



COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES OF GEORGIA

JUNE 2020

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ACCOUNTABILITY COURT NEWS & SPECIAL EVENTS

FULTON COUNTY ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS

Submitted by John Collins, Fulton County Accountability Courts Director

The Fulton County Accountability Courts team was able to come together quickly and harness technology to maintain services during this trying time. The program is particularly thankful to the Superior Court's amazing administrative and technology services team who made it all possible. In addition to virtual treatment groups, the program moved quickly to conduct virtual court status reviews and virtual community supervision and curfew checks.

The program continues to accept referrals and new participants via virtual assessments and orientations. Most recently, the program was able to re-launch its job readiness training classes and hopes that GED classes will be available shortly via a virtual platform. Most importantly, the program has been able to provide a virtual graduation option for successful clients. The team is proud of its ability to balance participant and staff safety with continued services.

Pictured: Drug Court Coordinator, Sharon Reaves, and Veteran Court Coordinator and Emcee, Antonio Brewer



CONASAUGA DRUG COURT

Written by Mitch Talley, Whitfield County Director of Communications

Amid Pandemic, Drug Court Participants Use Zoom to Continue Recovery Support Meetings

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, two Phase 5 members of the Conasauga Drug Court program came up with an innovative way to continue offering 12-step recovery meetings. Normally, Drug Court participants are required by Superior Court to attend three recovery-based meetings each week and turn in verifiable documentation to the court. All such community-based 12-step recovery support meetings had to be canceled because of the shelter-in-place order, however. In lieu of these meetings, Drug Court participants were required to watch online recovery videos or speaker meetings and journal about their connection to what the speakers were saying and how it related to their recovery. Instead of accepting this as an alternative to their usual recovery support meetings, two of the men in the program, Paul H. and Billy H., took the initiative to purchase online Zoom accounts and initially began chairing 12-step recovery support meetings once a week. Once they were convinced this approach would work, they began hosting hour-long meetings six days a week.

Initiating the step program meeting through Zoom was not a suggestion or requirement by the drug court staff for the participants, said Rosafay Lawson, a member of the Drug Court staff. She related that the participants demonstrated motivation and leadership in an area that they saw a community need.

"Our participants recognized a gap in services not only for our program but for the recovery community as well," Lawson said. "So these two men not only stepped up as leaders in our program to provide these services for our participants, they also opened these groups to other members of the recovery community."

Lawson said they have experienced a positive ripple effect throughout the program in which female participants are doing the same thing.

"We have also witnessed smaller groups begin in the lower phases of the program in both the men's and women's group to provide peer support to each other during a time that appears so uncertain to us all," she said.

Lawson related that the drug court staff is very proud of the involved participants and humbly says thank you to these individuals for their continued efforts in supporting our program and the recovery community at large.

DEKALB COUNTY JUVENILE ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS

Submitted by Michael Carter, DeKalb County Juvenile Court Programs Supervisor

DeKalb County Juvenile Accountability Courts Use Virtual Classrooms to Educate, Rehabilitate and Graduate!

Like many other Courts in Georgia, the DeKalb County Juvenile Court has adjusted its methods of reaching the youth and families that we serve during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thinking outside the box has allowed our Accountability Courts to move forward in rehabilitating and educating youth on the dangers of the pandemic and celebrate our youth who are ready to graduate.



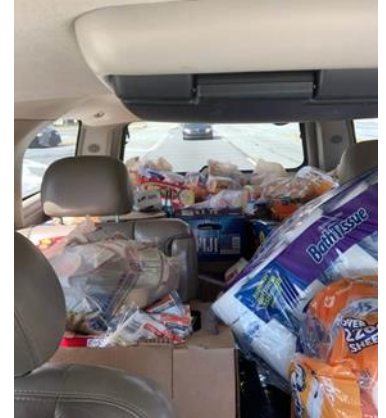
The Journey and Rebound teams are holding virtual orientations, meetings for staffing, court hearings, parent groups, and prosocial opportunities. Journey Mental Health Court and Rebound Drug Court has continued their great work in helping the youth and their families with additional resources and support during these uncertain times. Partnering agencies and the court's non-profit, DeKalb County Juvenile Justice Council, has stepped in to provide resources including tablets to ensure youth have the technology available to participate in virtual mental health sessions, programming, and school. They've delivered food and supplies to clients and provided assistance with rent and electric bills. We have banded together to ensure our youth and their parents maintain stability in the home, school, and community. Below is a small sample of the great work from each of the Accountability Courts.

JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH COURT During the pandemic, Journey has had three graduates. The mental health court for girls has seen an increase in compliance from participants with virtual therapy, obeying home and program rules, and using the skills they've learned including effective communication and conflict management. One of the most notable graduates completed her school sessions virtually and will matriculate to the 12th grade and was recently hired for her first part-time job. She continues to be in compliance with treatment and services and will be presenting her journey to the team this upcoming week during the virtual court session.

Over the next month, Journey participants will take part in an innovative eight-week girls' groups via Zoom. One of our partners will present topics to engage our young ladies on establishing and maintaining healthy relationships and boundaries; positive and productive communication with friends and family; identifying and dealing with emotions; coping skills and life stressors; self-esteem and forming words of affirmations for yourselves; peer pressure; and drug prevention. Each session will allow the participant to express themselves with the use of arts and crafts.

REBOUND DRUG COURT DeKalb County Juvenile Court's Rebound Drug Court is working very differently but still efficiently despite the challenges of the pandemic. Although things look and feel different for them as a team, they are doing their best to diligently work towards maintaining a level of consistency and excellence that is expected of them from our community.

During a virtual hearing, the Rebound team discovered that one youth had transferred to a new school during the pandemic and was having trouble connecting with his teachers to take his final tests. He was frustrated and concerned about his grades transferring and being able to pass his classes. Rebound's education advocate was on the virtual hearing and advised the youth and his mother that she would step in and connect him with his new teachers so he could take his tests. As a result, he was able to successfully complete all required assignments, exams and ended the school year with an "A" average. With school being completely virtual, our youth rely even more on the education advocate at times when there are gaps and breakdowns in



communication between families and teachers.

An upcoming highlight of Rebound will be our virtual graduation in June. We will deliver sealed packages to the families prior to the graduation. The families will open the packages during the ceremony when their names are called. The packages will contain plaques, medals, and certificates. Also prior to the virtual graduation, the youth will design their own graduation caps around something they experienced while in Rebound. A guest speaker will speak words of encouragement to our youth, as well. Rebound is proud to see the youth mature, increase their knowledge and skills through different programs, treatment and experiences they've encountered. Our team is excited to celebrate their completion of over a year of hard work.

One thing that the COVID-19 pandemic has taught all of us is that, regardless of the circumstances, a committed team with an involved community can still bring about positive outcomes for our youth.

ACCOUNTABILITY COURT GRADUATIONS

CONASAUGA DRUG COURT

Written by Mitch Talley, Whitfield County Director of Communications

Virtual Graduates: Seven residents receive their Drug Court diplomas in the first-ever graduation ceremony held via Zoom on the Internet

Nyckie says she once stayed in her room for almost a year and a half, only coming out to get more drugs.

Being honest was just not in her DNA, Kaylan admits.

Deitra says she had failed at being a mother, her life had no purpose, and she hated the person she had become.

Her addiction took everyone and everything she cared about, Beth says.

Danny used drugs every day, he says, to numb the pain from a childhood growing up with an alcoholic and absent father.

After his wife of 29 years passed away, Ronald says he needed more than alcohol to mask the pain.

Chris admits he was hardheaded, set in his ways, and thought he didn't have to follow the rules.

After battling addiction for years and finally seeking help through the Conasauga Drug Court program, these seven local residents had one more hurdle thrown in their paths over the past few weeks – the COVID-19 pandemic. But even the coronavirus wasn't enough to stop them from finally celebrating one of their biggest accomplishments in life – receiving their diplomas from the



Conasauga Drug Court program in the first "virtual" graduation ceremony on May 7 when graduates, treatment team members, and family and friends used Zoom to rejoice on the internet.

Graduation had originally been planned for March 12, but the serious illness and eventual death of treatment team member Prudence Byers forced postponement.

