

**It is what it is, but it will be what you make it!**

*Maridel Williams, Executive Director*

The courtroom was packed, as usual. Standing room only. Nothing new there: crunched shoulder-to-shoulder with complete strangers that shared at least one thing in common-- anxiety about the outcome from the day's proceedings. As the docket is called, some receive instructions to appear in another court room. Others, nervous that their name wasn't called, shuffle back out into the hall to try to find information. Those whose names are called jockey to find seats, and settle in to wait their turn in front of the judge.

When our client's name is called, silent prayers arise, and a young lady who has won the admiration of the entire organization rises and makes her way to the podium to stand alone before the judge. She is there, not because she is in trouble—she has already spent months in jail. She is in court, having paid yet another fee to get in front of the judge to plead for relief, because the errors of her past have resulted in thousands of dollars of debt that has to be addressed. The debt is for fines, fees, and the \$15-\$20 per day she was charged to be housed in the correctional facility. The bad news is, she will not be able to have her license reinstated until the fees are paid, or at least set up on payments. She is working hard, saving every dime she can, looking forward to purchasing a car and insurance, so it won't be so difficult to get to work. She also has hopes of going to college.

The judge quickly scans her file, as her parents, her life coach, and our wide-eyed intern hold their breath and take in the scene. We wait. The judge finally looks up and congratulates her on doing good work. On the merit of her good-faith efforts, he has decided to release her from paying the jail fees, if she will make a payment plan for the balance. With sincere gratitude, our client is dismissed, and we make our way to the crowded hallway for celebration.

Two weeks later, this super-brave client will stand before another judge in another jurisdiction to face \$11,000 in fines and fees...Thankfully, that judge also lowered the fees and gave her 6 months to pay it!

So, while we take a moment to celebrate, we also recognize the HEAVY financial load our clients face, as they begin to make a new start. The challenges can be overwhelming, and without encouragement, it would be easy to give up.

We congratulate these brave, tenacious, hard-working returning citizens.

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