



OJP Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project

**HOW TO DEVELOP AND SUSTAIN
A DRUG TREATMENT COURT ALUMNI GROUP**

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ALUMNI GROUPS IN DRUG TREATMENT COURTS

When Rochester Drug Treatment Court “Clean Slate” Alumni group members are asked about the challenges of ongoing recovery, they are exceedingly vocal about the fact that the difficult part of recovery begins the day of graduation. Graduation day brings with it feelings of success, pride, joy and relief. Yet additionally, fear, panic and anxiety may surface as graduates are faced with their own personal power to make lifestyle decisions which can either help maintain their sobriety and recovery or return them to active addiction and lives of crime.

Treatment professionals work diligently to prepare graduates for life beyond treatment, guide them to self-help groups, lead them to community resources and teach them the tools to live a sober life. Drug Treatment Court Alumni groups can be viewed as yet another tool to help graduates continue their recovery. Alumni groups work because:

- (1) members can “give back” to other addicts
- (2) they can become involved in an additional sober support group and develop relationships with other recovering addicts
- (3) they can see that they are able to impact change in their drug court by giving suggestions and ideas to the Judge and staff
- (4) members can enjoy status among the court staff and in the building
- (5) most important, by entering the courtroom, they can have a constant reminder of how life used to be when they were actively using

I do not consider myself an expert on Drug Court Alumni groups. What I have become expert in is learning that there is no specific blueprint to follow in order to make this project work successfully, and that it is a matter of trial and error. Since each Drug Court is unique, it makes sense that we cannot use the “cookie cutter” mentality when forming alumni groups. I am hopeful that some of the concepts that have worked for our court can be incorporated into yours and help encourage your own creativity and encourage continued participation of your graduates through your Alumni group.

Many of my best ideas have been developed from the suggestions, wisdom and insight from the

incredible graduates of the Rochester Drug Treatment Court. I know that their enthusiasm and perseverance will continue to motivate others to live an honest, drug free life.

THE TREATMENT PROCESS AND CONTINUING CARE

Before focusing on the continuing care process, it is imperative to have an understanding of the basics of the stages of treatment and recovery. The Center of Substance Abuse Treatment's Counselor Manual for Relapse Prevention with Chemically Dependent Criminal Offenders Technical Assistance Publication (Gorski, Kelley, 1996, p. 6 -7) series describes the Developmental Model of Recovery which is a comprehensive model of chemical dependency treatment which effectively combines the best of the medical and social/behavioral treatment models. It is based on the idea that recovery is a process that takes place over time, in specific stages. Each stage has tasks to be accomplished and skills to be developed. If a recovering person is unaware of this progression, unable to accomplish the tasks and gain the skills or lacks adequate treatment, he or she will relapse. The following is a brief description of the Developmental Model of Recovery (DMR).

The **Transition Stage** begins the first time a person experiences an alcohol or drug-related problem. *The major cause of the inability to abstain during the transition stage is the belief that there is a way to control use.* During the **Stabilization Period**, chemically dependent people experience physical withdrawal and other medical problems, learn how to break the psychological conditioning causing the urge to use, stabilize the crisis that motivated them to seek treatment, and learn to identify and manage symptoms of brain dysfunction. This prepares them for the long term processes of rehabilitation. Traditional treatment often underestimates the need for management of these issues, focusing instead on detoxification. Patients find themselves unable to cope with the stress of brain dysfunction and physical cravings that follow detoxification. Many have difficulty gaining much from treatment and feel they are incapable of recovery. They often use drugs and alcohol to relieve such distress. It takes between 6 weeks and 6 months for a patient to learn to master these symptoms with the correct therapy. *The major cause of inability to abstain during the stabilization period is the lack of stabilization management skills.* The **Early Recovery Period** is marked by the need to establish a chemical-free lifestyle. The recovering person must learn about the addiction and recovery process. He or she must separate from friends who use and build relationships that support long-term recovery. This may be a very difficult time for criminal justice patients who have never associated with people with sobriety-based lifestyles. They also need to learn how to develop recovery-based values, thinking, feelings and behaviors to replace the ones formed in addiction. The thoughts, feelings and behaviors developed by people with criminal lifestyles complicate and hinder their involvement in appropriate support programs during this period. Major intervention to teach the patient these skills is necessary if he or she is to succeed. This period lasts one to two years after the beginning of abstinence. *The primary cause of relapse during the early recovery period is the lack of effective social and recovery skills necessary to build a sobriety-based lifestyle.* The **Middle Recovery Period** is marked by the development of a balanced lifestyle. During this stage, recovering people learn to repair past damage done to their lives. The recovery program is

