



# COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES OF GEORGIA

MARCH 2021

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## ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS NEWS

### TROUP COUNTY ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS

*Submitted by Hillard Daniel, Troup County Drug Court and Family Treatment Court Coordinator*



Eight years ago, Bill Dollar of Hogansville was approached by Clinton Hughes, the Pastor of Hogansville First Baptist Church, and asked to start their Celebrate Recovery program. "I really felt that God was speaking to me at that moment," said Bill, who, unbeknownst to himself, needed the recovery program as much as the people he would be serving. "I struggled with alcohol up until the day that I was asked to start Celebrate Recovery. I told Pastor Hughes that I was a drinker, and he told me that he had no idea, but that is the thing about addicts, we hide it well, don't we?" Shortly after starting the Celebrate Recovery Program, Bill was introduced to the Accountability Courts in Troup County. During his eight years with Celebrate Recovery, Bill has developed a relationship with the four Accountability Courts that operate within Troup County. "I've noticed that some of the Accountability Court participants that come to Celebrate Recovery aren't initially interested in what we are

teaching; they are just coming to satisfy a requirement. So many realize later on, however, that neither us nor the courts are trying to change them, we are trying to help them. I have heard so many court participants as they come up on their graduation date credit drug court for saving their lives, and I am able to see that myself. I am truly thankful to live in a County that treats someone that is suffering from an addiction as a person."

A few months ago, Bill was teaching one of his Life Lessons Bible Study classes and a thought was brought forward by the group: Why don't we put these lessons into a podcast? So that's what they did! Hogansville Baptist Church gave half of the funds needed to purchase the necessary equipment to start the podcast, and the Celebrate Recovery group raised the other half. Now every Sunday, for an hour after their usual recovery program, you can find a rotating cast of five men recording thoughts on some of the most intimate experiences of their lives and the lessons they learned from them, such as being in denial of their addiction and difficulties with past relationships. Gary Blanks is a 2020 graduate of the Felony Adult Drug Court and one of the reoccurring hosts. "Drug Court and Celebrate Recovery really showed me that I have a purpose in my life and that purpose is to help others," said Blanks. "Recovery was something that I couldn't do alone, and even now I'm learning so much about myself."

Kevin Folds is another host and is currently an active participant in the Family Treatment Court. "There are a lot of people out there struggling with the same experiences that I have had in my life, and I want to try my best to spread a little hope." Seven months ago, Folds said he started thinking about what life will be like after graduating from the Family Treatment Court, and he knew that developing a sober network would be one of the best things he could do for himself. "I became more involved with Celebrate Recovery and came to the conclusion that I needed to do whatever it takes to stay on my recovery." Since starting the podcast, Folds



said he and the other hosts have developed a bond stronger than friendship and more like family. "If you don't have that good, strong, sober network, it is so much easier to fail," he said.



As of February 21, five episodes of the ARISE Ministry Podcast have been recorded and, according to Dollar, the average audience for each episode has been about 2,000 people.

"The whole point of this podcast is to reach those people that feel they are suffering in their addiction alone," said Blanks, "and let them know that they aren't alone. I haven't accomplished much in my life, but I feel that this is one of the best things I have ever done." In addition to Dollar, Blanks, and Folds, Wade Whitlock, another graduate of the Felony Drug Court, and Randy Brady fill out the cast of rotating hosts. Right now, you can find all episodes of the podcast on the ARISE Ministry Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/ARISE-ministry-338915440629119>). The group hopes to expand to other platforms in the near future.

*Pictured left to right: Gary Blanks, Bill Dollar, Wade Whitlock, Randy Brady, Kevin Folds*

## ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS GRADUATIONS

### LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT DRUG COURT

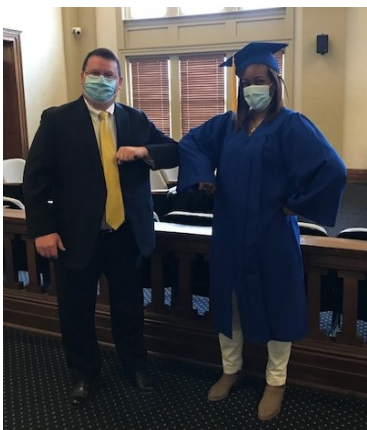
*Submitted by Gretchen Neal, Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit Drug Court Coordinator*



The Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit Adult Felony Drug Court held its sixth graduation ceremony on January 7, 2021 with the Honorable Don Thompson presiding.

Due to COVID-related restrictions, each graduate was permitted to bring two guests. The remaining participants joined the ceremony via Zoom. Additionally, one of the graduates was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer approximately three months prior to the graduation date. Her compromised immune system made attending in person too risky, so she joined via Zoom, as well. The Drug Court team delivered a cap and gown, along with her graduation certification, so she could participate fully with her graduating class.

