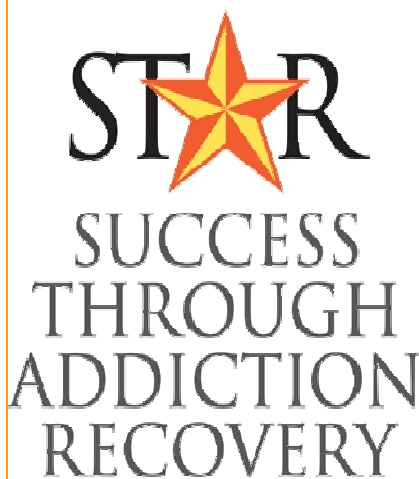


STELLAR SUCCESS

“When it is darkest, men see the stars.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

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An Important Piece of the Puzzle

The STAR Drug Court is different from regular criminal courts in a variety of ways, not the least being the role of attorneys in court proceedings. STAR would like to recognize Michelle Beck, Kyle Johnson, Deborah Keyser, and Cara Whitaker, the defense attorneys who cover our four STAR dockets.

A defense attorney is present at every staffing session and during each docket. Their role is not only to advocate for their client's best interests in regards to a program violation, but also to determine the most appropriate course of action to help that client get back on track and refocused on their recovery. STAR and its clients greatly appreciate the work of our defense attorneys who work hard to ensure the best possible outcomes for our clients.

Kyle Johnson has been practicing law for thirteen years. Before he entered the legal field, he worked as a probation officer who primarily supervised drug addicts. Johnson heard about STAR by word of mouth around the courthouse. “News gets around,” he explained, “Especially if it involves a program that seems treatment oriented [versus] just another episode of Law & Order.”

He chose to get involved in Drug Court in part because of his frustration with handling possession cases. Johnson stated that “the whole process seemed like little more than a...factory.”

This is not a new sentiment; of the roughly 50,400 felony cases filed in Harris County in 2007, about 12,400 involved the charge of possession of less than one gram of a controlled substance. As to his role in the courtroom,



Defense Attorney Kyle Johnson explains STAR's program rules to a new client.

Johnson clarified, “as a defense attorney, your biggest challenge is always to try to get the prosecutor and judge to see your client as a person and not just a number piling up their docket. In Drug Court, that's already built in.”

Drug Courts are unique in part due to their team collaboration. The docket judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, docket probation officer, Drug Court program managers, and various counselors and treatment providers make up a team of individuals who all want the best for program participants. The judge has the final decision, but all team members contribute valuable information regarding a client's progress and options.

The defense attorney's role begins with referring clients to STAR. Any attorney can make a referral, as can a judge, prosecutor, or other designated court staff member. If the Judge and DA approve of the client entering STAR and the client meets the eligibility criteria, one of the STAR defense attorneys represents that client throughout his or her duration in Drug Court.

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Special Announcement

Congratulations to all of our June graduates! We are incredibly proud of you and your accomplishments. We wish you good luck in your new lives—you have worked very hard for them.

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STAR

SUCCESS THROUGH ADDICTION RECOVERY

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The Quarter in Pictures



Judge Thomas speaks to the STAR clients about the significance of graduation and the importance of the program.

Shannon H. and her daughter, along with many other STAR clients and alumni, attended the second annual STAR Picnic at MacGregor Park on June 7, 2008.



Judge Cospers helps STAR alumni Bruno R. cool down after working up a sweat from grilling hot dogs all morning at the STAR picnic.

Mission Statement To build the community's confidence in the criminal justice system through a more effective judicial and public intervention based on changed perceptions of addiction. The Drug Court will seek to more efficiently utilize all available resources to save money and to save lives.

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Regarding the differences between her STAR clients and her regular clients, Michelle Beck explained that "I know much more about [STAR clients'] personal history, family history and their struggles than with other clients. I am more emotionally involved on a personal level as well. It hurts when I see someone relapse or fail the program."

Beck first heard about STAR from a prosecutor friend. A former Harris County prosecutor herself, Beck decided to volunteer with STAR in part for personal reasons: "I wanted to understand more about drug addiction. I have a family member who is an addict and I never could understand why she just could not stop using, especially for her kids."