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modified to allow time to reestablish relationships with family, set new vocational goals , and expand social outlets. The patient moves out of the protected environment of a recovery support group to assume a more mainstream and normal lifestyle. This is a time of stress as a person begins applying basic recovery skills to real-life problems. ***The major cause of relapse during the middle recovery period is the stress of real-life problems.*** They have completed primary treatment programs, and are beginning to “live life on life’s terms.” This is the time when most people enter an Alumni Group . One can see how the involvement in the group will assist them with their needs for continued support, connection with other recovering addicts. The **Late Recovery Period** is a time when a person makes changes in ongoing personality issues that have continued to interfere with life satisfaction. In traditional psychotherapy, this is referred to as self-actualization. It is a process of examining the values and goals that one has adopted from family, peers, and culture. Conscious choices are then made about keeping these values or discarding them and forming new ones. In normal growth and development, this process occurs in a person’s mid-twenties. Among people in recovery, it does not usually occur until three to five years into recovery. ***The major causes of relapse during the late recovery period is either the inability to cope with the stress of unresolved childhood issues or an evasion of the need to develop a functional personality style.*** The **Maintenance Stage** is the lifelong process of continue growth and development, coping with adult life transitions, managing routine life problems, and guarding against relapse. The physiology of addiction lasts for the rest of a person’s life. Any use of alcohol or drugs will reactivate physiological psychological and social progression of the disease. ***The major causes of relapse during the maintenance stage are the failure to maintain a recovery program and encountering major life transitions.***

Treatment professionals use the term continuing care (also known as aftercare) when discussing the ongoing treatment process. When looking at literature on this topic, it is apparent that continuing care describes a range of services and not a specific program. For example, if a patient is attending in-patient treatment or residential treatment and then is referred for out-patient services, out-patient treatment may be referred to as “continuing care”. Others may describe it as the adjunct services which are suggested along with chemical dependency treatment, such as mental health counseling, vocational training or life skills counseling. A third definition of continuing care may mean ongoing involvement with self-help groups such as AA, NA, Alanon or alumni groups. A recent study (Fiorentine, 1999) indicates that weekly or more frequent participation in a 12 step program is a useful and inexpensive aftercare resource for many clients. It notes that treatment providers should encourage and assist their clients to participate in 12 step programs. This encouragement and assistance should extend to those who exhibit low or high levels of recovery motivation, to those who may have dropped out of treatment, to those who are participating in conventional aftercare and alumni activities, and to those who have returned to treatment.

It is well known in the treatment community that increasing the length of participation in alcohol and drug treatment is associated with improved outcomes. A study (Lash, 1998) shows that if counselors take the time to explain the importance of aftercare and the reasons why it is helpful, people were more likely to attend aftercare (70%) than those who received the minimal treatment (40%) and did not have a personalized orientation to aftercare expectations.

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The important information above exemplifies that though traditional drug court programs and treatment programs address the early to middle parts of recovery, many times they are unable to provide continuing care services for the later stages of recovery. This is partly due to the impact of managed care and health insurance coverage regarding the number of treatment session cost which will be reimbursed to agencies, as well as limited staffing resources within agencies. Treatment plans highlight the ongoing issues that a patient must address in order to recover, but the intensive monitoring occurs mostly in the first six months of treatment. Patients are strongly encouraged to connect with sober support systems and develop relationships with other recovering individuals with the hope that this will allow them to continue to work on their recovery issues even when formal treatment or drug court monitoring is completed. Though an alumni group is not a formal treatment group, it can foster all of the life skill development that a therapeutic group can provide. It can become an adjunct to other recovery or self help groups. Making a commitment to the Alumni group can reinforce the need to give back to society, to be a responsible citizen who keeps appointments, and who gives suggestions to improve the functioning of the Court. Additionally, it provides people the opportunity to interact socially with people who have common backgrounds and have learned to live a sober lifestyle. One can view a drug court alumni group as an additional support system to help people through the stages of recovery.

HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

It is important to look at a drug court graduate's lifestyle, and then to understand why alumni groups may not have a large membership. In Rochester Drug Treatment Court, graduates must attain one to two years of sobriety, complete all treatment recommendations and follow through with ongoing mental health therapy if indicated, obtain a GED if they do not have a high school diploma, and must be employed or in college. In addition, we expect graduates to continue attending self help groups several times per week, and work with their sponsors and improve family relationships. When an alumni group is developed, it is important to consider all of the demands placed on potential members and then realize that if a few active members are engaged out of a graduating class of 50, you are doing very well. This writer estimates that one can expect to have a membership of approximately 5% of your graduates. In addition, it can be expected that a group will consist of core members and then have others who may come and go. Remember that even a few enthusiastic members can greatly impact the court and can provide your program with exciting and helpful ideas and suggestions. Since joining this group is voluntary and not mandatory, graduates who are strongly dedicated to their recoveries will be attracted and will maintain their investment in this group.

RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Recruitment can begin on the first day of a defendant's court appearance. At that time of orientation you can explain that the alumni group is a part of the drug court program and you can also disseminate written information. Though many defendants are still under the influence of chemicals at that time, some may still hear the message of hope that upon graduation they can

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help others. Ideally, a current alumni group member can reinforce the information that you provide to the defendant and can share that they remember their first day in court. It is imperative that all of the Drug Court staff members, case managers and treatment providers understand the importance of the group, support it and strongly encourage members to join. This can and should be a goal which is addressed on defendants' clinical treatment plans.

Of course, the presiding Judge's suggestion that a defendant join the group is always a powerful motivator. Many times the Judge will ask a Clean Slate member to address the court, and in particular, tell the new drug court defendants about their lives before and after Drug Court. Be aware that an additional way to recruit new members is to suggest that they attend a meeting even before they graduate. If a case manager feels that a particular defendant would do well in the group, he or she may be mandated to attend one or two months prior to graduation. This initial contact is usually a positive one for the defendant and the group will openly welcome, encourage and engage new participants.

When graduation time approaches active recruitment can begin. Alumni group members along with the group coordinator can attend court and meet individually with graduates to personally invite them to attend group, hand them a brochure (see attachment #1) and inform them about the next meeting. Hopefully this personal interaction will engage defendants. Clean Slate members developed an additional flyer which is placed in the folder with each graduate's diploma. This is written in less formal language than the brochure and is printed on bright paper in order to make it stand out.

A Clean Slate member always makes a short speech at every graduation. The speaker's focus is on how the Drug Court experience impacted the individual, and how his or her life has changed in recovery. In addition, the theme revolves around how important the Clean Slate has been in helping to provide a sober support group, an opportunity to "give back" to other addicts, and a strong reminder of how life was in the days of active drug and alcohol use. The graduation program also highlights the fact that the Clean Slate sponsors the refreshment hour which takes place after the ceremony. These events help in: (1) highlighting the success of alumni members and giving them an important place within the ceremony and a place of importance in the Drug Court (2) provides graduates with strong role models (3) allows Clean Slate members to be seen by the public, i.e. handing out brochures, serving at the reception and helps them "carry the message" about Drug Court and its effectiveness (4) helps many members conquer the fear of public speaking. It is important that staff members offer to assist the alumni group member with the content of the speech if necessary.

HOW TO DESCRIBE THE ALUMNI GROUP TO NEW GRADUATES

Many times I like to describe alumni group participants as the soberest of the sober, meaning that the members are those who have continued to work a recovery program and understand that recovery is a process, not an event. Another reason to join the group is to be able to provide help

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to defendants who are new to the program and are struggling and suffering the consequences of their addiction. This group can become an advisory group for the staff and particularly for the Judge. Members can impact programmatic changes, educate the Judge and improve the overall program by providing input. Joining the group allows individuals the opportunity to become role models and paraprofessionals. They sit in the front of the courtroom with staff members and case managers. The Monroe County Sheriff's Department Court Security Division has been most cooperative with our program and have honored my request to make special identification cards for Clean Slate Members. The design is very much like the judicial district's official staff ID cards and has on them, their name, alumni group member, and states that they can go to the "front of the line". This allows them to enter the building without waiting in line and gives them perceived status in the eyes of the deputies. Many members remark that despite the fact that they have been clean and sober for years, they still remember what it was like to enter the building while they were actively using chemicals. Now they are clearly recognized for their accomplishments.

