



International Association of Drug Treatment Courts

This is the story of Marc, 25 years old and an ex-addict. Only a month ago he became father of a son and he has a 4 year old daughter out of a former relationship. He is very happy in his new relation and this since the last two years. At this moment he is full-time working and paying taxes again.

My drug court experience starts on the moment that I, being very drunk, ripped off in a violent way the shopping bags of an old man walking on the street. No reason for that, just a consequence of all morning drinking in a bar with my father. I feel a lot of shame for this, this is not who I am... The police arrested me and I went to prison. There I searched for help with the social workers (*central orientation point*) for drug treatment. They gave me the advice to go to a crisis centre, because drinking was not my only problem. I also used heroine, cocaine and medication.

On the 4th of September 2008 I first appeared before the Drug Treatment Court in Ghent. I took this opportunity to ask to be set free and to do something about my addiction problem. Not that much for myself but especially for my mother, little daughter and the court. So that's how I went to the crisis center of "the Sleutel". This treatment would not last long. After 5 days I disappeared, I wanted to use some drugs, the craving was too strong and so I left... But after a few days I wanted to go back because I was not doing well and I had to go to the court again. The judge was clear, either I took the chance to let me help or otherwise it was a one way ticket to jail. I stayed with my brother until the moment I could go back to the crisis centre. This time I stayed there for 2 months and got the advice to go to a therapeutic community. A program for 18 months!? No way! I took my bags, again...

This time I stayed with my mother and tried to stay clean with the help of antabuse, (medication that helped me not to drink). In the meantime I had to go 2 times in a month to the court. The judge reminded me to stick with the plan of going to a therapeutic community and gave me the many chances I needed. Two weeks later I went to the crisis center to gather my third chance. After a month they changed my advice to a therapeutic community for double diagnosis. I went there for a day to experience how it works, but I still was not very motivated because of the length of the program. Until that day the day my father died because of drinking. For me that was my ultimate wake up call. He gave his life to let me make something of mine...

So on the 5th of march 2009 I started within the therapeutic community for double diagnosis, being happy for the many chances I got from the drug court. Otherwise I would have gone back to jail and started all over again when I ended my sentence. The program of 18th months passed by very quickly and I was able to organize a lot of things such as: a juridical organization to visit my daughter, a plan to pay my debts, some administration stuff and also very important some good behavior and attitudes to reintegrate within society.

The sentence/reward I got from court: one year jail but with a delay for 5 years and the order to continue my program within the measure of probation.

My drug court story ends in October 2009. More than one year later, but I am very thankful for the opportunity to make something of my live. I am happy now and very proud on who I am. It was not an easy life a had but when you find the correct motivation in combination with some external pressure and support, you can start all over again. That's an experience I would like to share with others...