



# *Your Success Is Our Reward . . . . .*

## **ADDICTION AS A BRAIN DISEASE**

Many think that punishment will cure an addict, and that addiction is simply a matter of choice. Many don't fully understand addiction or its effects. The medical profession now recognizes addiction as a disease, and has focused research on how to change the brain's state of addiction. Simply focusing on punishment and moral failure will not help an addict to abstain, and moving from user to addict causes drastic changes in brain function.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, drug addiction is defined as a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences. Addiction is considered a disease because it disrupts the normal, healthy functioning of the underlying organ and it is preventable and treatable. Although addiction is not a totally voluntary state, it does not mean the addict is helpless. Yet it does explain why an addict many times cannot simply stop by sheer force or will. There is no motivator more powerful than the craving which is the result of biological brain change produced by prolonged drug use.

Some of the brain changes associated with illegal drug use is the unprecedented release then destruction, of dopamine and dopamine receptors. Initially, the release of dopamine causes feelings of euphoria. The release is 2 to 10 times greater than natural dopamine release or rewards. Once addicted, an individual doesn't take drugs to get that feeling of euphoria. Because of the continued drug use and dopamine receptor destruction, the addict is no longer able to obtain natural feelings of pleasure. Drugs are then used in an effort to self-medicate, reduce depression, or reduce physical withdrawal symptoms. Some abusers are known to suffer from depression for 1-2 years after withdrawal. Another affected neurotransmitter is glutamate which controls cognition. Long term drug use affects habit, or non-conscious memory systems, which leads to cravings and compulsion through memory cues even after many years of abstinence.

Not everyone becomes addicted equally. Factors such as genetics (40-60%), environment, early use, and method of administration come into play. Few individuals are able to simply stop using drugs without intervention. Most need treatment, and many need multiple treatment episodes. It is the goal of treatment that each treatment episode will increase the intervals between relapse, and not total abstinence after a single treatment episode. There is no definitive prescribed amount which determines success. As with other diseases, the right fit or type of medication is a trial and error process. The rate of relapse for drug addiction is similar to other chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. According to the Journal of American Medicine, relapse rates for all of the above illnesses, including addiction, range between 40 and 60 percent. Research shows that addiction is a health issue which needs to be treated as such. Rather than the primary focus be on punishment, more of an emphasis should be on prevention and treatment.

### **MISSION**

*Assisting drug-addicted offenders/parents to achieve positive lifestyle change by providing efficient delivery of treatment services through a collaborative community effort of Therapeutic Justice.*

## Is the Genesee County Drug Court Program Successful?

A) The Genesee County Drug Court celebrated 26 graduates during fiscal year 2007. Let's review the cost savings involved considering the following:

- average annual cost of Genesee County jail (per inmate) is \$25,000
- average annual cost of Michigan prisons (per prisoner) are approximately \$30,000
- average annual foster care placement (per child) is \$6,000

**The Genesee County Drug Court results in a cost savings of approximately  
\$560,000.00!!**

B) Program retention rate is: 61 % (based upon 12 month average)

- According to the U.S. Department of Justice, to impact post program recidivism rates, target retention rate is 60%

C) A total of 4,084 drug screens were required during the 2007 fiscal year.

- Aggregate results are 72% Negative and 27% Positive with the following breakdown:
  - a) 72.04% Negative for all substances
  - b) 18.16% Positive for illegal substances
  - c) 8.6% Failure to Appear
  - d) 1.2% Excused for valid, documented reasons

D) Recidivism is as follows: (defined as new felony or new assaultive misdemeanor conviction)

- Average recidivism over 6 years is 15% for overall program operations.
- Average recidivism over 6 years is less than 1% for program graduates.



The Genesee County Drug Court  
would like to express its sincere gratitude to the

M.O.S.T.  
(Maintaining & Organizing Sobriety Together) Group of UAW  
Local 598 in Flint for their monetary donation to our Program.

Your organization works diligently to help our community see the  
value of recovery, and community collaboration leads to success.

On behalf of the entire drug court team, we collectively thank you and  
welcome your partnership!

## What do they say about Drug Court?

“Allow me to start by thanking you for, not only saving my life, but having mercy on me. If you recall, the sentence I received from you was Community Programs, Inc., drug court and probation. Since completing all three I believe I have been reborn a new man. My problem solving tactics and decision making has improved enormously. . . . . I have been able to remain drug-free for three years, and still counting gratefully. . . . . I’ve been fortunate to re-establish relationships, and pass on to my son’s those family values I had failed to follow as a result of drugs and alcohol. . . . . I have successfully passed my Michigan Certification Board for Addiction Professionals. I have completed certification for Emergency First Response. Furthermore, upon completion of drug court in 2006 I have re-enrolled into college and am due to graduate this year . . . . .”

