

June 18, 2019: Judge Cohen & Drug Court

Thanks to all the GALs/staff and Judge Cohen who showed up despite the torrential rain! A special thanks to Judge Cohen for always taking the time to teach us and keep us informed. Congrats go to **Judge Cohen** on being granted the **Champions for Children Award** by the **Children's Trust**.

- Judge Cohen began the meeting by thanking each of the attendees for being GALs. She expressed the appreciation she has for GALs' efforts and how much they are valued by the Judiciary. She reiterated that GALs are the "eyes and ears" for the Court, and they want to hear what GALs have to say. **Don't be shy!**
- When Judge Cohen started on the bench, there was no Drug Court. She recognized the following cycle -- cocaine-exposed baby placed in foster care or with a relative (even in the home where mom was using)/mother in treatment/reunification-/relapse -- without ever addressing the underlying issues or giving support and wrap-around services to the family. When the next child was born there was a good chance that child would also be a cocaine-exposed baby and the cycle repeated.
- **Judge Cohen started Drug Court in 1999.**
- **FRC (Family Resource Center)** is the only agency in Drug Court, and there is a staff of 8 addiction specialists and dedicated, trained case managers assigned to Drug Court. They are on call 24/7 and work with the entire family.
- There is a **comprehensive assessment** done to look at mental health, trauma, and substance abuse.
- **Targeted, gender-specific case plans** are created and the entire family (It's not important if they are biological!), foster parents, and everyone involved is included in the court process. They find the strengths of the family and treat the family in a very holistic way. A **recovery specialist** is assigned to the case. They are advocates and assist with referrals/treatment.
- **National family standards for Drug Court have been adopted** and are going to be certified in Florida.
- There is a 3x greater possibility for reunification in drug court than in other dependency courtrooms with a much lower rate of recidivism.
- If you have a case with substance abuse, ask your attorney to ask for the case to be referred to drug court. Judges who don't refer cases to drug court are doing a disservice to addicted families.
- **Cases are monitored weekly/bi-weekly/monthly.** They are staffed often (weekly) and have many more successful outcomes than traditional dependency cases.
- Parents are tested 3x week -- Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. If alcohol is an issue, ETG testing is done. It is a 13-panel test and promotes accountability.
- For **alcohol**, there are very effective meds or a **monthly free shot** (at Banyan). **Vivitrol** is used. It is a drug that blocks the opioid receptor. There is no dependence on this med. You must be off opioids for 2 weeks. If surgery is needed, the doctor must be informed because it will cause rapid detox. AA meetings are vital to recovery for alcoholics. It is peer support with sponsors. The sponsor should be the same gender and at least 5 years in recovery.
- Case managers use an **evidence-based intervention program** called **Engaging Moms**. It is highly motivational and successful.

- Not everyone needs residential treatment. Screens that are evidence based will tell you the level of care required from outpatient, intensive outpatient, residential, and step-down to maintenance.
- You will not be successful if you under treat or over treat! Unfortunately, the system doesn't do appropriate screening.
- A case can be referred to drug court anytime, but if the case has been in another division for more than 3-4 months, they will not be accepted in Drug Court.
- **The Village is moving to Pembroke Pines.** There is currently no capacity in Miami Dade. If you have older children who need treatment or an intact family, they can be sent to Broward. Women with children can go to **Reeves** and **Agape**. There is a waiting list because of the opioid epidemic. **Methamphetamines users** are coming in fast and furiously. There is no med treatment for them and they can cause irreparable brain damage. Priority for beds is given to opioid addicts and IV users. There are not enough female beds, no Spanish speaking beds for men, and 2 beds for women currently.
- If you have a parent who needs residential treatment and there are no available beds, they should have very intensive out-patient treatment: daily meetings, 3x week drops, weekly court.
- For **opioids** there are great meds available. There is no public methadone clinic. Banyan, Agape and Reeves House offer **Subotex** and **Suboxine**. This is a very humane treatment. Trying to come off opioids without them will make an addict very sick. They will be dependent on these drugs but not addicted.
- **Addiction** is a complex behavior -- compulsively doing something even though there are negative consequences. **Dependency** on drugs needs a legal medication- it doesn't get you high but does enable you to go on with your life.
- If someone on Subotex or Suboxine has to take a drug test and they fail because they test positive for these meds, it is a violation of the ADA and the Civil Rights Act.
- Drug Court coordinators go to every shelter hearing and may even attend the 1st hearing. Defense attorneys for the parents are the biggest obstacle in getting parents to agree to Drug Court.
- They do not try cases in Drug Court.
- The drug-testing unit (The Village) will remain in the courthouse.
- The **3 biggest predictors of substance abuse** are: untreated mental illness, genetics, and trauma
- 75% of families have underlying mental health issues, mood disorders, depression, etc.
- If a mother has an alcohol problem, the children should be given a fetal-alcohol exposure screen. It will alert to potential learning, sensory disabilities, etc.
- If a child has a substance-abuse problem, there are not a lot of juvenile treatment centers. The only residential one in Dade is **Here's Help**, and it's for boys only.
- Marijuana can be a very harmful drug if abused. Smoking pot in adolescence can lower IQ by 8 points. There is loss of energy, ambition, and increased hostility. Add the risk factors of being involved in the dependency system and the risk of stronger drug use and addiction is greatly increased.
- **Diluted urine:** the tests are designed to pick this up. A diluted specimen is considered a positive test. A creatinine level of under 20 is intentional dilution, and the outcome will be a positive drug test. For more info, you can go to the website for National Association of Drug Court Professionals or NADCI.
- If a case has a goal of reunification and it has not been in another courtroom for over 3 months and there is no severe, psychotic mental illness, the case is eligible for Drug Court.

- There is no drug test that can determine how much of a drug is in the system. Hair follicle testing will show if drugs were used during the 3-month period. It will not pick up alcohol or tell you how long ago the drugs were used.
- Xanax is not a drug a parent should be on! It is not for chronic use. It is for acute anxiety only (e.g., flying on an airplane) and is over prescribed. It is highly addictive and a person must be weaned off. If just stopped (with no weaning off), a person can seize and die. It is one of the most abused drugs. Anxiety should be treated with a non-psychoactive like Vistaril.
- **Relapse is a part of recovery!** The person should be honest and receptive to continuing treatment.