

Abused children can't wait

During his 30 hours of advocacy training, Dallas CASA supervisor Chris Jeffries spoke to Martin about Legacy Drug Court, a non-adversarial program that provides intensive and collaborative support to families who have entered the Child Protective Services system due to drug or alcohol addiction or abuse. The goal is successful recovery, rehabilitation and family reunification. Martin's interest was piqued immediately.

"I was attracted to the team approach idea," he said. "'I felt like I could work inside the process. The collaboration, the way everyone on the case from family to attorney to judge all know each other, suits me very well. We all have a strong mutual respect for each other."

For advocates, a case in the Legacy Drug Court can be more time-consuming, including weekly meetings, but for Martin the additional time has only meant a deeper investment in his cases. On a recent case, he felt like he played a critical role in saving the life of a young mother considering doing drugs again. Martin's supervisor, Chris, agrees.

"In Legacy Drug Court, we lift the families up, provide support and resources and even basic life skills," Chris said. "Martin plants seeds of hope. He says 'this is possible' when they haven't heard it before. And those seeds of hope stay with people the rest of their lives."

The latest case involved a young mother working hard to get her life back. An arrest on an outstanding traffic ticket sent her to jail and then spiraling toward doing drugs again. With the group support of the drug court, she was able to change her life and is clean today.

"I'm so much more aware of these issues than I was before I was brought face to face with them," Martin said. "We occupy the same city, the same sidewalks, but our worlds are completely different."

Martin's advocacy proved so capable that he has worked four cases in just over a year, many overlapping. He's found the emotional investment comes easily.

"It's impossible to work that closely and not develop empathy and hope for everyone involved," Chris said. "Ultimately, we want so badly for them to succeed. And the real reward is when we do succeed – parents get their lives back and a child is quite possibly saved, too. Thanks to super caring and passionate advocates such as Martin, these families have a real chance at a whole new life."

