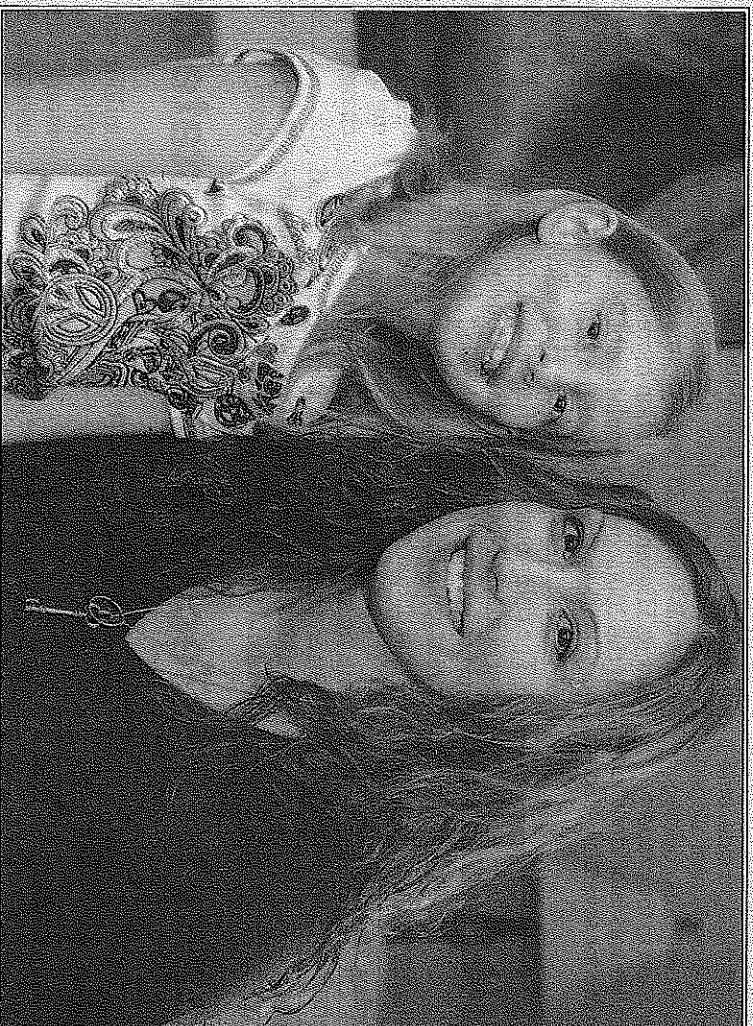


Sober after 2 DUIs



Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

Devon Miller, right, poses with her daughter Alyra, 9. Miller will be one of the first graduates of the Snyder-Union DUI Treatment Court.

Participants avoid costly jail sentences

By Tricia Pursell
The Daily Item

As she sat on her bunk in the women's wing at the Snyder County Jail, Devon Miller remembers asking herself two questions:

"How did I get to this point?"

"What happened?"

The now 30-year-old Selingsgrove resident had excelled at most things in life, including school and sports.

Before things got really bad, she owned a house with a pool in the yard, a brand-new vehicle, and was the proud mother of a baby girl, then a toddler.

"I thought I had the world," she said. "It went downhill so fast."

Miller had begun socially drinking and going to parties around the age of 15. In college, she began experimenting with drugs.

And then, she entered a relationship that she said was "rocky at best."

They had a child together, and then the relationship fell apart. That's when she turned to alcohol as an escape, and soon received her first DUI.

On probation, she ignored the help that was offered and continued to use alcohol as a way to escape from her problems. She isolated herself from everyone she knew, and her drinking became a secret that she covered up, succumbing to the belief that "life will go on."

But her family and friends began abandoning her, and Children and Youth stepped in to remove her daughter permanently from her custody.

That only encouraged her to drink more heavily.

"I would try not to use drugs," she said. "In order not to, I would drink."

She got her second DUI in 2008, and spent 57 days in jail for violating probation. While there, she told herself she would never drink again. But as soon as she got out, she returned to her old habits.

"Addiction is so sneaky," she said. "It tells you that everything is OK."

Miller continued to feel miserable about herself.

4 TO GRADUATE

■ **When:** The very first graduation ceremony of the 17th Judicial District DUI Treatment Court (Snyder and Union counties) will be held at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday in Snyder County Court.

■ **What:** The strict program consists of three phases, taking about 12 to 18 months to complete. Mandatory requirements for graduation also include stable housing, no pending legal matters and employment or viable income.

■ **Who:** Four participants will graduate Wednesday. To be eligible for the program, individuals must plead guilty to either a second or third DUI offense, be a non-violent offender, and have a moderate to severe substance dependence.

