

Stellar Success

“Moonlight drowns out all but the brightest stars.” — J.R.R. Tolkien

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NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK



Above STAR welcomes Judge Maria T. Jackson as the new judge of the Wednesday docket.

Judge Jackson immediately volunteered and is happily committed to presiding over the Wednesday docket,” notes fellow STAR Court Judge Vanessa Velasquez. “She is a welcome addition to STAR Drug Court, serving as the first African American Judge to serve as a Drug Court Judge in Harris County, Texas. She is well liked, strong, genuine, compassionate, fair, and brings life experience and diversity to a very diverse STAR court population. Judge Jackson is also very involved in the community and will bring more attention to the positive results of our Star Court Clients and Graduates.”

In addition to a new judge, STAR is also excited to announce a familiar face as the new Drug Court Coordinator—



Pamela Thomas! Ms. Thomas has been with the Harris County Probation Department for 10 years, and specifically served as the CSO on the Tuesday STAR Court Docket for the past eight. We feel extremely fortunate to have Pam join us, as there will be a minimal learning curve regarding STAR programming, and, her positive, client-focused approach will be an immediate fit to the current structure.

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Special Announcement

Congratulations to all of our December and March graduates! We are incredibly proud of you and all of your accomplishments. Good luck in your new lives—you have worked hard for them!

Veteran Jurist and avid STAR Drug Court Supporter Judge Maria T. Jackson of the 339th Criminal District Court has volunteered to step into the STAR Court Family and preside over the Wednesday docket. She has been familiar with how STAR Court works and has referred many clients to our program. She is looking forward to learning more about the treatment aspect of the court as it works to support the rehabilitation of our clients.

“Judge Maria Jackson has had a strong desire to be a Drug Court Judge for many years. And recently with a Drug Court Judge position open,

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Mission Statement:

To build the community's confidence in the criminal justice system through 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.

Announcements

DOCKET REALIGNMENT

With the close of one year and the next on the horizon, it was the perfect time for the Star Drug Court to make any adjustments to its court structure. Previously, new clients were assigned on a random basis to each docket. The goal was to keep them with relatively the same number of clients from all walks of life and offenses.

Beginning in 2017, the dockets will be divided by gender: two male dockets and two female dockets. All current clients, regardless of their gender, will remain on their current dockets until they graduate, but any new clients added will be assigned as follows:

Monday Docket

Judge Cabaniss

Male Clients at Peden

Tuesday Docket

Judge Bradley

Female Clients

Wednesday Docket

Judge Jackson

Female WHO Clients

Thursday Docket

Judge Velasquez

Male Clients

SAVE THE DATE



The National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) will host the 23rd Annual Conference training in Washington D.C.

Mark your calendars now!

July 9-12, 2017

Gaylord National Convention Center

TRANSFORMING LIVES ACROSS THE POND

by Judge Denise Bradley

On December 6th, the Tuesday STAR Drug Court docket was happy to welcome Jenny Earle, Program Director of the Prison Reform Trust Program, join us for staffing and docket. She travelled all the way from the United Kingdom to see the STAR drug court in action, and to gather ideas for her program that focuses on reducing women's imprisonment. She chose STAR Drug Court because it is cited as "a model of criminal justice innovation" and a true "problem solving court," stated Ms. Earle.

Her visit was a reminder that drug addiction is a worldwide problem and certainly not confined to the United States. Her jail diversion program is called: **Transform-**

ing Lives: Reducing Women's Imprisonment. We discussed the impact that drug addiction has on families especially young children. We discussed the wonderful work that Santa Maria is doing with women and their children. She was eager to visit the facility and meet some of the women in the program.

Ms. Earle shared a program in the UK called PAUSE. She told us that PAUSE is a voluntary program and is predicated on working with women at a time when they do not have a child in their care or are pregnant. To participate, they are required to use Long Acting Reversible Contraceptive (LARC) if they decide to join.

The women in the program are able to have a period of time where they can focus on their needs and development, alongside others, without the risk of pregnancy during that time. They will gain better control of their lives, improving relationships with existing children and increase the chances of them being able to successfully care for future children, if that is what they want.

Our team discussed whether a program like PAUSE could work in this jurisdiction. As we move forward, it will be interesting to see if there is support for voluntary contraception as part of a treatment plan in the therapeutic court setting.

IT'S HARD TO SAY GOODBYE



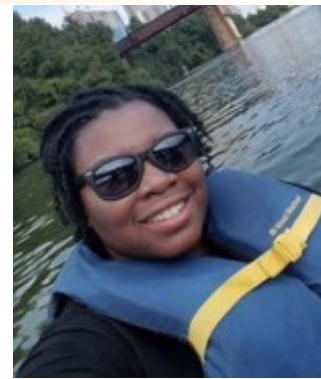
Due to the elections this past November, Drug Court lost Judge Stacey Bond who presided over the Wednesday docket. Judge Bond is a deeply caring person who managed her docket with optimism, faith and hope. She enforced the laws but went out of her way to work with each client to develop the best treatment option available.

There will be another absence on the Wednesday docket with the



departure of CSO Charletta Johnson. In a move that will allow Charletta to pursue her dream job, she will be working as a teacher, providing education to young people. She brought to the docket her feisty personality, her deep spiritual faith, her unwavering commitment to her clients and the ability to advocate like none other.

