

Case Study

Leslie is a 29-year-old woman from a suburban city near Chicago. By all accounts, she was raised in a typical middle-class style, with parents who loved and supported her. Giving into peer pressure, she started using alcohol and marijuana at age 17, but slowly her addiction progressed. She graduated from high school and then college with an undergraduate degree. She began using cocaine right out of college, after a “friend” convinced her to try it. From that point on, her life was a downward spiral and she began smoking crack daily.

In 1999, she decided to move with her boyfriend at the time, who lived in a different city. By this time, she was no longer speaking with her family, who continually talked about her drug use and begged her to quit. She had hoped to get away from the life she was leading, but after only a week of being in a new place, she managed to find someone to sell her drugs. In 2003, she was arrested for getting drugs for an undercover cop and taken to county jail. She faced multiple felony arrest warrants for delivery of a controlled substance, crimes that earned her a total possible sentence of 28-105 years in prison. Leslie knew in her mind she was an addict, but in the eyes of the law she was a drug dealer.

Sitting in jail convinced Leslie that she needed to make some serious changes in her life. She did not want to hurt herself or her family any longer. Her attorney recommended she plead guilty and ask for “TASC probation,” which would allow her to receive a clinical assessment to determine the existence and nature of her addiction, along with a recommendation for a specific course of addiction treatment. This path would also allow her to avoid serving time in prison, something she very much wanted.

Leslie was assessed and found to have an addiction. Her case manager recommended and the judge mandated her to in-patient treatment at a facility for 90 days as a condition of her probation. However, no spaces were currently available. While she waited the couple of weeks for one to open up, her TASC case manager stayed in constant contact with her and encouraged her to continue waiting and not use drugs. Finally, when a spot became available, she checked in and participated in treatment for 90 days as recommended. During her stay, she remained in touch with her TASC case manager, who helped her meet the requirements of her probation, as well as plan for her release.

Once she completed her treatment, she received a referral from her TASC case manager to an employment agency that helped her find a job, and she was able to save money towards her future. She attended support group sessions. Due to a connection with her case manager, she received an opportunity to speak with some high school students about her experiences to help them from going down the path she had. From that day forward, she felt that helping others was her calling in life. She found an apartment and went back to school to become a Certified Substance Abuse and Alcohol Counselor (CADAC). She even called the undercover cop that arrested her to thank him for saving her life.

Leslie has rekindled her relationship with her family. She is happy that her mother now calls her to tell her she loves her and that she’s proud of her. Leslie has maintained a perfect grade point average in school, and is only a few steps away from finishing her CADAC program. She has been sober for over four years.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did Leslie’s contact with the criminal justice system affect her recovery?
2. How does Leslie’s path to recovery differ from Andrew’s? What are some similarities between them?
3. How might the support of Leslie’s family impact her as her addiction was forming? And during her recovery?
4. What challenges does Leslie face in her recovery and return to productive society?