Submitted by a drug court graduate

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“My life before heroin was what you can say was on track. I just graduated from high school with honors. I had a full ride scholarship to U of M-Flint. . . . . The summer before my freshmen year things started to spiral out of control. My life of drugs started at the age of 18. At the age of 24 today I’ve experienced more than I ever imagined. I’ve had numerous jobs, some that might have been worth having in the end. Experimented with everything and anything possible. Started a great education to losing a full ride scholarship, and having an account balance at the local community college. I’ve lost respect from long time friends and respect for myself. My drug of choice is heroin. I originally started with basically any type of opiate from vicodin to oxycontin. . . . . My life of narcotics consisted for a period of six years. Through the six years I’ve managed to hurt those that gave everything and anything I needed to me. I’ve disrespected loved ones to the point they no longer trusted me in their homes or just plain out being around them. . . . . In my pre-active addiction I managed to catch a case for drugs, get sentenced to probation and stop reporting all within two months. Then I managed to get pregnant. . . . . My boyfriend of three years called my parents. He told them the situation and they all helped me get to the methadone clinic . . . . . and with the grace of god my beautiful child was born just fine.

Months after his birth, with the pressure and stress of a new born baby and his father, my rock, was gone for two years locked up, my disease took over again. This time was ten times stronger. A year and a half later in what I consider my active addiction I became pregnant again. . . . . My second child was born opiate positive. My child had a horribly rough time with withdrawals. She had to be hospitalized for two months after her birth. . . . . My kids were removed from my care and I got put in jail for my violation. . . . . My kids, my everything was gone. By the grace of god I was put in drug court. After a bumpy road of going to rehab and a few days here and there of jail I still was struggling. . . . . Since January 30, 2008 which is about three weeks and one day today I can truly say I am heading down the right road and I’m on the right page. . . . . Now I’m fighting to get my kids back and fighting to stay on the right road in drug court.

My life as an addict consisted of one thing, getting high on heroin or hustling up more money to buy one more pack. . . . . Now I can say my life revolves around getting my kids back, using and finding ways to stay sober and clean.”

Submitted by a drug court participant

## A NEW BEGINNING, A NEW LIFE!

Researchers at the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions (RIA) and Old Dominion University (ODU) in Norfolk, Va., have found that when fathers recover from substance abuse, children exhibit significant improvements in psychosocial functioning. It is rare to find a father that will go the distance Douglas Tickle has gone to change his life. His hard work has not only changed his life, but the security, health, and lives of his sons. Flint Odyssey House, Inc is proud of the outstanding accomplishments of Mr. Tickle. He is the first father to graduate the Genesee County Drug Court Program, as well as Flint Odyssey House. In addition, he has maintained his sobriety while receiving full custody of his children.

Mr. Tickle began his fight for life in June of 2006 when he was admitted into Flint Odyssey House for addiction issues. He entered Flint Odyssey House with several legal problems, including warrants for his arrest and custody concerns with his sons.



Mr. Tickle became a participant of Drug Court in September of 2006. In the beginning, Mr. Tickle was conflicted with participation in both programs. However, as time passed and he began to work on changing his life, true transformation began to occur.

He began to understand that he needed the complete help of both programs to turn his life around. Mr. Tickle buckled down and did the required work for reunification with his sons while remaining sober.

Today, Mr. Tickle is thankful to both Flint Odyssey House, Inc. and the Genesee County Drug Court programs for helping him get his life back on track. Throughout his work in Drug Court he developed a great deal of respect for the staff including

Mrs. Ford, who was very firm and honest; Demona, who maintained a positive and supportive role; and the Honorable Judge Beagle. Mr. Tickle stated "he didn't judge you for your past mistakes, but on your current actions". Finally, Mr. Tickle stated "I am very grateful to have met all of the people in Drug Court and Flint Odyssey House. They are my role models

## SUCCESS BY CHOICE!

Because of the tireless efforts of the Genesee County Drug Court staff, my students met an incredible man today: one who is tough enough to tell it like it is, but sensitive enough to share his vulnerabilities. He spoke from his heart to 75 alternative education high school students in Montrose.

Like the city of Flint, Montrose is feeling the devastation of drug use by our youth. When he polled the audience as to how many had used marijuana, about 80% raised their hands. He followed up with a poignant message, "If you smoke marijuana, you will become addicted to drugs." He paused and then continued, "I didn't say **might** become addicted to drugs; I said you **WILL** become addicted to drugs!" One could have heard a pin drop in that auditorium.

To the students who live in a world of drugs, health lessons on substance abuse are not real, DARE officers are not real, *This is Your Brain on Drugs* and *Just Say No* campaigns are not real...He is real!

Thank you for giving him the gift of a second chance. This gesture has given my students the gift of a reality check. Maybe one more child will put out his joint, dump pills down the toilet, or walk away from a crowd going nowhere.

I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to be a guest in Judge Yuille's drug court this summer. I learned a lot that day. I learned about the pooling of resources and expertise, the struggles of addiction, about pride and recognition, and that even when one slips backwards there is encouragement. Most of all, I learned about myself. I didn't grow up in an environment that cultivated drug addiction. In fact, most of my life, I hadn't even thought about the effects of drugs on people. I think about it now – most of the time.

I look forward to learning more about the ins and outs of drug court. I have this burning passion to be a part of a campaign that convinces others that we don't have bad people in our midst we just have bad drugs. There is hope because there is help.

*Submitted by*

*Terry M. Bigelow*

*Montrose Choice School Principal*

14<sup>th</sup> Annual NADCP (National Association of Drug Court Professionals) Conference will be held May 28-31, 2008 in St. Louis, MO. Call for details!