After five years of service as the STAR Drug Court Coordinator,



Tiffany Cadore accepted a position as the Program Director of a new Drug Court in Winchester, Virginia. She was very excited to be able to take some of the innovative systems and program operations that she helped to pioneer.

STAR wishes Judge Bond, Ms. Cadore and Ms. Johnson luck, love and endless happiness wherever their paths take them.

COUGARS IN RECOVERY



Acronyms: The World is Full of Them!

CIR. If you don't know what it stands for, YOU NEED TO!

Cougars in Recovery or CIR celebrated their third annual celebration breakfast on December 7, 2016 to recognize the organization's efforts over the past year, as well as to honor the undergraduate and graduate students between now and May 2017.

In addition to students, faculty, program administrators and family members that were in attendance, the criminal justice program was represented by Keith Liles, Program Manager & Clinical Director of STAR Drug Court and Laura McCarty, Veterans Court Program Coordinator.

CIR Founder Barbara Dwyer noted how the program has grown from a handful of disconnected sober youth in the beginning, to dozens of active members. Since its inception, CIR has helped over 80 students in varying stages of sobriety find a place to connect, find comfort and support, and commiserate. The CIR Lounge is the hub of activity on the U of H campus if you are looking for a quick game

of ping pong in between classes, a place to study, somewhere to set up your laptop and watch a movie or just be with other like-minded and spirited folks.

John Shiflett, CIR Program Director, shared his emotional sentiments around the myriad of activities that the group participated in this year. From coordinating sober tailgate parties for all football games, becoming visibly active in U of H community projects, or even going to Africa as a group to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro. Once a group of people with no identity and limited integration into campus activity, CIR now has a role and prominence in a variety of efforts aimed at the betterment of the population, and their support base grows each day.

STAR Drug Court has referred two clients to this program this year, and those members have reported that the support they have received around recovery and education was like nothing they could have imagined.

STAR Graduation

In December, five STAR Drug Court clients received early holiday gifts by graduating from the program. A standing-room-only crowd of family and friends, court dignitaries, STAR Court staff, employers, treatment providers and more, witnessed these five outstanding people don their caps and gowns, and receive their certification of completion of their treatment phase of the program. They were: **Emily A, Pamela, M, Jennifer R, Rima S, and Cecily M.**

The Judges and Probation Officers of the dockets represented by each client were present to speak on their behalf as to their accomplishments and their journey of recovery. The ever-popular Transformation Video certainly captured that journey with photographs of what life was like at the time of their arrest, and upon better days today.

Special guest speaker was Mr. Tommy Thompson, CEO of the Open Door Mission, which is one of STAR's preferred treatment providers. Mr. Thompson offered an inspiring pep talk and challenged each of us with the statement: "Show me your friends, and I will show you your future." That statement resonated around the room and while painful to some and joyous to others, it reinforced the notion that the people we associate with directly impacts our life and recovery.

Each graduate was able to share their thoughts and express their gratitude to the STAR Program and its staff for helping to give them the structure that they might not even know they needed or wanted.

STAR HOLIDAY EVENTS: ALUMNI HOLIDAY PARTY



'Tis the season to be jolly.....*and sober*, and over fifty alumni of the STAR Drug Court Program came together Wednesday, December 15 for an evening of holiday fellowship, food and festivity.

Each graduate brought a favorite food and nobody left with an empty stomach! Incoming Alumni President Jason G fried two turkeys which the feast was built around and guests shared holiday blessings and wishes for the New Year as they celebrated gratitude for their life in recovery.

In addition to the food, most alumni brought a present for a young girl or boy that were collected and later donated to Houston's Toys for Tots campaign. Members were overheard sharing how happy they were this year to be free of alcohol or drugs, and to be able to spend the holidays with their families and watch their own children unwrap the gifts they purchased for them. In years past, they sadly spent the holidays behind bars or so deeply under the influence of mind altering chemicals that they were not wanted by their families.

James P. blessed the food with a heartfelt, inspirational story of what life can truly be like when you are happy, joyous and free. It was the perfect way to kick off the night.

Guests were also given a slip of paper and asked to write an inspirational message about the key ingredients of sobriety for the new year, and those notes will be distributed after the first of the year to all of the Phase One clients who are the newcomers to the program.

Indeed, what a joy to see so much success, happiness and hope in one room. The STAR Alumni are a very special group that support each other without question, push one another up when they are down and come together to celebrate each and every recovery victory. And then they pass the message on to the next person...

That is how sobriety works!

The STAR Drug Court Staff was proud this year to collect items for the mothers and babies at Santa Maria Hostel. An SUV was packed full of baby diapers, wipes, socks and other much needed baby items, and Mary Covington and Keith Liles made the delivery several days before Christmas so that many of the residents could take advantage of the supplies. "Just the smiles on the faces of the ladies immediately showed their enormous gratitude. To be remembered at this time of the year when so often they feel shunned from society, with limited support offered, and then places like Santa Maria and STAR Drug Court come along and remind everyone that the real gifts of the holidays are connections of the heart," reflects Liles.