Johnson enjoys watching how

STAR helps people restore their lives and families. "One of the things I like most about STAR Court is the idea that it reunites families," he said, reflecting on the first STAR Christmas party. "Having kids myself, I have always have been moved by the idea that STAR Court helps provides a more stable parent for their children."

STAR Announcements

STAR GOES CLEAN AND GREEN

The STAR Judges, along with several invited clients and alumni, will get down and dirty with Clean and Green on June 21st alongside other volunteers from Shell Oil Company, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Greater East End Management District, and the Port of Houston Authority. The clean up will take place at Buffalo Bayou near the Turning Basin and will involve removing litter and separating recyclable plastics. Clean and Green's goal is to change behaviors and attitudes regarding the environment, similar to recovery which is all about changing behaviors. This makes the collaboration even more exciting. If you are interested in attending this event and sharing the day with your judge, please contact your case manager. You must provide your own transportation to the Port of Houston, and be ready to work outside from 8 AM until noon.

The Quarter In Review

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

STAR III Judge Caprice Cosper was the guest speaker at the Rotary Club of Houston on May 15, 2008. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to promote and discuss our program with such a prestigious and respected group. The STAR Program thanks Vernus C. Swisher, 2007-2008 Rotary Club President, for making this event possible.

MINISTER'S LUNCHEON

On May 14, local clergy from the Houston community came to support the Drug Court Foundation and learn about the drug court process. We are very appreciative of all those organizations who attended as they will spread the word about drug courts and the success of our clients to their congregations.

SECOND ANNUAL STAR PICNIC

The STAR Program's Alumni were pleased to host this year's Family Day and Picnic at MacGregor Park. This event was held June 7th from 10:00 AM until 2:00 PM. STAR judges, staff, clients, family, and friends all attended. The Alumni provided food and drinks and the picnic had a great turnout. We hope you all had a wonderful time.

NATIONAL DRUG COURT CONFERENCE

Several members of the STAR team attended the National Association of Drug Court Professionals Training Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, May 28-31. The STAR Court judges and program managers were excited that our newest team members joined us as we honed our skills and learned best practices that enable us to better serve our clients. This year's conference was packed with celebrity special guests, stories of recovery, highlights from drug courts around the country and a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game!

EDUCATIONAL FORUM

STAR II Judge Brock Thomas and Mary Covington, the STAR Special Programs Manager, joined Harris County Drug Court Foundation's Executive Director George Pope on Sunday, March 9th at St. Philip Presbyterian Church for another educational forum. They addressed the Church and Society Class and premiered the new STAR video.

If you would like for STAR to come and talk to your organization, please contact George Pope at 713-533-4972.

In Memory of Our Dear Friends

Nathan Haynes

STAR clients and staff suffered a great loss last month with the death of Nathan Haynes. His passing serves as a reminder to all of us that we must be vigilant in our recovery to lead healthy and sober lives. He was a dear friend, mentor, brother, and son, and we will honor his memory by continuing to seek success through addiction recovery.

Do not stand beside my grave and cry,
I am not there, I did not die. . .
I am that gust of wind that blows
I am the shining star that always shows,
I am that angel standing over you all through the night. . .
I am that angel that makes you feel so right. . .
I am that butterfly that passes you by,
I am the flutter you get when you see me smile,
I am that beautiful day,
I am the month of May.
I am that song you love to hear,
I am that long you want to feel.
I'll be the first to see you again,
I'll be the burst of love, Amen.
So do not stand beside my grave and cry,
I am not there, I did not die.

—written with much love by Daniella Haynes

Bert Thompson

Getting ex-offenders back on track after being released from jail or prison is a difficult task to accomplish and would not be possible without dedicated and compassionate advocates like Bert Thompson. Mr. Thompson was involved within the recovery and restorative justice communities for many years and made personal efforts to help ex-offenders find jobs and become involved within the community. He and several other advocates were able to further his efforts when they created Restorative Justice Communities, an online directory that links ex-offenders with employers and resources in various communities. The organization also includes providers that teach job skills, substance abuse counseling, and values clarification. In addition, Mr. Thompson tirelessly supported the STAR Program because he believed that drug courts help people change their lives and become positive and productive members of the community.

Mr. Thompson passed away in April after battling fibrosis for several months. The recovery and restorative justice communities mourn the death of Bert Thompson but would like to recognize him for his many accomplishments over the years.