

Hello my name is Helena I am 31 years old and a single mother of 3 beautiful children. Today we are here to discuss what has and hasn't work in Drug Court since I have attended but, in order to do that I am going to give you a brief background on how I got to this point in my life.

March 29, 1985 I was born into a family with 2 older brothers, Don age 2 and Mikel age 1. My father, Curtis was an alcoholic and couldn't hold a job but, he was a mechanic tending to car repairs on the side. He was very cruel verbally and physically abusive when he was around. My mother, Donna raised us in a Christian church and was very kind, loving and never gave up hope. We grew up in a small town in Jeannette Pennsylvania and we lived on public assistance for most of my childhood.

Growing up was difficult, I was the youngest, the only daughter and my brothers were the "good kids" and I was labeled the "bad kid".

School was never a fun time for me because kids were very cruel, always making fun of everything that was different from me to them.

When I grew up I wanted to be either a teacher or a nurse. I wanted to make others feel better and feel safe because that's how they made me feel. I was tormented by my fellow classmates, neighbor kids and my brothers.

At age 10 and a half I had my first drink at a family wedding.

Age 11 I tried marijuana for the first time with my older cousin.

Age 14 we moved from Jeannette to Greensburg. Half of 8th grade I switched schools not to my surprise kids were still cruel. It was like starting all over again with bullying and being rejected. My grades dropped dramatically when switching schools.

Age 15, 9th grade, 3 Middle schools merge to the High school and again I'm starting all over. At this point I shut down from the world. I remember fighting in school because I had enough. I was charged for fighting at the local magistrate, Mark Mansours. This was the first run in with the law.

I failed 9th grade, the only class I passed was English.

Summer of 2000 I was diagnosed ADD and learning disabled after a series of test. So they bumped me back into 10th grade, gave me an IEP and put me in learning support classes. Now my brothers made fun of me again for being in special classes.

By age 16, 10th grade, I was being suspended for underage drinking in school. I was losing my license before I even got them.

11th grade, I started skipping school to go drink and hang out with my friend and our boyfriends while I was supposed to be at vo-tech. It wasn't long before I "ran away".

When I turned myself in I was sent to the YMCA youth shelter for a while then was released to go back home with my parents.

12th grade right before my 18th birthday my dad kicked me out. I had 2 and a half months left before graduation. I moved in with my boyfriend and his mother. I tried to finish school by getting rides back and forth, which worked for a few weeks or so until I was kicked out again.

I then became homeless, a drop out, sleeping in yards, cars and sheds with gas fumes.

7 and a half months later I found out I was pregnant.

Rich and I then moved into our own place in Apollo. Shortly after, domestic violence became very real to me. I called to cops and had him arrested and charged. Then I moved back in with my mom and dad so the baby and I would be safe.

I got my own place shortly after so I could raise my child on my own.

At 19 yrs. old I gave birth to Hailey. 4 months later I met another man. I thought I was in love but I soon realized he was an alcoholic like my father was. It was too late!

Age 20, Hailey was 9 months old, I was pregnant again. I felt stuck. Again, domestic violence became very real. This time I didn't want to leave 2 kids fatherless, so I tried to cope.

December 5, 2005 my son Deven was born.

2006 I was introduced to crack cocaine and heroin from my partner and quickly became an addict. I stole, lied and cheated to support our habit.

Retail thefts started to stack up against me.

Domestic violence, drug use along with alcohol abuse continued.

October of 2008 I found out I was pregnant with baby number 3. At this time I was abusing opiates throughout my entire pregnancy on and off. I was asked to have an abortion, my answer was no.

August of 2008 CYS became involved due to Domestic Violence. My partner and I split when I was 4 and a half months pregnant.

July 14, 2008 I gave birth to my daughter Savana, when she was 7wks and 2 days old CYS took custody of all 3 children. I was kicked out of my mom's house because my dad came back after a PFA order was over. It wasn't safe for anyone there.

My son went home with dad and stepmom after 6 months of CYS custody, he was 3yrs old.

I fought for my daughters for a year and 10 months, enduring and overcoming many obstacles. I had supervised visits, a Drug n alcohol eval, mental health eval, anger management classes, parenting classes and I also went to rehab and a halfway house. I had so much trouble staying clean I was trying everything to get my girls home.

July 17, 2010 I won my daughters back! I had stayed clean long enough to prove through my actions that I was best for them.

CYS closed my case in 2011.

I was at a methadone clinic to continue staying clean from illegal substances and completed the program in 2012.

I started to utilize marijuana to help cope with the withdrawal symptoms from methadone, leg cramps, hot and cold sweats and constant back aches. I figured marijuana isn't that bad. It's better than heroin or crack.

I hadn't had any other trouble with the law until recently. March 25th, 2016 the car I was a passenger in was pulled over for a headlight that was out and I had 59 morphine pills in my possession along with 22 grams of marijuana and other paraphernalia. Accumulated 84 drug charges. I begged and pleaded with the officer to let me go home to my children because I was honest. But he kept saying I can't you are going to jail. I was devastated.

