

MMHC NEWSLETTER

this issue

- The highly anticipated
Misdemeanor Mental
Health Court P. 1
Graduate Gab P.1
DeKalb Full Court
Press P.2
Raving about our
Retiree P.2
Spotlight On P.3
Mental Matters:
Depressive Disorders
P.3



CHIEF MAGISTRATE

Beryl A. Anderson

SENIOR RETIRED CHIEF

MAGISTRATE/FOUNDER

Winston P. Bethel

EDITOR PRESIDING JUDGE

Rhathelia Stroud

CONTRIBUTORS

Judge Stroud, Sharla Taylor

DESIGN/PRODUCTION

Sharla Y. Taylor, Ingrid George

Rhathelia Stroud

The Highly Anticipated Misdemeanor Mental Health Court

Welcome to the newly redeveloped and expanded DeKalb County, Georgia Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC). The MMHC is a pre-plea and post-plea deferred sentencing Accountability Court. The MMHC was formerly the Diversion Treatment Court, which was established in May 2001 and is the longest-running court of its kind. The MMHC accepts misdemeanor cases and is a 2016 collaboration between community stakeholders such as the DeKalb Solicitor General, the Circuit Public Defender, the Sheriff's Department, Adult Probation, Pre-Trial Services, Magistrate Court of DeKalb County and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) DeKalb.

The overarching mission of the court is "to decriminalize mentally ill offenders by offering treatment instead of incarceration." Accordingly, the primary goals of the MMHC are to: 1) connect criminal defendants who suffer from serious mental illness to treatment services in the community; 2) find appropriate alternative sentencing dispositions to criminal charges, taking into consideration the facts of each case and prior criminal history; 3) ensure public safety; 4) reduce recidivism; 5) eliminate and end or reduce violence or re-arrest through appropriate mental health treatment and intensive case management and judicial oversight; and 6) increase collaboration between the court, community mental health providers and mental health advocates.

The length of MMHC participation is 12 months and includes regular court appearances before the judge to monitor treatment progress and compliance. Upon successful completion of the MMHC, alternative sentencing and dispositions to the offenses reflect that a sentence will be vacated and or charge(s) will be dismissed and records restricted if post-plea and dismissal and record restriction if pre-plea.

Participation in the MMHC is voluntary and a participant must be willing to engage in mental health treatment on an ongoing basis. A participant also must be willing to sign a release of information for details pertaining to their mental health treatment, substance abuse, legal status and history to be shared with the MMHC team. This information is needed to develop an appropriate individualized case management plan for each participant.

More information about the DeKalb County Misdemeanor Mental Health Court is available at www.dekalbmisdemeanormentalhealthcourt.org. You may also contact the Court's Coordinator, Sharla Y. Taylor via email at sytaylor@dekalbcountyga.gov or the Court's Clinical Director, Dr. Vickie Jester, via email at vjester@dekalbcountyga.gov or directly at 404-371-7042.



Congratulations to the recent DeKalb Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC) graduate Ms. P, who completed 12 months in MMHC on January 25, 2018!

Ms. P entered the MMHC in January 2017 on a misdemeanor charge of Family Violence Battery (FVB). She was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder in 2016, and had undergone multiple hospitalizations. However, when Ms. P entered the MMHC, she was extremely enthusiastic and full of energy. She was also an active participant and was even working part-time while enrolled as a full-time student at Georgia State University (GSU).

The first half of her participation in MMHC went well as she attended all required groups and kept all mental health appointments. However, MMHC staff observed changes in her behavior and noticed that Ms. P was experiencing many challenges in the areas of family, relationships, work, school and mental health care. Ms. P later conceded that she stopped attending mental health appointments and was facing challenges with maintaining her work and school schedules. Her grades fell and she was denied financial aid therefore being forced to take a leave from GSU. During that time, the court provided additional support to Ms. P and aided her in attending mental health appointments. Once Ms. P was back to her treatment regime, she greatly improved and began participating in the Emerging Adult Support Services (EASS) through her mental health center. EASS is a program designed for young adults ages 16-25, recently diagnosed with a mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder. The group provides education and support. Ms. P credits the EASS with increasing her understanding of her illness and providing a safe space to discuss personal issues. She expressed an interest in returning to GSU and the court in turn wrote a letter in support of reinstating her financial aid. At the time of graduation from the MMHC, Ms. P had regained her balance and productivity, and she had begun courses again at GSU. She continues to work part-time and expressed gratitude to MMHC for all the support and opportunities afforded to her while being a participant in the MMHC.

