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Drug Court System Helps Youth

By Ra-Jah S. Kelly
 WI Staff Writer
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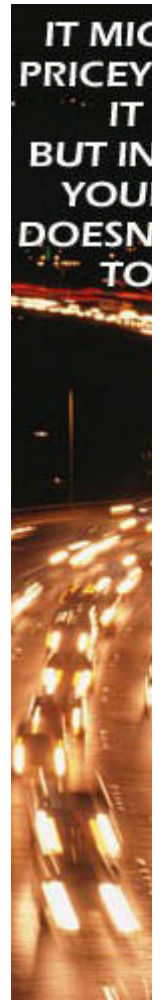
One year ago things looked grim for 18-year-old Terrence Stanley. While smoking marijuana on the playground, he was arrested and charged with possession - a charge that carries a possible penalty of six months in jail.

It was his first offense, so instead of dealing with the traditional D.C. Superior Court system, Stanley was selected for participation in a newly revitalized Juvenile Drug Court program, an eight-month substance abuse treatment program aimed at promoting



Photos By Victor Holt
 Judge Laura A. Cordero (l), Juvenile Court, listens to the proceeding of the Youth Power Graduation Ceremony.

abstinence and healthy living choices for juveniles and their families. Juvenile Drug Court is a comprehensive



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program that includes monitoring and frequent drug testing, individual and family counseling, and community service requirements. Parts of the program, particularly the twice-weekly drug tests, may have been demanding for some, but for Stanley there was no difficulty. "You just gotta do what you gotta do.

If you know what you want, you can get it," he said in an interview after the graduation. "You can make the program easy or you can make it hard."

A judge helped make the program easy for Stanley. Presiding Juvenile Drug Court Judge Laura A. Cordero was one of the principle architects in revamping the Juvenile Drug Court program. Changes include smaller classes (Stanley was one of five graduates), more personal interaction between substance abuse counselors and participants, and continuing to work with participants after they have graduated the program to prevent relapses.

As a judge, Cordero gains professional and personal benefit from participating in the program. Said Cordero, "There's nothing more rewarding than for a young man who I've seen come in [court] under the influence - and you can tell after sitting on the bench for a while, and then seeing them sober. It's like a different person. It's a really amazing transformation."

At more than 70 days drug and alcohol free, Stanley provides a shining example of the transformation. Thanks to counseling, he now has a five-year plan that includes work, college, and homeownership. In the immediate future, he plans to begin working with 100 Black Men of Greater Washington D.C.

Said Stanley, "A drug free life offers enough challenges and excitement."

