

## Conclusion

There are a lot of moving parts to these efforts. It's hard, but it is not complicated and can be boiled down to a few concepts. Parents and caregivers need to know about the adverse effects of childhood trauma. Children who are survivors of severe trauma need to receive evidence-based, trauma-competent mental health services. We need to make those services available to families who want and need them.

These children need to receive nurturing, trauma-informed daily care from their parents and caregivers. To provide this, parents and caregivers of these children need training, support and encour-

agement. Parents and caregivers who are themselves survivors of serious childhood trauma also need to receive effective, trauma-informed treatment and interventions to prevent the recurrence of trauma to the children they care for and so that they can, in turn, provide the trauma-smart healing care that their children need.

*This article is adapted from a presentation given at the American Probation and Parole Association at its winter meeting in New Orleans in January 2020.*

## FOOTNOTES

1. [www.wvlegislature.gov/Senate1/majority/poverty/ACEsinWashington2009BRFSSFinalReport%20-%20Crittenton.pdf](http://www.wvlegislature.gov/Senate1/majority/poverty/ACEsinWashington2009BRFSSFinalReport%20-%20Crittenton.pdf).
2. See, e.g., Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Admin., "Essential Components of Trauma-Informed Judicial Practice," p. 3, available at [www.nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/DRAFT\\_Essential\\_Components\\_of\\_Trauma\\_Informed\\_Judicial\\_Practice.pdf](http://www.nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/DRAFT_Essential_Components_of_Trauma_Informed_Judicial_Practice.pdf).

# Interview with Judge Ree J. Casey-Jones, Louisiana's First STAR Court Judge

Interviewed by Hal Odom, Jr.

*"You can be a rising star. You can be a shining star. You can even be a rock star!"* This is the message Judge Ree J. Casey-Jones has for the girls (and a few boys) who come through her court, Louisiana's first STAR court, a specialty court established to help address the epidemic of human trafficking. Before the coronavirus lockdown, Judge Casey-Jones sat down to talk with the *Louisiana Bar Journal* about this innovative court section under her leadership.

**Journal:** What does STAR stand for?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** It stands for Succeeding Through Achievement and Resiliency. We got the idea, and the name, from the Los Angeles, Calif., County Court System, where they have developed it. I was able to go to Los Angeles and observe the system for about a week. It was an education. There are also similar courts in other major cities.

**Journal:** When did Caddo Juvenile Court begin the STAR Court?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** In March 2019. So, it's relatively new. In the first year, we have diverted 13 cases to STAR.

**Journal:** How do you divert cases to STAR?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** All our cases start out as delinquency cases, and most of them have been with girls. We look for juveniles who have started out with minor offenses, like fighting or disturbing the peace, but have progressed to more serious matters, like major theft, kidnapping or even homicide. We're trying to find out, what's causing this? What are the underlying issues? What can we do to move them out of juvenile justice?

**Journal:** Who selects cases for diversion?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** The Caddo Parish Office of Juvenile Services. The office's intensive probation officers evaluate the kids, starting with talking to them, their parents, their teachers, and any other significant persons in their lives. Most of them are already on probation, and moving their case to STAR Court is a condition of probation.

**Journal:** Is there an immediate effect?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** Our first goal is to make sure they have a place to stay, food to eat, and some security. Their safety is



Judge Ree J. Casey-Jones

our Number One goal. Unfortunately, this sometimes involves moving them out of town, or even out of state.

**Journal:** Is human trafficking the thread running through most of these cases?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** Yes, in perhaps 90 percent of the cases. However, we never use the expression "human trafficking" or the word "prostitution." We try to focus on the positive aspect of improving each child's self-esteem, placing the children in a safe environment and giving them

3. *Id.*; Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. London: Penguin Pub. Group, © 2015.

4. We use the TARGET model. See, [www.advancedtrauma.com/Services.html](http://www.advancedtrauma.com/Services.html).

5. As Dr. van der Kolk states, "Study after study shows that having a good support network constitutes the single most powerful protection against becoming traumatized. Safety and terror are incompatible." Van der Kolk, *supra*.

6. Shreveport was selected as a training site for TCU's international TBRI® practitioner training, set for September 2020.

7. <https://cfjla.org/aces/>.

*Caddo Parish Juvenile Court Chief Judge David N. Matlock was elected in 1994. He earned his BA degree at Louisiana State University-Shreveport and his JD degree from Baylor School of Law. In his 26 years at the court, he has been instrumental in establishing the Trauma Competent Child In Need of Care program, Juvenile Drug Court, Family Preservation Court, Domestic Violence and Child Support Drug Court, Juvenile Mental Health Court, Truancy Court, Sex Trafficking*



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incentives to stay out of trouble. That's why I always tell them, "You can be a rising star."

**Journal:** What kind of procedures do you have for that?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** You know, it's hard to believe, but many of these kids have never once had any person in their life tell them, "You're pretty," "I love you for who you are" or "I don't want anything out of you." This is the first step. Then, we use incentives. They can get a gift card to have their hair done or their nails. Some of them would like to have a prom dress; we've done that. We held a Christmas party for them, and some of them had never received a Christmas present before. It was a revelation to see their eyes when they got three, four or five presents!

**Journal:** Can you revoke their probation?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** Yes, that's a last resort, and I hate to do it, but we can always send them to Juvenile Detention.

**Journal:** Has the program been successful?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** Well, it's so new, as of February 2020, we have had only one person go all the way through and graduate. However, she is now doing okay, and it's an encouraging model moving forward.

**Journal:** What community resources have partnered with the STAR Court?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** Oh, there are many. First, the Office of Juvenile Justice

and its individual employees. The employees have opened up their own wallets to help with incentives and been so involved. The Caddo Parish Commission has been a source of funding. Volunteers For Youth Justice are very involved. The District Attorney's Office is a great partner, lots of resources and personnel. Then, there's the Christ Center Church for work with girls. And too many individuals to name. I would also mention Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, an organization of which I have been a member for 20 years. They have really jumped in. And Jack and Jill of America, an African-American organization that has always helped mothers. You might not have heard of them, but they are important players.

**Journal:** From what you have seen, what are the underlying causes of human trafficking?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** Maybe not causes, but we always see two things: lack of self-esteem and absence of stability in the home. These are latchkey kids. Their situation makes them very vulnerable.

**Journal:** What have you learned from the STAR Court?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** When I first started, I didn't know the severity of the trafficking issues. It's shocking to me that a parent or grandparent could do this to a little girl. Through working with the girls, helping them, seeing them smile, building their self-esteem, I see they are learning for the first time that somebody wants them to

succeed in life. I am overjoyed by giving back and helping someone. And it just makes an enormous difference.

**Journal:** Do you have any other comments about your experience at STAR Court?

**Judge Casey-Jones:** Juvenile court is not just for kids. It's to bring families back together, to give them all the tools they need to build, or rebuild, their family unit. Look, I am a parent, too. I can tell everyone in my court, "There's no parenting handbook. We're all going to learn by doing, and we can all make mistakes." But the message is, we are here to help. I'm going to give it everything I can, and so are our partners. This is a wonderful opportunity to pull these kids out of an awful situation.

**Journal:** I'm enormously impressed with all the layers of support right inside this building, and the strong networks you have developed. Thank you for taking time to talk with the *Journal*, and mostly for all you're doing to address trafficking and delinquency.

**Judge Casey-Jones:** You're most welcome. It's been my pleasure.

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