Then came the pandemic.

"When this virus hit, we were all very, very concerned for a lot of reasons," Drug Court Judge Jim Wilbanks said. "How does this program go forward when we're told you can't leave your home – how does this work? How do we go forward since we will not have people coming to the Accountability Court Treatment Center?"

The answer turned out to be the use of electronic technology like Zoom, the same software that allowed some 75 people to safely gather on their phones and computers to participate in last week's graduation ceremony.

"I've got to take a minute and brag on everyone involved in the Drug Court team," Wilbanks said. "That's everyone from the DA's office, public defender's office, to probation, to law enforcement, every agency, every person, all of my treatment team, my coordinator, administrator, everyone has done exceptional work in making sure that this program continued forward in a very positive way."

"It was a lot of hard work, a lot of effort," he continued. "Everybody was basically dealing with things 24/7. Treatment didn't start at 8 o'clock and end at 5 o'clock. It was 24 hours a day, seven days a week – law enforcement, surveillance, all of those folks the same way."

The judge also praised the seven graduates and other participants in the Drug Court program for doing “amazingly well” in stepping up to their responsibilities during the ongoing crisis.

“This could have been - and has been for many - a huge bump in the road of recovery,” he said. “From some of you it triggered a desire, a deep desire to relapse, to escape the hardship that COVID-19 brought with it because that’s typically what addiction is about, is escaping our realities. But you all have stood head and shoulders above what I anticipated. I apologize for not believing that we would do as well as we’ve done, that you would do as well as you’ve done, but I’m very impressed and I thank you for that because that was individual fortitude for each one of you, from each one of you to maintain your sobriety and recovery and move forward in this program.”

The ultimate goal of the program is to change the lives of the participants and their families, and each of the graduates reported major accomplishments, including holding steady jobs, maintaining funds in savings and checking accounts, buying cars and homes, and mending relationships.

That’s a far cry from the way Nyckie once lived. She says she had used drugs for nearly 25 years and started getting high when she was just 13.

“The only thing I ever wanted to do was get high and die,” she said in a letter to Judge Wilbanks that she read during the graduation ceremony. “I once stayed in my room for almost a year and a half only coming out to go get more drugs. If my family and very few friends wanted to see me, they came into my room. I was in such a dark place inside my head. I wanted to kill myself, but I did not want to cause my family any more pain than I already had. I was truly a junkie without a reason to live, or so I thought.”

She says the day she entered the courtroom shackled will stay in her mind forever. “Judge Wilbanks, you told me that this was going to be the hardest thing I ever did and that the bar was set high. You asked me what I thought about that. I said, ‘Good.’ You just looked at me and asked, ‘Why is that good?’ I told you that ‘the higher the bar was set, the higher I would reach’ and that has proven itself true!”

Nyckie says the program “took that confused, impulsive, angry, and reckless girl and shaped her into a confident, grateful and caring woman who is slow to anger and quick to help others without judgment.”

Meanwhile, life was also rough for Kaylan, who entered Drug Court with a suspended license, no vehicle, lost custody of her son, and damaged relationships with her family.

“I had lost all self-respect and had no emotions besides anger,” she admits. “My early recovery was hard. I thought I could fly under the radar and do the bare minimum to get through the program. I was rebellious and hardheaded. My attitude was awful and if there was a loophole, I was determined to find it. Being honest was just not in my DNA. I could look you straight in the eyes and lie to you with no remorse. My conscience had dissipated after years of drug use, and other people’s feelings were not my concern.”

Team members took that rocky past, however, and showed Kaylan that she didn’t necessarily have to change who she was. “You let me be myself and respected who I was,” she said, “but you just guided me and gave me suggestions on how to look at things differently and how important it was to pay attention to what I tell myself.”

Today, Kaylan says her life is “simple and that’s the way I like it.” She works Monday through Friday and sees her son on weekends, she has somewhere to call home and her own dependable vehicle, she talks to her family all the time and hangs out with them every chance she gets, she attends meetings and has an “awesome” sponsor, she has clean and sober friends she can count on, and she has a relationship with her Higher Power that is stronger than ever.