TIPS ON HOLDING MEETINGS

∅ Location is important! Rather than having your meeting at a church or public meeting place, I suggest that having it in the courtroom will be the most effective meeting place. Again, this will be a great reminder of each member's past struggles, allows them to be in the courtroom when it is voluntary and not because they have pending charges, and allows them to be identified in the building as alumni group members. It can be challenging to choose a time for the meeting because of the many commitments that participants may have.

∅ The best time for our group seems to be late afternoon, so we meet on a monthly basis for our regular meeting. In addition, we get together routinely at least one or two more times to do various projects or activities. Start on time and end on time and make this group a priority in your schedule. You will find that if you cancel or change a meeting time your attendance will drop. It works best for the Clean Slate if we hold the meeting the same day of the week and same time each month, i.e. every third Thursday afternoon at 4 p.m.

∅ Phone lists are important as they foster group cohesiveness and bonding. Be sure to encourage members to call one another and also to call you to check in routinely. Building a relationship with members will help them maintain their connection to the group and to the Drug Court.

∅ An agenda of topics is prepared for each meeting, and each participant can call me to add topics or suggestions.

∅ Goals and objectives for the alumni group are important and give purpose, structure and formalization to your group. I suggest that these be revisited at least yearly, and are always given to new members. You may find that when the membership of your group changes, so will your goals and objectives.(example of the Clean Slate goals and objective in

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Appendix #3).

∅ Give your group a name! I offered two movie tickets to the person who came up with the catchiest name. The Chief Judge and Presiding Drug Court Judge decided the winner and this is how our group became “The Clean Slate”.

∅ Refreshments always attract membership! If possible, publicize that food and soda will be provided at the meeting.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The alumni group is not part of a formal chemical dependency treatment program, and participation in it is purely voluntary, therefore federal confidentiality guidelines do not apply. However, the same rules apply here as at self-help groups - “what is said in this room stays in this room”. Group participants understand this and know that they are expected to honor this rule.

MEETING FOLLOW-UP

Take minutes and distribute them to each member by mail. This serves as a good reminder about what has happened at each meeting and also delineates what tasks may have been assigned. In addition, this formalizes the meetings and updates people about the proceedings if they were not able to attend the meeting. Court staff members also can benefit by receiving minutes as it will keep them apprised of the group status and also helps them remember to talk about the group to potential members. It is imperative that you follow through on any tasks which are assigned to you. Any suggestions which are given about the court must be delivered to the Judge or appropriate personnel. When participants see the results of their suggestions, it reinforces their influence on the court proceedings. One of the most important events in the Clean Slate is when the Drug Court Judge attends a monthly meeting. This happens approximately every six months and these meetings are the most well attended. The Judge solicits ideas and suggestions from members and lets them know that their feedback and information is necessary and an integral part of the Drug Court. He asks their opinions on the proceedings and they feel free to suggest programmatic changes. Rochester Drug Treatment Court is able to reap the benefits of a presiding Judge and Chief Judge who understand the importance of their involvement in this group, and I believe that this is why we have been successful.

In addition to sending minutes of the meetings, I have elected to call each group member a few days before the next meeting to remind them. I have struggled as to whether this is “enabling” yet I have found that meeting attendance is much greater if I make the phone calls.

GROUP PROJECTS

Alumni members are both inventive and creative, and know very well what projects can benefit

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the court. Here are some ideas that Clean Slate members have instituted and have been successful. I am certain that each group will bring its own ideas and suggestions, and we can all learn from one another. Here are some of the Clean Slate's ideas:

Relapse Panel. The topic of relapse was discussed at one of our monthly meetings. The consensus of opinion was that our court was not confronting the problem of relapse strongly enough. Even though case managers addressed this issue on each defendant's treatment plan, Clean Slate members felt that defendants who were struggling could use additional support after a relapse. Therefore, the "Relapse Panel" was begun. *It became another court sanction and alternative to jail.* This panel discussion is held on a monthly basis. Current drug court defendants who have had at least 3 months of chemical dependency treatment and have honestly admitted to the Judge that they have relapsed are mandated to attend this hour long group one time. The Judge makes it clear that if this session is missed, that the sanction will be one week in jail. The panel is run solely by Clean Slate members. I do not attend the group in order to make it safe and confidential atmosphere. I do make sure that everyone signs in, introduce panelists, and encourage participants to volunteer to facilitate the panel when they graduate from the program. I ask each participant to ask or write a question about relapse or recovery. Each panelist introduces themselves and tells a little about their drug court story, and then they address the questions. Many times panelists will give their phone numbers to interested individuals. Though people are usually angry about being mandated to this session, they often tell the Judge that the experience was beneficial and often times ask if they can attend the next session even if they are not mandated to do so. A person can be referred more than once, though panelists do not want constant repeaters as they believe they are continual users, not relapsers. It is important to refer people who have had some chemical dependency treatment because without it there is too much denial and a lack of understanding of the disease.

