

By [S.A. Reid](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 01/24/08

Wanda Scott graduated from Fulton County's Family Drug Court program three years ago clean and sober after 15 years of abusing crack, a destructive habit that nearly caused her to lose her youngest children.

But without post-graduation support services, Scott struggled to avoid crashing against the shoals of relapse.

"It wasn't easy. The temptation came. I had to stay prayed up," said Scott, mother of seven children ages 3 to 27. "If you don't have a lot of support, it can really be rough."

The drug court is working to fix that with Project Ready, Set, Go!, a new after-care program it's rolling out this year to make it possible for children to remain with their families permanently and create more safe and stable homes by helping their parents with staying clean and sober.

Project Ready, Set, Go! makes available at least a year of free services ranging from mental health and job counseling to literacy and GED assistance. The services will be phased in over the next 10 months.

It also will enhance elements of the drug court program, such as providing transportation for family visits to children in placement and offering ongoing case management by family advocates and peer counselors.

Kim Shellman-Borna, executive director of the Fulton County Juvenile Justice Fund, said 70 percent of the 12,000 cases the juvenile court handles annually involve children affected in some way by substance abuse.

"A program like this is going to have a huge impact on a large number of children in our community," Shellman-Borna said. "We will help to strengthen their families so that they can get the care and nurturing that they deserve."

Perhaps, no one is more excited for drug court alumnae than Scott, who has signed on with the program as a peer counselor.

"I really think it will be helpful," said the 43-year-old Scott, whose post-graduation experience helped shape Ready, Set, Go! "There are a lot of women coming from the program who don't have resources. It will really encourage them."

The Fulton County Juvenile Justice Fund, a nonprofit that partners with the county's Juvenile Court system, is managing the initiative, which is paid for with a five-year, \$2.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Family Drug Court, a program of Fulton County Juvenile Court, has been around since 2003.

It offers a last chance to mothers faced with permanently losing their children because of substance abuse. A woman's success in meeting the drug court's treatment requirements helps determine whether her family can be reunited.

The mother of a 13-year-old son, Teporise Newton graduated in December after spending 14 years addicted to marijuana, alcohol and crack cocaine.

"I loved the program. It kept me on the right road," said Newton, 27. "The biggest thing I feared was relapse and going to jail. I'm sober and clean and will stay sober and clean."

Under the federal grant, drug court also will offer community awareness and intervention training in methamphetamine addiction.

Additional undertakings include a housing feasibility study whose findings will help design an assistance program for drug court graduates who have trouble finding affordable housing because of criminal histories related to substance abuse.

A \$100,000 Humana Foundation grant will go toward building out space at Fulton County Juvenile Court to house Ready, Set. Go!

Christine Owens, an East Point mother of two and former crack and alcohol abuser, said her post-graduation experience hasn't been as tough as most, but she wants to be there for others struggling to stay clean.

She has not volunteered to be a peer counselor but said she wants to be available. "If they need my help, I'll help."

## FAMILY COURT DRUG PROGRAM

The following statistics represent yearly averages.

- > Caregivers referred to drug court: 250
- > Program enrollment: 200
- > Cocaine, marijuana or heroin addicted: 95%
- > Graduation rate: 28.5 %
- > Post-graduation family reunification rate: 54%

Source: Fulton County Juvenile Court, Family Drug Court Program