I kept asking myself how I got to this point, what did I do. My kids have no one else, no other parent.

I spent a week in jail and then I was released because my boyfriend hired a lawyer. I was sick for a month or more trying to piece back together my life. Everything was falling apart worse than before.

I knew nothing of drug court until an acquaintance of mine, Jen, told me that she went over my head and talked to her boss Tim Phillips who was a member of the Drug Court team when she heard of my arrest. She had said "I hope you don't mind". She asked him if I would be eligible to participate in this program. Our sons are best friends and her son was spending the night when I was arrested. I had went to apologize to her for the situation. She expressed to me how she doesn't judge and that there was no apology necessary.

In May 2016 Tim Phillips gave her the okay to allow me to use him as the referral source for drug court. I filled out the paperwork myself and met with Eric Leydig immediately. He explained the process of the drug court and the color or the day used for random drug screens. He said there is a window from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. to get to the probation office to submit a drug screen when your color is called, is that going to be a problem since I didn't have a car or a license. I said to him "I don't make excuses, I make it happen". He smiled and said I like her to Mary Jo, my pretrial probation officer. She said, I only bring you good ones. I was then excepted into the drug court program 5/26/2016.

Drug Court is saving my life and my kid's life. Due to all I have endured through life there are many helpful aspects that drug court has to offer that truly work. The team is set up of 11 team members who are like the loving, caring and supportive family that one needs to make it through such a tough life experience. First the judges who are more compassionate than I could have imagined. They see through the hard times and excuses that sometimes follow and try to show leniency when necessary but will also show disciplinary actions when needed. There must be consequences for our wrong doings to show us right from wrong. Then you have Margeret who has a heart of gold and always tries to help us through our shortcomings. She is our case manager and works for SPHS. She is the one who initially gives us our drug and alcohol evaluation to see what type of treatment plan will best suite our needs to help restore us to sanity. She suggested

that I do 3 days of intensive outpatient therapy. I chose to attend Gateway rehab facility but, others have the choice to attend SPHS if they like.

Gateway truly helped me in my recovery. Gateway staff works to counsel everyone together as a unit which is very smart. The more people to see inside the box and outside the better help we get. Some see what others may not.

Next there are the 2 wonderful Certified Recovery Specialist that work for SPHS, Kat and Kendra. These women have been on the dark side of addiction and know exactly what it feels like to be in our shoes. They also know exactly what it takes to get out of our own shoes and step into better ones. The kind that brings us into true recovery if we are willing. You can tell them anything and they are like our angels watching over us. They guide us to resources that can help our situations for the better.

Let's talk about the probation officers for a moment, Keri and Bill, I never met a better pair of probation officers that work so well together and don't try to wreck our lives at every turn. Usually your honesty and progress depends on the outcome of what they have to say to help us. If you don't go for a urine test on time the day your color is called, well frankly that is your own fault, not Keri or Bills. If you're honest with them they will work with you when you are showing you deserve it and that your sobriety comes first.

The rest of the team is more behind the scenes but all serve to their purpose effectively and efficiently. Tim Phillips is the man who made this all possible for me and works through Westmoreland community Action which is another resource available to those in need. The District Attorney is there to handout a lesser punishment to the participants in hopes that they will take this journey and better their lives. The public defender is there to ensure that each candidate has fair legal representation to fulfill a reasonable outcome through the completion of drug court.

The requirements to participating in drug court are the tools necessary to fixing the addiction problem. Gaining a sponsor and a home group is key, this makes us accountable for our actions and gives us the extra support we need to live another day clean and sober. Attending support groups each week and providing proof of this is another sure way to show we are working the program. Randomized drug screens is a great way to ensure we think twice about taking that first drug, because who wants to live in fear over a dirty drug screen? Not me that's for sure.

A lot of the participants that come in and out of drug court have one thing in common which is we are addicted to one thing or another. Each step we take has to be monitored per say to help us learn how to relive, to teach us skills we weren't taught to show us we are worth it. Life is what we make it. I truly feel that this process of at least 18 months of extensive treatment through drug court is exactly what will save life's and rebuild each one to become the people, parents, children and aunts and uncles and nieces and nephews we were always meant to be.

Drug court has given me the support I need and confidence that this is all possible with some hard work and support. It has given me my freedom back. It has given 3 children their mother back and better than she was before. It has given me hope for the future, confidence, love and

compassion for others. This program has given me reason to care about life and show me how important my life is. Without this program I would be in jail where it is difficult to see the good in anything. I know my life would matter even less if I wasn't able to live each day as a mother. To prove I can live a better life without drugs and alcohol because it is possible.

Through this process I realized how I am powerless over all drugs and alcohol no matter how they can be justified in my addict mind. I have been sober for 110 days. I just got a new job. I enjoy my days rather than drowned them out.

I now have hope and a better future for me and my children and for that this program needs to continue, it will save lives and transform lives for the better. It is a second chance which we as addicts are not used to having. Everyone deserves a chance to join this program because it is a life changing experience.