Peer Counseling/Mentoring. Clean Slate members volunteer to sit in the courtroom, and the Judge utilizes them to counsel defendants who appear to be struggling with their program. He will instruct a defendant to see the Clean Slate member before they leave the courtroom. At that time, Clean Slate members will provide the defendant with a handout which they developed (see appendix #5), provide them with AA and/or NA meeting lists and talk with them about addiction.

Courtroom Assistant. Another opportunity is for Clean Slate members to become assistants in the courtroom. They meet with case managers and develop a list of individuals who need to have urine screens done, provide the Judge with the list, take urine samples, staff the results with case managers and verbally report the results to the Judge. They are considered a part of the Drug Treatment Court staff. These positions were of a volunteer nature when our program began, and we are now able to pay graduates for their courtroom work.

Public Speaking. Graduates are the best ambassadors of your program and are living proof that the program works! We have formed a speakers bureau and most of the Clean Slate members are anxious to be recognized by the public for their accomplishments in Drug Treatment Court. Examples of speaking engagements are college classes, TV and radio

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appearances, community organizations, schools, state and national Drug Court Conferences, treatment agencies, videos explaining drug courts, graduation ceremonies and newspaper articles. I have found that confidentiality is not an issue, and in fact, members sometimes are disappointed if they are not asked to speak at an event.

Graduation Projects. Clean Slate members host graduations, usher, and host the reception. Rochester Drug Treatment Court works closely with the Rochester Police Department and is continually encouraging officers to refer to our court. In an attempt to further educate the police about Drug Court, we ask each potential graduate to write a letter to their arresting officer inviting them to the graduation ceremony. Clean Slate volunteers assist graduates in composing the letter and collect letters so they can be forwarded to appropriate officers.

Orientation Group. Our most current undertaking is to develop an orientation group for new participants in Drug Court. Clean Slate members remarked that when they were first in the court they did not understand the requirements due to being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. They felt it would be important for new defendants to hear about the program from the graduates themselves, and feel that they know what addicts need to hear. We are currently developing an orientation packet and with the Judge's approval will begin to hold a weekly group for all new defendants.

Research Assistants. The Rochester Drug Treatment Court was awarded a grant from the Office of Justice Programs, and Clean Slate members will be hired to work as field researchers to locate graduates assist in performing interviews to assess long term outcomes of the program.

Sober Social Activities. Group members have had the following ideas and we have enjoyed activities such as bowling and pizza, hockey games, baseball games and picnics. Our particular group seems to enjoy the "service work" aspect of the Clean Slate more than focusing on activities and events.

YOUR ROLE AS A FACILITATOR

What kind of group as an alumni group? Is it a therapy group, social group or support group? It is my opinion that the boundaries in this kind of group are much less rigid than with a treatment group, yet the facilitator can still play a key part in guiding and role modeling healthy behaviors. If you have been trained as a chemical dependency counselor or as a group therapist or social worker, you have learned to develop strong and formal boundaries with your clients. The challenge with an alumni group is to maintain your professionalism yet still be able to engage participants and offer them support and guidance as they face life's challenges. You will still need to see that group process takes place at meetings and when the discussion gets off task, bring it back. Though it is not a traditional therapeutic group setting, you may have the opportunity to use the group to intervene on members if they begin to show relapse behaviors or high risk behaviors. For example, one member of the Clean Slate group was not attending self-help meetings, was argumentative and self-centered in our monthly group. Several members

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confronted him about his behavior at the meeting, and afterward I met with him individually. He admitted to being depressed and angry. I suggested that I could refer him to a mental health center where he could address those issues. He later thanked the group for caring enough about him to give him “tough love” and this intervention helped him continue on the path of recovery. It is important for the group facilitator to be aware of the community resources and refer alumni members to appropriate agencies.