■ **How many:** As of Thursday, there were 25 participants in DUI Court, according to Scott Kerstetter, treatment court coordinator. The next graduation will take place on May 18.

"As of March 1, 3,749 jail days have been saved in Snyder and Union counties through DUI Court, with the use of Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitoring (SCRAM) bracelets," Kerstetter said.

■ **Who pays:** Funding for DUI Court comes from grants provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Some local DUI-offender paid fees are also being used to help fund the program, Kerstetter said.

■ **Website:** www.treatment-court.org.

Local

Court program helps avoid jail sentences

JAIL, from Page B1

suffering from depression, loneliness, anger — everything negative, she said.

Meanwhile, unknown to Miller, her worried father was corresponding with her probation officer about her increasing problem, and as a result, she was placed back in jail.

She was very angry with her father for telling on her, she said, but "Today, I'm thankful he did."

During the six months in jail, she said, she had time to heal, attending meetings and drug and alcohol counseling.

"I decided I was going to do whatever it took," she said.

The very first month DUI Treatment Court began, Miller joined the program. There, where the No. 1 rule is honesty, she found a group of people who supported her through every step of recovery, laughing with her, listening to her struggles as they sat around her kitchen table.

On Tuesday, she will mark two years clean and sober.

"I can feel feelings today, and not have to pick up a drink or a

DUI AT A GLANCE

The state Department of Transportation reports there were 12,712 crashes involving driving under the influence in Pennsylvania in 2009, and 449 fatalities.

In 2010, there were nine alcohol-related fatalities in the Valley: Three each in Northumberland, Snyder and Union counties.

Alcohol-related crashes in 2010: 63 in Northumberland; eight in Montour; 31 in Snyder; and 23 in Union.

MADD: THUMBS-UP

Georgeann Rohrbach, senior victim advocate for Mothers Against Drunk Driving, applauded the DUI treatment court and its goals last week.

"This is an awesome program," she said, after reading about it online. "It's a really positive approach."

More so than putting someone in jail for committing a DUI offense, she said, after which it is likely they "come back and do the same thing over again."

"This gives them the steps they need," she said. "It keeps the repeat offender off the streets."

drug," she said. She has rebuilt her relationships, regained custody of her daughter. Soon, she will be attending school to obtain a nursing degree. She's in a healthy relationship now, and works with him at his contracting business.

"Everything that I once

thought was impossible or never going to happen, all the dreams that fell by the wayside ... they're all right back there again," she said.

Miller will give a speech Wednesday at the Drug Treatment Court graduation ceremony, and she plans to focus

on the positive of what her life is now, not the negative it once was. And she owes it to the program.

"If you put the effort in, there's no reason why anyone can't succeed," she said.

□

Shawn Ritter had been dealing with a heroin addiction for 14 years when he was faced with a decision that would change his life forever.

"I never really lived a normal life since I was an adult," the 31-year-old from Selinsgrove said. "My life was pretty well out of control."

When he applied for the DUI Treatment Court program, it was because it was the only option he had for staying out of jail.

Ritter had received three DUIs within seven years, all drug-related.

"I had doubts in myself if I was going to be able to complete this program," Ritter said. "I never thought I could live without the use of drugs."

As he continued going to meetings, however, his attitude changed.

"I knew this is what I wanted,"

Ritter said. "I came to realize that I don't need (drugs) to get up and go to work and live a normal life."

"I'm grateful this chance was put in my life," he said. "I wouldn't want nothing else."

Ritter is employed as a full-time laborer at a local homebuilding company, and has been clean for 14 months.

□

The night Shawn Prutzman, of Mifflinburg, was stabbed in the arm with a kitchen knife finally marked the turning point of the life he had drowned in alcohol since he was 18.

He had followed his mother outside after a heated argument, and a neighbor came over, began fighting with him, and then finally ended the fight with the knife he carried in his hands.

Prutzman had been drinking that night, but got into his vehicle to get away. Someone called the cops, he said, and he was soon pulled over.

The officer smelled alcohol on his breath, and he was served his second DUI that night in June 2009.

The following March, Union

County District Attorney Pete Johnson advised Prutzman to accept a plea bargain that would give him the option of DUI Treatment Court, rather than 90 or more days in jail.

At first, he agreed in order to stay out of jail.

"But as months went by, I could see I was an alcoholic, and I needed help," the now 35-year-old said.

"I was ready to grow up," he said.

The program, Prutzman said, "made me realize that you can have fun having a sober life. It gave me some manageability."

He said he has been blessed with a baby girl, who will be three months on April 5. "That was a reward," he said.

He celebrated a year of sobriety on Thursday, and he credits not only the program, but the support system he has in the meetings he attends and his fiancée and family.

Prutzman is working full time at a Lewisburg deli.

■ E-mail comments to tpursell@dailyitem.com