Each graduate was given an opportunity to share personal highlights and special lessons learned. During their time of sharing, each graduate expressed thanks to those who impacted them over the last two years. One of the requirements for the graduate is to present their relapse prevention plan to the Drug Court team. Each graduate is also encouraged to highlight their plan during their presentation at the graduation ceremony, and all four of the graduates in this class chose to do so.



## FULTON COUNTY ACCOUNTABILITY COURT

*Submitted by John Collins, Fulton County Accountability Court Director*

On January 29, the Fulton County Accountability Court celebrated the graduation of four Behavioral Health Treatment Court, seven Drug Court, and two Veteran Court participants. FCAC would like to thank Fulton County Board of Commissioner's Vice Chair Natalie Hall, Commissioner for District 4, for delivering her congratulations to the graduates. The graduates were able to gather, while social distancing, with other attendees joining via Zoom and YouTube. One graduate delivered a heartfelt, self-authored poem (featured to the right), and the Hope and Healing Foundation sponsored gift bags and refreshments that helped celebrate the graduates.

The transition ceremony highlighted the changes the participants have experienced through their hard work in the program. Superior Court Judges Rachel Krause, Emily Richardson, Robert McBurney, and Henry Newkirk met with each graduate individually via Zoom to share their congratulations.

FGTV link to Drug Court and Veterans Court graduation clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvvkqPq44ms>



Today my friends...

Is the most important day and

I want to share the excitement I have with you all

If I may

The road we travelled to get here

Was challenging to say the least

But the things we acquired along the way

Have made our recovery a beast

We've strived, stayed strong, stuck to our guns, and been true and

There is nothing we won't be able to do

We've helped each other grow and change from day to day and

We know the things we've learned in this building

Will always help us along the way

We are no longer puppets for anything attempting to control our lives

We are now born again, the world sees us with new eyes

When we leave here today, never again be afraid, or worried

Always be calm and keep your head cool

Because for every problem we could possibly face

We have been given a specific tool

To God we are thankful for our 2<sup>nd</sup> chance and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>

With this chance will show true change

No more need for self-pity or remorse

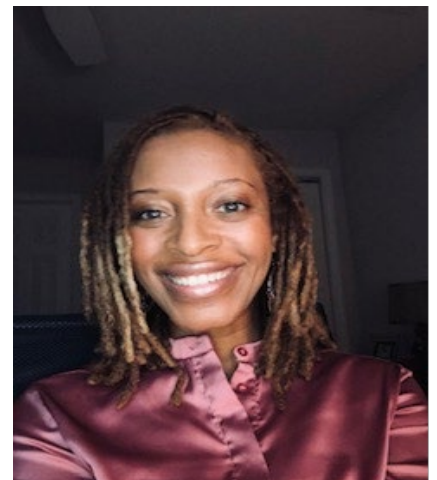
As we leave this place today

Go forth, be the best, change someone's world, continue winning

## COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES NEWS

### LASHEIKA KASSA TO SERVE AS DIRECTOR OF DEKALB COUNTY ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS

Lasheika Kassa was hired in January 2016 with the Council of Accountability Court Judges. She was one of the Council's first hiring decisions. She faithfully served as a certification officer, then as the first treatment fidelity program monitor, and prior to her departure, the treatment fidelity program manager. In her role as the treatment fidelity program manager, she provided direction to and oversight of the unique, evidence-based fidelity monitoring program, which she developed. She trained over 150 treatment professionals in the Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for Substance Users curriculum and provided various trainings to countless judges, coordinators, and accountability court team members. She was instrumental in assisting with conference planning and worked closely





with the Training Committee to help execute several trainings across the state. Ms. Kassa will now serve as the Director of Accountability Courts for DeKalb County.

"It goes without saying that I, along with the entire CACJ staff, will miss Lasheika," said Taylor Jones, CACJ Executive Director. "She has never wavered in her faithful support for Georgia's accountability courts or the Council. It has been wonderful to watch her work and grow over the past five years. I can't wait to witness the great things that she will accomplish next. Thank you for your dedication and service. See you soon!"

Please join CACJ Staff in thanking Ms. Kassa for her work with CACJ and wishing her well in her new role with DeKalb County!

#### APRIL 2021 NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

Please send submissions for the April 2021 newsletter to Debbie Mott ([Debbie.Mott@GeorgiaCourts.gov](mailto:Debbie.Mott@GeorgiaCourts.gov)) by Friday, March 26. If you plan to include a photo where participants can be identified, please be sure to send a signed photo consent with your submission.