Deitra, meanwhile, says she was “a lost soul just trying to numb the pain I was feeling” and her addiction “sent my life spiraling out of control” and “pushed everyone away that cared about me.”

“I was in the darkest place I had ever been in my life,” she says. “I was in a toxic relationship that I did not know how to get out of. I had lost my job and did not have a stable home. I spent my days and nights running the streets searching for my next high. I put drugs above everything in my life. I had failed at being a mother, my life had no purpose, and I hated the person I had become.”

After she started being honest with herself and others and working through the 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous, her life began to change, however. “I learned to be responsible,” she says. “I started to accept myself for who I was, and I was happy with the person I was becoming.”

“For the first time in a long time,” she says, “I had a purpose in life.”

Today, she is proud of the mother, daughter and friend she has become and offers this message to others who may be facing their own addictions. “DON’T GIVE UP!!! Keep pushing forward even if it’s baby steps. Keep putting one foot in front of the other.”



Likewise, her addiction took everyone and everything she cared about, Beth says.

"All within a few months' time, I lost custody of my kids, lost my job, got evicted from my apartment, and my car had been totaled," she said.

About a month after being arrested in 2017, Beth was invited into the Drug Court program and says she remembers Judge Wilbanks asking her why she wanted to participate. "My response was, 'I'm going to die if I don't get help.'"

That's when her recovery gradually began, she says. "I started sharing in group, being transparent about all the pain, regret and hurt that kept me high for many years, and bit by bit I slowly started to feel the weight lift off my shoulders. I started making connections with the women in the program. I started going to NA meetings, I got a wonderful sponsor, started getting involved with service work with my home group, and started working my 12 steps. I continued to do the next right thing for the next right reason, and things started changing for me."

Now she says she's been clean for 31 months, has her own place to live and her children back at home with her, and has held a job for almost two years, among other notable achievements, and says she now wants to become a sponsor to "give back what was freely given to me."

Recovery, she says, is a beautiful process. "My message to others is to let your faith be bigger than your fear. Always have integrity with everything you do. Rip the Band-Aid off and clean out all the hurt that kept you high for many years."

Danny was in much the same boat, saying his life had little to no value before he began the Drug Court program.

"I was constantly in and out of jail, using drugs every day to numb the pain from my childhood growing up with an alcoholic and absent father," he says. "I would act out and get into trouble looking for attention in the wrong ways to cope with my core issues. Abandonment, self-esteem and trust were just a few I suffered from."

Thanks to his recovery, his life is "forever changed and is blessed," he says.

"Today, I'm a good son to my mother, I have trust back from my family, and I have my GED. I have a career that doesn't feel like work because I enjoy it that much. Dog grooming is my passion. I am involved at church and have a home group that is a big part of my recovery."

In fact, he hopes to run his own dog grooming business one day and become a sponsor and a volunteer in the community.

Danny's advice for others is to remain open minded, willing to take suggestions, be teachable, and remain consistent in your recovery. "It's not all struggles," he says. "It's what you do to push through your struggles that equals recovery!"

After losing his wife of 29 years in 2017, Ronald says he turned to alcohol and drugs to mask the pain. "Rather than mask, it was giving me an easy way out to not deal with my emotions. I truly thought I was going to eventually do enough drugs to take my own life. I was at a point where I was okay with dying."

After entering the program, though, he began to feel that his life was worthwhile, "that I did matter." Now he says he has "a great family who trust me" and "a loving and understanding fiancé whom I can't wait to spend my life with," not to mention "a job of a lifetime with lots of promise."

He suggests to others: "If you have something on your heart, please talk to someone now. This is the true way to find healing!"

Chris, meanwhile, is a second generation alcoholic and addict and says he had "a rough upbringing where rules did not apply and respect was not given, it was taken."

While his road to recovery was "not smooth," Chris says his life "looks good" today after earning his GED and getting a good job, a good home life, and the desire to stay clean and sober. "I also now have the knowledge and tools to stay clean," he says, offering the advice to others that things achieved the right way will have a better chance of working out the right way.

Judge Wilbanks says he is proud of the achievements of all seven graduates but reminded them that the Drug Court program will always be there to help them if needed.