I have been able to assist Clean Slate members in other ways:

- write letters of reference when members are seeking employment
- since several members are college students, I can help provide them with information for reports or projects concerning Drug Courts
- I have met with Department of Social Service representatives and Rochester Drug treatment Court has become an official work site for graduates who are in college, are mandated to work in order to receive DSS assistance
- I supervise Drug Court graduates in college internships for social work, human services or criminology

OBSERVATIONS FROM A CLEAN SLATE MEMBER

Elizabeth Coombs entered Rochester Drug Treatment Court in 1996 and graduated in the first class, in Feb 1997. She has remained active in the Clean Slate since its inception, and I have asked her to write a part of this publication to give her perspective of the importance of the group in her life.

“As I entered the Hall of Justice and began ascending the stairs to pass through the metal detector I was struck with a familiar fear; did I clean out my purse? Was there any paraphernalia I missed? Then it hit me . I am clean! I am not in trouble. I am entering the courthouse as a volunteer for the first time in my life. What a feeling! What freedom On January 17th , 1997, I graduated in the first graduating class of Rochester’s Drug Treatment Court. I no longer had to stay clean for the courts. That morning, I was overwhelmed with feelings. I found no reason to celebrate “graduating form the judicial system”. My disease told me that I should “go out and celebrate”. Fortunately there were others graduating with me that I was able to talk to about my feelings. Those “codefendants” validated my feelings so I was able to realize that I was not alone and that I did not have to follow through on my urge to use.

March 28th of 1997 I attended my first drug court alumni meeting. I had received an invitation to attend this meeting two weeks in advance and was unsure if I wanted to join this group or not. When I arrived, I found a group of people that I knew from seeing them in drug court. These people were very friendly and I felt accepted. There appears to be some stigma in 12 step programs with regards to people mandate to treatment. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable referring to drug court in meetings. Yet, here I was in a room full of people who had followed the same path in recovery as I had. I felt at ease with these people. It is common knowledge that alumni groups tend to be very boring and most people avoid them at all costs. Therefore I came

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with very mixed feelings regarding the concept of an alumni group for the drug court. After all, it wasn't like this was a Princeton or Harvard alumnus. What prestige is there for drug court alumni I members anyway? To my surprise, the experience of entering the courthouse of my own free will for the first time without any stigma attached was incentive enough to continue attending. So I joined this motley crew of recovering alcoholics and addicts. I found the rewards beneficial to my recovery.

One of the first things we did in this group was discuss ways that we felt drug court could become more effective. It was an uplifting experience to have my opinion valued for the first time in a very long time. My addiction had brought me to levels of degradation that didn't allow for respect of self. By participating in helping drug courts to become more effective I felt that I was contributing to helping others. This became very important to me, as I was able to remember where I had come from thus reminding myself of where I could be if I returned to the old way of life.

I have found that active participation in the Clean Slate Alumni group helps to keep me clean. Whenever I participate on the relapse panel, I am confronted with a group much like myself in early recovery. I cannot help to feel gratitude for my new life as I observe the denial, anger and blaming that is so common in addicts and alcoholics. Yet, I have never left a relapse panel without at least one person approaching me to thank me for sharing my experience in drug court and recovery. I found that each alumni member brings something different to the panel. Although we all have our addiction in common, everyone has had different experiences, which brought us to drug court. Thus there is always something in at least one of the panel member's stories that every relapsed defendant can identify with."

The Clean Slate Alumni group has suffered membership challenges for a number of reasons since its inception. One of the main difficulties in maintaining membership concerns time constraints. As we go on to become productive members of society, our lives become full with numerous responsibilities. This can make participation in alumni activities difficult. The key to keeping members active is to distribute volunteer work among all of the members in order to reduce the load and to reduce burnout.

Recruiting members is also an important aspect in maintaining membership. As members' schedules change, it is important for the new members to join to carry on where others may no longer be able to. This is where members and the facilitator need to work together.

