

Drug Courts have come a long way in Pennsylvania since the first one opened in 1997. There are now over 90 problem solving courts in the Commonwealth including Drug Courts (adult and juvenile), DUI Courts, Mental Health Courts and Veterans Courts. In 2006, our Supreme Court officially recognized problem solving courts, appointed a statewide coordinator and established an advisory committee to support these programs. On June 3, 2010, the Governor signed into law Act 30, authorizing the establishment of problem solving courts in Pennsylvania.

Our Adult Drug Court program in Lancaster has been thriving since 2005 after several years of planning and training. Today, we are rapidly approaching our 100<sup>th</sup> graduate and have welcomed 16 totally clean "Drug Court babies" into the world. We have experienced our share of challenges, treatment funding cutbacks and Team personnel changes but our purpose as noted in our Mission Statement has always remained the same, "To improve public safety and change the lives of offenders by providing a cost efficient means of reducing substance abuse related offenses and addiction."

On August 26, 2009, the Drug Court Accreditation Development Committee appointed by the Supreme Court met for the first time. I had the honor and privilege of serving on this team of extremely dedicated individuals whose task was "to establish a protocol for the Supreme Court to accredit adult drug courts throughout the Commonwealth that utilize nationally recognized best practices for program operation." It was recognized that if problem solving courts are to maintain their integrity, some measure of evaluation would be of value in encouraging programs to meet accepted standards.

Lancaster County's Drug Court Team submitted its Application for Supreme Court Accreditation on August 2, 2011 within hours of the public announcement that applications would be accepted. A review process spanning more than 3 months, which included interviews ranging from 20 minutes to five hours of key court personnel, a thorough document assessment and observation of a team meeting and court session culminated in an Accreditation Ceremony held on Wednesday, February 8, 2012.

We were honored to have Supreme Court Justice Seamus McCaffery formally present the Accreditation while many supporters, dignitaries and participants were in attendance. It was indeed and landmark day for the Drug Court program in Lancaster County.



**President Judge Joseph C. Madenspacher, Adult Drug Court Judge David L. Ashworth, and Supreme Court Justice Seamus McCaffery**

While accolades and ceremonies are of value in recognizing the hard work of those involved, we must not lose sight of the underlying purpose and goal of why Drug Court exists. With the cooperation of our participants, we will continue to pursue our mission with the understanding that although we have accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time, we will always strive to do better.

Perhaps the famous English poet, Robert Browning said it best when he wrote, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp. Or what's a heaven for?"

Respectfully submitted,

David L. Ashworth