our programs are having a huge impact on the community, but the DUI program is especially important to me. If we can stop someone from drunk driving in the future I truly believe we are saving lives. "

SCDC Cleans Up the Community

On September 24th, the Shelby County Drug Court Alumni Association teamed up with CleanMemphis.org for a day of community service, picking up trash and beautifying the neighborhood of Frayser and Lucie E. Campbell Elementary School.

Over 30 Drug Court affiliates participated in the event. Drug Court alumni, clients, staff, and their families split up in teams and picked up trash throughout the neighborhood and trimmed hedges around the school's property. The event was organized by the Alumni Association as a way to give back to the community and to send a positive message that we are all in this together.

Bryan Owens, Peer Recovery Specialist for SCDC, helped to organize the event. "We are clean, so why not clean up Memphis? We want to give back to Memphis because we had taken so much," said Owens.

