

Drug Program Participant Turned Law School Student



Summary: *Once a member of a drug program, Michael Fielding will now be going on to law school.*

Not many are able to successfully overcome a drug problem. Even fewer are able to do so and move on to attend law school. Michael Fielding is defying the odds to become a rare success story, according to the Marin Independent Journal.

Fielding graduated last week from Marin County's drug court. Most that enter into this program fail and end up re-entering the regular criminal justice system. The few that are considered success stories have steady employment, abstain from crime, and are sober. Fielding decided he wanted to go farther and get a law degree. He will be set to do this on a full ride scholarship.

His story begins in February 2017 when he was arrested more than once for drug possession and driving under the influence of drugs. One of the arrests involved a rear-end collision where there were minor injuries in the other car involved. He was sent to jail for 117 days, where he entered the drug program.

The drug program requires a strict schedule of court appearances, counseling, substance abuse treatment, random drug testing, and more. Those who fulfill the program requirements, which takes around one year to 18 months, allows them to get felony charges reduced and outstanding jail time removed. Only around 40 to 45 defendants are allowed into the program each year. A Marin County Department of Health and Human Services supervisor, D.J. Pierce, states that only about 46 percent complete the program, at the lower end of the national average range.

The program is funded partially by federal grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Foundation. The latest grant they received is for \$322,000 a year for three years.

Fielding was able to get his felony intoxicated driving dropped to a misdemeanor. Two misdemeanor drug possession counts were dropped completely. He also had the remaining 233 days of his sentence dismissed and probation reduced to three years from five. Prosecutor Nicole Pantaleo noted that Fielding was "extremely humble" and "contemplative, serious, remorseful, insightful and mature."

Fielding was a sociology major at Chico State University. He has family working in the legal industry, which aided in his decision to pursue law school while he was in jail. He spent his time reading the novels "Crime and Punishment," by Fyodor Dostoevsky; "In Cold Blood," by Truman Capote; and "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness," by Michelle Alexander.

He took the Law School Admission Test and scored a "solid" 152. Then he applied to several law schools. [Golden Gate University Law School](#) Dean Anthony Niedwiecki and his staff were impressed by Fielding's application. The school decided to accept Fielding and waive his tuition. Niedwiecki explained, "We're a school that likes to give opportunities to people, and he fits the type of student we'd like to give that opportunity to. You want to look for people who take an experience, learn from that experience and use it in a positive way."

He will start law school in August. Until then, he is spending his time doing the preparatory reading and working at a grocery store in Novato.

Fielding's advice for other drug defendants: "Tell the truth." He explained, "Sometimes it's the only thing you can control. You have to be able to trust yourself, and the way you do that is through spoken truth."

Do you think that people deserve second chances or are certain careers exempt from a second chance? Share your thoughts with us in the comments below.

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