"You're all a part of this family," he said. "That family doesn't end. It is something that we are here for you. If you ever need to come back and you want to come in for group sessions or individual sessions, contact Drug Court and we'll be happy to embrace you and provide you with whatever assistance or support you may need. Do not, do not, do not fail to do that, and get yourself in trouble."

Wilbanks says his motivation for leading Drug Court is simple: "So I can read these letters and I can have these graduations and I can hear from these graduates as to how they have literally saved their lives, saved their families' lives, and put their families back together, put their lives back together. And it all started with changing their thoughts and changing their lives, which is one of the basic principles that we teach in Drug Court."

RESOURCES

Appeared on the Council of State Court Governments website



The Critical Role of Courts in Diverting People to Care

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, state and local governments were working to minimize criminal justice system involvement for people who don't pose a public safety risk. As communities battle high infection rates in prisons and jails, diverting people with behavioral health needs from correctional facilities to care is even more vital. And court personnel can play a crucial role in directing people to community-based supports. To read more, visit https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/faq-a-look-into-court-based-behavioral-health-diversion-interventions/?mc_cid=67a8f9355c&mc_eid=aa8638ab2e.

Improving Responses to People Who Have Co-occurring Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorders in Jail

People with co-occurring mental illnesses and substance use disorders—also known simply as co-occurring disorders—have complex needs that require integrated responses across jails and behavioral health systems. However, staff often do not know how many people with co-occurring disorders reside in the jail or do not know how to respond when they recognize the symptoms. This brief outlines how jail administrators and staff can improve their responses to this population by implementing practices that focus on identification and provision of services: conducting standard screening and assessment for both, linking people to services through collaborative comprehensive case management, and assessing effectiveness through regular performance measurement tactics. To read more, visit <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/improving-responses-to-people-who-have-co-occurring-mental-illnesses-and-substance-use-disorders-in-jails/>.



FAQ: A Look into Jail-Based Behavioral Health Diversion Interventions

This fact sheet is a complement to Behavioral Health Diversion Interventions: Moving from Individual Programs to a Systems-Wide Strategy (see below), which talks about developing a community-wide diversion plan across the criminal justice continuum, but notes that communities will need to determine priorities based on their specific needs. In this publication, we answer some common questions from people who may want to invest in jail-based diversion, such as why set up this type of intervention, who can implement it, what are some common best practices, and where and what can people be diverted to? To read more, visit

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/faq-a-look-into-jail-based-behavioral-health-diversion-interventions/>.



Developing Effective Working Relationships with Victims and Offenders

Friday, June 5, 2020 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM EDT

Comprehensive Approach to Offender Management

Thursday, June 18, 2020 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM EDT

Motivational Interviewing 101

Wednesday, July 8, 2020 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM EDT

Introduction to Cognitive Behavior Therapy/Skill Development

Wednesday, August 19, 2020 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM EDT

Introduction to the Neurobiology of Trauma

Wednesday, September 9, 2020 | 2:00 PM – 3:30 PM EDT

To register for the free webinar series, visit <https://ncjtc.fvtc.edu/training>.



New Webinar: Improving Cultural Competence across the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM)

JUNE 29, 2020, 2:30–4:00 P.M. ET

Across all intercepts of the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM), disproportionate representation of some racial and ethnic groups, including people within those groups with mental and substance use disorders, may stem from both community-based and criminal justice issues that hinder access to culturally responsive treatments and resources. Efforts to reduce disproportionality and improve equity and inclusion should be based on a data-driven approach that identifies drivers of disparities, incorporates culturally responsive services, and considers bias when implementing assessment tools and evidence-based practices. This webinar, hosted by SAMHSA's GAINS Center, will provide participants with practical strategies to reduce racial and ethnic disproportionality among individuals with mental and/or substance use disorders who are interfacing with the justice system.

For more information, visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/gains-center>.

REMINDERS

- ❖ Please send submissions for the July 2020 newsletter to Debbie Mott (debbie.mott@georgiacourts.gov) by Friday, June 26. If you plan to include a photo where participants can be identified, please be sure to include a signed photo consent with your submission.

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