

Butler County Drug Court Changes Lives



Caption: Judge Keith Spaeth addresses the 42nd graduating class from the Butler County Drug Court.

On January 22, 2020, Judge Keith Spaeth's Butler County Drug Court held its 42nd semi-annual graduation at the Butler County Courthouse in Hamilton, Ohio. Ten individuals, each convicted of felony drug charges, were given a choice: go to jail for their offense or take part in Judge Spaeth's model program of recovery and work. They chose Judge Spaeth's program.

The goal of the Butler County Drug Court Program is to improve participants' lives by requiring them to obtain stable employment, stable housing, and pro-social relations while living a sober lifestyle.

In 2015, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) became involved with Butler County Drug Court through a contract with the Butler County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Services Board. The board found that an OOD Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor could help people receive services more quickly, land jobs, and lower costs.

"This program is successful for participants because it brings together treatment, probation, and employment. Having everyone working together for a common goal (recovery of the individual) is what makes the difference," said Erin Crawford, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for Butler County OOD Jobs for Recovery.

To be eligible for participation, the Butler County resident must be charged with a drug-related felony through the Butler County Court of Common Pleas, where court-monitored treatment

and services would enhance their ability to become productive and law-abiding citizens. There are four phases to reach graduation. Phase one consists of receiving intensive inpatient treatment or partial hospitalization treatment based on needs. In phase two, the individual must reestablish relationships and engage in sober support networks. Phase three is where participants begin to put what they have learned into practice and find employment. In phase four, participants focus on maintaining self-sufficiency.

“A large part of the program is accountability,” said Jerica Kruse, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor for Butler County OOD Jobs for Recovery. “The judge requires every participant to keep a calendar of appointments. At any given meeting, the judge may ask them about appointments and check calendars. Throughout the process they must maintain a job. That is where OOD comes in. We can help them find a job, help with skills they need to get a job, and help them keep the job.”

“Success has many fathers and mothers, and failure is an orphan,” said Judge Spaeth. “We are all here today to be fathers and mothers and share in that pride and success. Drug court works because it is the coming together of these departments, courts and people, so all of us can have a whole life. That is what we are celebrating today, 10 people, right here, who can have a whole and happy life.”



Caption: Andrew, a graduate of the 42nd Butler County Drug Court.

“I was relieved to come to this program. Instead of a two-year prison sentence, it gave me a place to get the help I needed while providing me with structure and forced accountability,” said Andrew. “OOD has been a very positive part of this program helping me with finding a job. I am grateful to have this resource.”

Judge Spaeth’s model program of recovery and work has been replicated through OOD Jobs for Recovery, an investment by Ohio Governor Mike DeWine’s budget. OOD is partnering with six additional counties with specialty courts this fiscal year: Ashtabula, Franklin, Lucas, Miami,

Scioto, and Summit. Approximately 100 individuals will be served annually in each county. For more information about OOD Jobs for Recovery, visit <https://ood.ohio.gov/JobsforRecovery>.