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Tiffany's transition

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to change her ways.

"I wasn't fit to take care of them," Hall said. "I would have days where I could be a really good mom. Then other days where I was in pieces - I couldn't even pull it together to get out of bed."

This week marks the four-year anniversary of the Family Dependency Treatment Court program.

The residential program is for addicted parents and includes services for their children. Its stated goal is a reunited and sober family. Participants receive treatment - including drug counseling - for a minimum of one year, plus an additional year of follow-up services.

The Family Dependency Treatment Court program began as a part of Cobb County Juvenile Court in January 2006. The program only takes deprivation cases and sometimes transfers cases from Cobb Superior Court, if a defendant is in need of a higher level of care. It's designed to break the cycle of substance abuse and neglect.

Cobb Juvenile Court Judge Juanita Stedman presides over both the Juvenile and Family Dependency Treatment courts. She said it has been a big success.

"There's a huge incentive to get your child back," said Stedman. "We say, 'You want your child back, but you want it to be permanent.'"

In April 2008, the program began treating men as well.

Twenty-two women, three men and three couples have graduated from the program. Currently, there are 44 women, eight men and 63 children enrolled.

A total of 14 babies whose mothers were in the program have been born drug-free and 10 women have received their GED since enrolling in the program. According to program records, there have been no new deprivation charges against participants since the program was implemented four years ago.

Jennifer Farmer, former program director, said holding participants accountable for their decisions is what has made the program successful.

"Drug treatment courts are best because you have the accountability piece and treatment piece,"

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she said.

Farmer is now executive director of Reconnecting Families, the program's nonprofit arm that provides educational, employment, housing assistance, in-home case management and therapeutic support once the family has returned to their community.

It costs an estimated \$265,000 to run the program, according to Cobb Juvenile Court. Funding primarily comes from state and federal grants, Cobb County government and fundraising by Reconnecting Families.

The program recently received a \$447,197 grant from the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The grant will allow the program to hire a full-time, in-home therapist to work with the families as well as implement a program to offer education and treatment to children who have a parent addicted to drugs and alcohol.

The Family Dependency Treatment Court also partners with Mother's Making A Change - a nationally-recognized program serving mothers with substance abuse problems - to assist families in treatment and during their recovery

There is also a county-run Juvenile Drug Treatment Court program, which focuses on adolescents but includes the entire family. Teens receive intensive case management and weekly meetings with a judge and treatment team for 12 to 24 months.

Hall said the most important aspect of the program for her was the therapy she received that helped her out to manage problems in life. After graduation, she was able to land a job as an assistant manager at Gabriel's bakery on Whitlock Avenue in Marietta. The bakery has a history of hiring graduates from the program.

"Anybody who can rise above their circumstances and change their life are better people for it," said Becky Williams, Hall's supervisor at Gabriel's. "So that make great workers with positive attitudes who are ready to work."

Like Hall, who now has custody of her children, Kelly Vining of Eatonton in central Georgia, went through the program after her newborn child was taken from her in January 2007 by DFACS due to her methamphetamine addiction. Her case was transferred to Cobb, where she had relatives to care for her now 2-year-old son.

"Meth took it all from me. The last straw was when it took my son," said Vining, 32. "I knew my life had to be different."

The program was intense, she recalled, but Vining graduated in May 2008. She received custody of her son moved back home to her family in Eatonton and is now a fulltime student. She ultimately wants to become a substance abuse counselor, she said.

Marietta First Baptist Church has been a longtime supporter of the program. Marietta lawyer Justin O'Dell, a church member and Reconnecting Families board member, was first approached in 2007 by Stedman during a Leadership Cobb class with the idea of providing a sit down meal for the women in the program.

The Sunday School class at Marietta First Baptist has since hosted three to four family events each year, as well as an Easter egg hunt and annual graduation ceremonies.

"For our church to provide an atmosphere where the women can come and see their children, share time and fellowship together and feel like a family again is very powerful," said O'Dell.

"The program is vital to our approach to drug abuse in Cobb County," he said.

"The cost of incarceration is unmanageable. For every mother who is locked up on a drug offense, a child or children become wards of the state. Evidence shows that these children are virtually guaranteed to wind up in jail. If we can break that cycle and put a family back together, we can spare the prison system not just one inmate, but generations of inmates."

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God Bless you for getting the help you needed.I've been there and my husband and I have 25 years clean and sober.See there is life after drugs and alcohol.Just remember One Day at a time.what a great job Tiffany I wish you the best for you and your Family.I will keep you in my prays may God Bless you.

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Badcatm | January 15, 2010

After a week of such sad news this is a "breath of fresh air." Way to go Tiffany and to this program that is helping these families.

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Kim Huffman | January 15, 2010

Congratulations to Tiffany. You have many admirers and people pulling for you. Best of luck to you and your family in your new life!

Also, thanks to people like the Gabriels, who show compassion and humanity, success stories are possible.

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