

The Telegraph

Eight Drug Court graduates honored in Nashua

November 3, 2017

- **Author/Byline:** Adam Urquhart, Staff Writer aurquhart@nashuatelegraph.com

NASHUA – Hillsborough County South Drug Court honored eight graduates Thursday afternoon during a ceremony at the courthouse.

The commencement ceremony honored Katie Emery, David Roy, Ryan Haggerty, Christina Colburn, Jeremy Garcia, Stephen Briere, Tasha Maddox and Jesus Cortes-Rodriguez.

Judge Jacalyn Colburn gave a welcome to start the ceremony, saying the event honored the largest class they've ever had, by one.

"Anyone doing drug court on average will last 18 months, and they'll say it's not easy. It's probably easier for them to go to jail or prison. The eight folks up here should be examples of what you can accomplish if you put your minds to it," Colburn said.

The eight people honored all experienced addictions to a wide range of drugs, from alcohol and marijuana to meth and heroin, among other substances.

After coming into contact with the criminal justice system on numerous occasions, these eight individuals eventually all faced charges that led them to drug court.

"Without the drug court option, they'd probably be heading toward years in prison," Judge Colburn said.

No one is accepted into drug court unless they're at a high risk for continued criminal behavior and have a high need for substance use disorder treatment. Eventually, through drug court, those risks are minimized and those needs met over the course of many months of commitment and hard work, officials said.

Following Colburn's welcome, the ceremony itself was then underway where each of the eight individuals were formally recognized. Every graduate had someone introduce them, whether a family members, sponsor or anyone else who impacted them along their road to recovery.

Tasha Maddox was the first to be introduced, and after her stepfather spoke, she took to the podium to deliver a powerful poem she had written about overcoming her addiction and believing in herself.

Katie Emery was the next graduate to be honored followed by David Roy.

Ryan Haggerty then took to the podium to give a few words about his experience in the program and how it benefited him.

In his speech, Haggerty said, "The Ryan I am today is not the Ryan I came into the program as." He also said the program saved his life.

"If I can do this, anyone can," Haggerty said.

Next up was Christina Colburn, followed by Jeremy Garcia.

Garcia now recognizes family as his No. 1 support system and has a baby on the way.

Stephen Briere was the next graduate to be honored. Right now, he's focused on pursuing a career as either a counselor or recovery coach. He wants to be the first graduate to be employed by this program.

Jesus Cortes-Rodriguez was honored as the last graduate during the ceremony. He had his prosecutor, who's put him in jail on multiple occasions, introduce him, because she knows his history.

With a lengthy criminal background dating back to when he was just 13 years old, he stood before the crowd and briefly highlighted his past struggles, his experience in the program and then thanked those who helped him along the way.

After being in and out of jail he eventually ended up in prison. He was released from prison at 21, but continued to make the same mistakes and was arrested a few more times until he reached 23. During his final arrest, his girlfriend was pregnant with his son.

During Cortes-Rodriguez' speech, he said, "My prosecutor made the decision to give me one last chance to redeem myself through drug court." He went on to say, "Drug court is not just about recovery from drugs ... for me it's being able to get back into society and live as a human being, and be an honorable man." He then thanked those who made an impact in his journey to sobriety before Colburn gave closing remarks.

Following her remarks, a reception was hosted where folks had the chance to mingle and grab sandwiches from Subway. The Steering Committee and Subway donated food for the reception.

As the ceremony wrapped up, many proud friends, family members, officials and current program participants came together to congratulate those eight for their success in graduating from the program.

Adam Urquhart can be reached at 594-1206 or aurquhart@nashuatelegraph.com.