



Mothers Graduate From Family Treatment Court



In a small courtroom at the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, five proud mothers—donning black caps and gowns—slowly danced their way down the aisle to celebrate their graduation from Family Treatment Court.

The September 28 ceremony marked a poignant moment in the women’s long journey toward drug-free lives. As part of the Family Treatment Court, a comprehensive substance abuse treatment program for mothers and female guardians of children who are the subject of child neglect allegations, the women will now enter the community-based after-care phase.

Chief Judge Lee F. Satterfield welcomed the audience comprised mostly of the graduates’ supporters, from children and family to friends and community members. He commended the women’s efforts to beat their addictions and to change the lives of their children for the better.

“You’ve earned the admiration, respect, and richly deserve the attention and regard you get today,” said Dr. Roque R. Gerald, director of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency. “You set out to scale a personal mountain and you succeeded.”

Even with great success, keynote speaker and 2003 graduate of the program Carla Evans reminded the women that they need to see recovery as an ongoing process. Evans recounted her story, from initially feeling angry at the child neglect allegations to becoming a graduate student focusing on mental health and addiction. She urged the graduates to create new memories and new patterns of behavior. “Your mind is a computer. It remembers everything you’ve done,” she said. “It takes a lot of work to get into these chairs, but you can get back [to where you started] in a second.”

As the ceremony drew to a close, the women received their graduation certificates and a standing ovation from everyone in the room. “You are on your way to a wonderful journey,” Evans said.

The Family Treatment Court is a program that lasts 15 months. During the residential phase, mothers are allowed to stay in a treatment facility along with up to four of their children, 10 years old or younger. The treatment facility provides on-site and community-based services, including substance abuse education and treatment, relapse prevention, parenting classes, counseling, and childcare. This is the 11th graduation ceremony for the Family Treatment Court.—*T.L.*