The person chosen to facilitate the alumni group can make it or break it. Personality and disposition are vital to the core of the group. The facilitator needs to be human in that they have an understanding of the recovery process along with the ability to communicate with members effectively. Nothing can hurt the future of an alumni group more than a facilitator that perceives and relates to the group as if they are beneath him/her can. I doubt that I would still be active if it weren't for the facilitator of drug court. She is always grateful for anything we do for drug court. This is important. I have come to know the judges and the facilitator as people that I can learn from. If I need advice they are always willing to give some of their precious time to hear

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me. The judges also express gratitude for our help and have truly listened to our suggestions. A great many of these suggestions have been implemented into the drug court. By participating in making drug courts work I feel appreciated and we all know that a little appreciation goes a long way.

Finally, I have found that service work is vital for my recovery. A common saying in a 12 step meetings is that 99% of people who perform service work stay clean and sober. I have found this to be true for me. All too often I have stood on the sidelines of life observing but never participating. However they also say that you cannot fall off a roof if you are standing in the middle of it. My fellow alumni members help me to be accountable for my recovery. We check on each other. We are the ones most able to identify when someone is exhibiting negative, unhealthy behaviors. We are also the ones in the best position to call our fellow alumni members on these behaviors. I have gained such rewarding friendships from this group. Friends that I can call when I am happy, sad, angry, or alone and afraid. This is the greatest gift that the Clean Slate has ever given me. As long as I am able to participate I will because drug court saved my life and the least I can do is to help.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What if someone comes to the group high or drunk?

I have found that the last meeting that a graduate would attend under the influence of drugs or alcohol would be a Clean Slate meeting! It is my strong belief and the belief of the Clean Slate members that the Hall of Justice and their Drug Court courtroom is the place that they would most likely avoid if they are using. Also, active users would not want to be present at a Clean Slate meeting as they know they would be strongly confronted on their behaviors. If a person under the influence of chemicals should happen to attend the group, this would provide a perfect opportunity to perform an intervention.

2. Do you do drug testing on Clean Slate members?

For the above reasons I have not found this necessary. This program is voluntary and all members are working an active recovery program.

3. How many people should we really expect to attend the group?

The Clean Slate began in March of 1997. To date we have 400 graduates of the program and the active Clean Slate membership is 25. This is approximately 6.5% of graduates. From my experience, if you engage one or two active members from each graduation you can have a good working group.

4. Should we still hold the group if only 2 people are in attendance?

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Yes! There have been times when I have had two people at a meeting, and sometimes those meetings are the best ones. Most times I have five or six members attending. I have learned that numbers do not necessarily mean anything; the outcomes are what are important. Most group members keep in contact with me by phone. Even if their schedule does not permit them to attend meetings regularly, they can still attend special events or be utilized for speaking engagements.

5. What if your court does not have personnel to facilitate the group in the same manner that the Clean Slate is run?

Not every court will have the personnel to dedicate to facilitating an alumni group. If you have interested graduates, they can start a group themselves. I do believe that some staff member should act as a liaison to the group in order to give them some direction and structure.

6. What if we do not have a person with clinical background or chemical dependency knowledge to work with the group?

Ideally, a person with some chemical dependency knowledge and background should work with this group as much of their conversation tends to focus on recovery and self-help language. At a minimum, the facilitator must have some exposure to and knowledge of self-help meetings and treatment in order to have a common frame of reference with group members.

7. What if the Judge is not willing to support the group by attending periodic meetings?

The Judge needs to understand the important role he has played in these graduates' lives. Many times the Judge becomes a substitute parent and positive authority figure that graduates have not previously had. Explaining this to the Judge is helpful, or allowing a graduate to directly explain his or her feelings may help the Judge realize how important his or her support to this group may be. If the Judge's schedule does not allow attendance at your normal meeting time, you can hold a special meeting time to accommodate the Judge's schedule. Be persistent. The Alumni Group needs to know that they have the Judge's backing and support. When the Judge attends the Clean Slate Group, I am sure to send out flyers announcing this event, and we always have outstanding attendance at these meetings. Group members feel honored that the Judge clears his busy schedule to meet with them, and this reinforces their involvement in the group.

8. How do you get funding for activities?

This has been a problem for the Clean Slate. You can offer to speak to local service groups such as the Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club or other local foundations. If a graduate speaks also, the impact is usually greater. These Clubs may offer some funds for group activities. Sometimes you can work with recreation therapists from various agencies to obtain reduced rate tickets to games or community sponsored events. Be creative and use your contact. There are

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also free events that take place in communities which can be entertaining and fun.

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