

Justice Initiatives, Inc., the non-profit established earlier this year in support of the Mecklenburg County Court System, hosted its first fundraising event the evening of Thursday, September 22 at the home of Dee-Dee and Cameron Harris. Monies raised will be specifically earmarked for treatment and other services needed by clients enrolled in the ground breaking and award-winning Mecklenburg County Drug Treatment Court.

Justice Initiatives, Inc. believes this community's only responsible choice is to provide our court system with the supplemental funding needed for innovative and non-traditional programs that exceed the core functions and basic necessities covered by the State. This small fundraising event allowed an opportunity for those in attendance to listen to testimonials from those invited to speak on why they support Drug Treatment Court. Speakers varied from judges, district attorneys, public defenders who see first hand how the program makes a difference in rehabilitating substance abusers who come before the court, as well as from individuals who have faced the devastating destruction that substance abuse has brought to the lives of their friends and family members. The event created a heightened awareness around current funding shortfalls that this valuable program is experiencing.

The Drug Treatment Court (DTC) Program has been operating as an innovative and non-traditional court sponsored program aimed at stopping the cycle of alcohol and other drug abuse related to criminal activity since 1995. The program offers substance addicted offenders charged with non-violent offenses an alternative to incarceration. Program participants are held accountable for their behavior in a rehabilitative environment that provides a holistic approach to substance abuse while ensuring the safety of the citizens of Mecklenburg County. Funding for DTC has come from a mix of State, County and grant sources. After several years of support, though, the grant funding has expired and institutional funding has not yet risen to a level that offsets what has been lost. Attendees were educated about Justice Initiatives and its role of providing seed money and short term funding to bridge the gap when government funding is not available.

DTC Facts - Recidivism

- 84% of criminal offenders in the justice system are drug and/or alcohol involved. Most are addicted.
- 75% of repeat offenses by addicts are prevented by participation on Drug Treatment Court
- Over 75% of abuse and neglect cases have parental drug and/or alcohol abuse as a major cause.
- An independent evaluation of NC DTCs shows that DTC graduates are rearrested at half the rate of non-graduates. 18% of DTC graduates were rearrested in the 12 months after discharge compared to 44% of the comparison group. In Mecklenburg County, the recidivism rate was even lower at 11%.

DTC Facts – Cost Effectiveness

- It costs between \$2,500 and \$4,000 annually to provide community treatment and supervision for each offender through the DTC program. Incarceration of drug-using offenders costs between \$23,000 and \$50,000 per person, per year.
- A series of national studies have also shown that for every dollar invested in these programs, savings between \$3.00 and \$7.00 have been realized.
- More importantly, though, are the human and societal benefits. In 2004, the FIRST (Family DTC) Program had a total of seven babies born clean and sober to participating mothers. That equates to \$750,000 – \$1.4M saved for every baby born to a clean mother.

Recent Mecklenburg DTC Program Accomplishments:

- The DWI Treatment Court was selected as a model court by the National Drug Court Institute and has hosted thirteen teams from around the country over the past two years.
- The DWI Treatment Court hosted members of the National Highway Safety and Traffic Administration as they sought information to include in their nationwide campaign to utilize this court model as an effective solution for the rise in DWI arrests.
- In December 2002, the DWI Treatment Court was awarded the *Adjudication Award* by the National Commission Against Drunk Driving and MADD.
- The FIRST Program received the 2003 *Pioneer Award* from the Chemical Dependency Center and was recognized as a program of excellence by the NC Council of Community MH/DD/SA Programs.
- The National Drug Court Institute recognized the FIRST Program as a model court and has hosted eighteen teams from around the country over the past three years.
- The FIRST Program received recognition by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts as an “*Exemplary Family Court Program.*”

DRUG COURT CLIENT STATEMENTS:

- “*Drug Court did for me what I couldn’t do for myself.*”
- “*If I didn’t get into this program, I would have done my time and tried to start all over again and probably end back up where I was.*”