

# Health And Well-Being

## When Getting Arrested Becomes An Opportunity To Heal

(NAPSA)—Getting arrested isn't something most people think of as a positive experience. For Leslie Caldwell, however, getting pulled over while under the influence of alcohol changed the course of her life.

This wasn't Caldwell's first time driving under the influence (DUI), and it wasn't her first time being caught. She had four prior offenses; the most recent where she was jailed for 35 days. As a single mother of three young children, Caldwell knew that this arrest, as a reoffense, was much more serious and could result in a much longer time in jail—and probably the loss of her children.

After her last arrest and incarceration, Caldwell swore she would never drink and drive again, but while incarcerated, she didn't learn about her problem with alcohol and related depression, and she didn't explore treatment. She didn't know where to get help. Three months later, Caldwell was under the influence and behind the wheel again. Drinking had become her way of coping and managing with life and parenting stress and she believed alcohol was helping her.

Caldwell's story, unfortunately, is not unusual. Even when the warning signs are there, many people have a difficult time reaching out for help, although they realize they have a problem. Not only are people with mental health and substance use concerns more likely to find their way into the criminal justice system, they end up staying incarcerated longer than individuals who were arrested for similar offenses who don't have these issues. They're also at a higher risk of being homeless, unemployed and without family support—and this, in turn, places them at higher risk for being rearrested later in life.

### Specialty Courts Can Offer Helpful Alternatives To Incarceration

Specialty courts deal with specific cases, such as those involving mental health, drugs, veteran's issues, and domestic violence. These courts work to identify people struggling with such problems and find strategies to help them recover, live healthier, and make better choices. Adults and youths can avoid jail or have their sentences greatly reduced by agreeing to participate in community "diversion programs" designed to help them heal. There are more than 3,000 program sites across the country, many of which are



**A courtroom can open the door to dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues.**

supported with funding and technical assistance by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

While it is most helpful to identify a person with mental health or substance use issues before incarceration, there are different points at which a person might be referred to a community program: when engaging with law enforcement, at initial detention or a first court appearance, in jails and courts, when released from jail and re-entering the community, and during probation or parole. Any one of these points in the process can be an opportunity to identify someone needing help so that underlying concerns can be addressed and jail time can be minimized. SAMHSA provides screening tools, technical assistance, and other guidance to help mental health professionals, judges, law enforcement officers and others in the criminal justice system to effectively use diversion programs for nonviolent offenders—and to help the public to understand how these programs are good for individuals, families, and communities.

These court-based programs can also give people with prior arrests who are in recovery the opportunity to help others in similar situations. Some are hired to help identify and work with those who have just entered the system. These peers can more easily recognize the circumstances involving mental health and substance use disorders that can ultimately lead to an arrest. Their personal lived experiences make them valuable members of the treatment team as mentors, volunteers, or paid specialists.

### Jail Diversion Starts The Healing Process

In the last and most serious arrest, Caldwell was incarcerated for 18 days, during which her attorney told her about a DUI and substance abuse treatment pro-

gram as a possible option for release. She applied and was accepted into a program referred to by the Behavioral Health Treatment Court in McMinnville, Tenn., a program supported by a SAMHSA grant. She received a lesser charge and was released to a substance abuse treatment rehabilitation clinic, where she spent 36 days working on her sobriety. After that, Caldwell had to commit to an 18-month DUI program. It provided outpatient treatment three times each week and talk therapy with a supportive counselor. She also talked with the counselor intermittently if she was struggling with an issue or with her sobriety.

Three years later, Caldwell is still in recovery and visits the DUI treatment program to stay connected to that support. She also regularly does cognitive behavioral therapy worksheets to help her look at things differently—from the negative and heavy, to the positive and hopeful. She's earned her GED high school equivalency and is in college, and she works with a law firm. She's aspiring to higher achievement—both for her career and as a mother.

"I was really depressed and thought nobody could relate to me—so I became a functional alcoholic," said Caldwell. "Then I met other people who were going through the same kind of struggle. That helped me to start out and it helps me now. It's so much easier doing this than living with actions that I regretted."

Caldwell completed the court-ordered diversion program successfully and she continues a church-based recovery program now. The DUI program continues to be a support as well and she speaks with new groups of students to share her story and offer understanding and hope. When she has a bad day, she talks with her therapist and she has an exercise routine to help manage the stress.

"I am a good mother now. The kids know that there are consequences for their actions and I don't just let them do whatever they want, as they could before," said Caldwell. "They aren't on the path I was on—they have structure and are doing well in school. We're all in a much better place."

For further information about specialty courts and jail diversion programs or to learn more about mental illness and substance use disorders, visit [www.samhsa.gov/criminal-juvenile-justice](http://www.samhsa.gov/criminal-juvenile-justice).