



# Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

## News

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### Boone Couple First to Graduate from Family Treatment Court in W.Va.

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Photos on SmugMug <https://wvcourts.smugmug.com/>

JULIAN, W.Va. – Sabrina Ward and Matt Blackshire were addicted to meth and had lost custody of their toddler daughter when they began participating in West Virginia’s first Family Treatment Court in October 2019.

On Tuesday, they and their little girl, Adalynn, were surrounded by family and friends as they became the first people to graduate from a Family Treatment Court in West Virginia.

“I never dreamed I would be where I am today. I am very thankful and blessed. Family Treatment Court has changed my life for the better,” Ms. Ward said during the ceremony at a picnic shelter at Boone County’s WaterWays park.

The couple regained custody of Adalynn after only six months because of their hard work in Family Treatment Court, “which is nothing short of amazing,” said Twenty-Fifth Judicial Circuit (Boone and Lincoln Counties) Judge William Thompson. Parents in abuse and neglect cases usually lose custody of their children for much longer periods of time, he said.

For Judge Thompson, the graduation was the culmination of at least eight years’ effort to bring Family Treatment Courts to West Virginia. He thanked the West Virginia Legislature, Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, and West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources for their support and funding.

“The way we were doing things before simply didn’t work,” said Judge Thompson. “Family Treatment Courts have exceeded my expectations.”

Family Treatment Courts serve individuals with substance use disorders who are also involved in a child abuse and neglect case. Family Treatment Courts are designed to return children to a safer home environment and achieve permanency faster and more effectively than traditional methods. The Supreme Court provides oversight, technical

assistance, and training. Boone County has one of five Family Treatment Courts in West Virginia. The others are in Nicholas, Ohio, Randolph, and Roane Counties.

Chief Justice Tim Armstead said all the Supreme Court Justices support the Family Treatment Court concept because it is designed to reunite families quickly and safely, helping parents overcome substance abuse problems and allowing children to grow up in safe, loving homes with their families instead of in state foster / kinship care.

Family Treatment Courts require accountability, because participants meet with a circuit judge at least once a week and can talk about their challenges and what they need to succeed.

“All the Justices join me in saying how pleased we are to be a part of this process,” he said. “I believe this program has tremendous promise for the children of our state.”

Chief Justice Armstead also congratulated Ms. Ward and Mr. Blackshire. “You put in the work. You put in the effort. It wasn’t easy, and we know that,” Chief Justice Armstead said.

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