#### GEORGIA ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS JOB POSTINGS

Please see the Career Opportunities tab (under About Us) on the CACJ website for information about these job postings:

Drug Court Coordinator – Enotah Judicial Circuit (South)  
Laboratory Technician – Hall County  
Drug Court Counselor – Hall County  
Case Manager – Rockdale County Juvenile Drug Court  
Counselor – DeKalb County



#### TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES



#### Webinar: Mitigating Trauma in the Courthouse by Understanding Changes to the Brain

THURSDAY, MARCH 11 | 2:00 P.M. ET

NADCP's Drug Court U invites you to join a [free, 90-minute webinar](#) on the science behind substance use and trauma in the brain. Treatment court judge and neuropharmacology expert Judge Kim McGinnis takes viewers through the science of brain change in those experiencing substance misuse or trauma. With time permitting, the speaker will answer questions from viewers.

Substance use and trauma change brain architecture, leading to frustrating or unexpected behaviors. This session will discuss structural changes commonly found in the brains of people struggling with substance misuse and trauma, which will help us understand some of our participants' frustrating behaviors.

At the end of this sessions, attendees will:

- Learn practical suggestions for making your courthouses more welcoming, including environment, language, and rules reduction.
- Learn how trauma and substance misuse change are potential barriers to case plan progress.
  - Realize participants' repeated return to use and trauma responses.

To register: [Webinar Registration - Zoom](#)



### **Equity and Inclusion Training for Your Treatment Court Team**

Registration is open now for virtual [Equity and Inclusion Training](#) developed by NADCP in partnership with the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President.

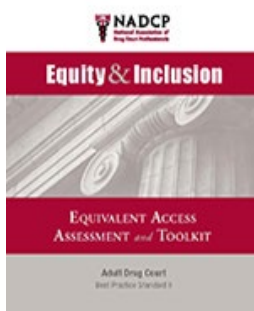
This training, based on NADCP's Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standard II, is designed for jurisdictions interested in addressing racial disparities and bias to ensure equivalent access, retention, treatment, incentives and sanctions, and dispositions.

Register soon: the all-day, fully virtual training is available on only five dates in 2021 and has limited capacity. Applicants must have commitment from their full, multidisciplinary team to be considered.

Available training dates (all trainings are presented from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. local time):

- May 7; Central Time
- May 13; Eastern Time
- May 14; Eastern Time
- May 21; Mountain Time
- May 28; Pacific Time

### **[Learn More and Apply](#)**



### **More Groundbreaking Equity and Inclusion Resources from NADCP**

NADCP has several free tools for treatment courts to help ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes by ensuring equity and inclusion in their programs. All resources, including the groundbreaking equity and inclusion toolkit and assessment tool, are available to download now. [View Equity and Inclusion Resources](#)



## **Early Diversion Virtual Learning Community Part 1: Strategies for Addressing Treatment Engagement Challenges with Certain Individuals**

MARCH 25, 2021, 2:00-3:00 P.M. ET; DISCUSSION GROUP 3:00-4:00 P.M. ET

The Early Diversion Virtual Learning Community kicks off its five-part series on enhancing systems responses for people with mental and substance use disorders who are justice-involved or at risk for justice involvement. Join this webinar and interactive discussion group about strategies and tools for addressing common barriers to treatment engagement for people who cycle through homelessness, incarceration, and crisis services. [Register for Webinar and Discussion Group Now](#)



## **Innovations to Support Drug Treatment Court Programs during COVID-19: Spotlight on Technology to Improve Participant Experiences**

MARCH 24, 2021, 2:30-4:00 P.M. ET

Treatment courts, including drug courts, typically engage in a highly collaborative and hands-on approach to support individuals experiencing substance use disorders. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on drug treatment court programs and their ability to serve clients. While an increasing number of drug treatment court programs have begun to incorporate technology and teleservices into programming during COVID-19, implementation barriers are a common occurrence. This webinar will present recent findings from the National Drug Court Institute's survey of Bureau of Justice Assistance grantees on how drug treatment court programs across the country made changes and adopted innovations to minimize interruptions to programming during COVID-19, as well as lessons learned to date. Spotlights from a local drug treatment court program utilizing virtual platforms for streamlining services during the pandemic will highlight practical strategies for increasing program participation and improving participant experience through the use of technology. [Register for the Webinar](#)

### **RESOURCES**

In partnership with the State Bar, the strategic plan of Georgia's Judicial Council includes a wellness component supporting wellness and good mental health for everyone in the Georgia judicial branch. A joint venture of the Bar and Council will include a Suicide Awareness Program and a separate Wellness Program. Linked is a pandemic resource: [Addressing the Mental Health and Well-Being of Judges and Court Employees](#)



## 2021 Annual Training Conference



September 26 - 29, 2021

Accountability Court Teams Paving New Roads to  
Recovery and Continuing to Shine Bright !



The 6th Annual Training Conference will be held at the  
Classic Center in Athens, Georgia.

Details for conference registration will be available in Spring 2021. Please continue to monitor the  
CACJ website at [www.cacj.georgia.gov](http://www.cacj.georgia.gov) for the most up to date information.