

Excerpt from Hilo Drug Court Graduate's Speech at Graduation:

When I came into Drug Court, I was lost and confused. I didn't know who I was because I built my life on lies. I never aspired to anything great. The only two positive things that had come out of my life were my daughter Adriana and my son Ryder. Going to jail was honestly one of the best things that ever happened to me and I needed to be in there. While I was in there, the father of my two children overdosed on heroin and died. Finding that out was one of the darkest moments in my life. I had overdosed before but never died. Got in car accidents and always walked away. I have had many friends that have died as well but it never really fazed me. I remember the first time I went to rehab and all the people would say this is life or death and I would think these people are so dramatic. Realizing I was the only parent my children had left and growing up without a father because he was an alcoholic who inevitably drank himself to death, I finally realized it was really time to dramatically change my life. I no longer wanted to be everyone's burden and the family disappointment. Me wanting to change is why I changed and I changed everything. If people didn't share the same interest as me or I sensed any type of negativity that could rub off on me, I disassociated myself with those people. If you decide to change you have to change everything, not just the areas that are convenient for you. No one can force you to do it and some do it cause they are told to but when they are done with their program, they end up going right back to where they started off. Drug Court is not easy and I have sat through a lot of graduations, and I would always hear the graduates say if I can do it so can you and I am sorry to say that is just not true, or everyone would graduate. I have seen a lot of participants get sent to prison or go back to drugs shortly after graduating. I will not tell you guys you will make it because I did. I will simply tell you will make it if you want to. This program is designed to push you to your limits, to see how you react under pressure, to use the tools you learned in treatment. For those of you who have Keri be prepared, she will make your life difficult. But when I look back on all the times she made me want to lose it, I can thank her now for that. I have learned how to be pushed, to pick my battles instead of always arguing my point, to count to ten when I am upset, and to not give up because things get hard. My best piece of advice I can give to my fellow peers in Drug Court is don't ever let anyone label you. When you are a recovering addict, you are sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters husbands, wives and friends. Be more than a recovering addict. Figure out who you want to be and define yourself. You don't have to live under a negative label for the rest of your life and only you can change what you are viewed as. I used to be ashamed of my life and who I was. Don't be ashamed of your past. Use it. Remember where you came from and use it to help others, to inspire yourself and the people around you. If you are here, it is for a reason. Don't ever think it's by accident. Everyone has potential and anyone can change if they will it. My real journey starts now, that I leave Drug Court. It is easier to live a life when you are told what to do, when you have someone constantly holding you accountable for every mistake you make. The true test starts now. To my fellow graduates, our lives are now ours. Be proud of all that you have accomplished and don't settle for anything less than what you deserve. Keep doing what you have been doing to bring yourself to the point you are at now and continue to set goals and reach them. Don't let Drug Court Graduation be your last accomplishment. Push yourself to achieve more. It doesn't matter where we have been or where we are now, but where we are going.