

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## Drug addicts get a clean slate and second chance

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Anthony Barnes is a drug addict. He has been one for years, so there's no use hiding it, he says.

In fact, the 57-year-old Richmond man comes from a family of addicts: His sister was hooked on crack and his niece on heroin.

But Barnes, whose drugs of choice are heroin and cocaine, says he is no longer going to allow addiction to be the guiding force in his life.

"There was some things that really hindered me, and I'm glad that's behind me," Barnes said Friday. "My life has just begun. Just begun."

Barnes was one of 13 people to graduate Friday afternoon from the Richmond Adult Drug Treatment Court, a program that gives drug addicts facing felonies a chance to get clean and turn their lives around.

For Bobby Ingram, getting clean means getting another shot at a normal life.

"I can pay my rent now," said Ingram, whose drug of choice was crack cocaine. "I can keep a roof over my head and stay off the streets."

The 13 addicts who graduated from the program range from a young college girl hooked on heroin who should have graduated college last month to a grizzled man addicted to crack who has spent years living on the streets.

The graduates and program officials did not discuss individual crimes, but to qualify for the program they needed to be nonviolent, drug-addicted offenders facing felony charges in Richmond's Circuit Court.

There are 29 drug courts in the state.



The intensive outpatient program includes drug treatment, probation supervision, judicial monitoring and community service.

The program usually lasts 18 months and it not only helps the addicts get clean, but works with them to find work, get mental health help and go through needed counseling.

Gloria Jones, the drug court's coordinator, said the program is geared toward helping assure a successful recovery after completion.

"We utilize a holistic approach and make sure everyone gets the individualized help they need," she said, adding that the program participants have a host of government and nonprofit resources available.

To complete the program, participants must have steady work, avoid drugs and alcohol and stay out of legal trouble, Jones said.

The participants, who volunteer and have to be approved by a commonwealth's attorney, also have to attend counseling with substance abuse professionals and attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

They also routinely undergo drug testing and receive six months of continuing support.

There are 75 to 80 people in Richmond's program at any one time with 20 to 30 joining each year, Jones said.

Richmond General District Court Judge Tracy Thorne-Begland, who gave the keynote address at the graduation ceremony, said he was initially skeptical of the program when he was a prosecutor but eventually embraced it.

Thorne-Begland said he was comfortable with the old way of dealing with drug cases where formulas dictated people's punishment.

But the longer he worked as a prosecutor and the more cases he saw, he began to question "if, in some cases, with the right people in the right circumstances, there might be a different way."

"I want to thank you, the graduates here today, because I owe you a debt of gratitude. You and those who came before you ... for showing me a better way," Thorne-Begland said.

"For showing me that you can change, that you can become productive members of society. That you contribute to your communities, to your families' lives, to your friends' lives, to make a real difference. And that's taught me to be a better lawyer and it's taught me to be a better judge."

For those who graduated Friday – and their families – the opportunity to start over after years of battling addiction is welcome but only a first step.

“Now the hard work starts,” said Barnes who, like most in attendance, knows recovery is a lifelong struggle.

His sister, Cheryl, and niece, Quenetta, believe that not only does Barnes’ recovery help heal him and their relationship, but that it is part of a process that will have a much larger impact on his family.

“We’ve been praying to not break but destroy this yoke that’s been placed upon our family so it won’t be passed down to the next generation,” said Cheryl Barnes, who has been in recovery for 13 years.

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