DEKALB FULL COURT PRESS BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT
A SLAM DUNK FOR MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY



Full Court Press Kickoff Event, which was held March 9, 2018 with Law Enforcement, First Responders and Legal Entities in and around DeKalb County! Come and join us!

- Who:** Hosted by the DeKalb Criminal Justice Treatment Coalition, Inc. (DCJTC)*, with support from law enforcement, first responders, legal entities and supporters in and around DeKalb County.
- What:** A basketball tournament and mental health awareness event
- Where:** Decatur Active Living Center
231 Sycamore Street
Decatur, GA 30030
- When:** Saturday, April 21, 2018 9am – 6pm and
Sunday, April 22, 2018 1pm – 5 pm
- Why:** Proceeds from the tournament will fund programs and services for participants in the DeKalb County Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC).
- Cost:** \$5 (Adults 12 & up), \$3 (children (ages 3 to 11), children 3 & under free

*The DeKalb Criminal Justice Treatment Coalition, Inc. (DCJTC) is the 501(c)(3) Foundation to the MMHC that also serves as its Advisory Council. The DCJTC is comprised of mental health care professionals such as psychiatrists, attorneys, treatment providers, National Alliance on Mental Illness representatives and family members of those challenged with mental illness, who work on behalf of the MMHC to ensure best practices that comply with codified mental health court standards.

“The participants could always tell Chip was a genuine person and cared about their well-being. He had an open-door policy with them where they could call or come see him at any time. His relationship with his participants was so valuable, that even after they graduated from the Court, they would still call and come by to see him occasionally.”

-Pretrial Services Director
Braddy Smith

“Mr. Forte has a wealth of knowledge and experience, both professionally and in everyday life. He had a way of relating to the MMHC participants that was respectful yet he could ‘keep it real’. Mr. Forte had a heart for the MMHC participants and they knew he cared.”

- MMHC Clinical Director
Vickie M. Jester PhD., LCSW

“Chip’s success as a case manager was because of his ability to relate and calm his participants, regardless of the circumstance. His connectivity with them was superb, which resulted in a unique bond.”

-MMHC Presiding Judge
Honorable Rhathelia Stroud

Raving about our Retiree



Pictured from left to right:

Judge Winston P. Bethel, Retired Senior Judge and Founder of MMHC, Judge Rhathelia Stroud, Presiding Judge, MMHC, Bedford “Chip” Forte, MMHC Program Coordinator, and Chief Magistrate Court Judge, Berryl A. Anderson at Chip’s farewell bowling celebration.

After 11 years of dedicated service with DeKalb County Government, we bid our “see you later” to our recent retiree and MMHC Coordinator, Bedford “Chip” Forte. Mr. Forte’s success as the MMHC Coordinator was attributed to his amazing ability to relate to the participants, his extensive knowledge of mental illness and his dedication to the Magistrate Court of DeKalb County. Although Mr. Forte will be greatly missed, and we are saddened to see him leave, we wish him great success and happiness in retirement.



And so, the adventure begins...



"Never give up on someone with a mental illness. When "I" is replaced with "we", illness becomes wellness"

- Shannon L. Adler

Mental Matters

Depressive Disorders (Including Major Depressive Disorder)

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), depressive disorders are among the most common mental health disorders in the United States. They are characterized by a sad, hopeless, empty, or irritable mood, and somatic and cognitive changes that significantly interfere with daily life. Major depressive disorder (MDD) is defined as having a depressed mood for most of the day and a marked loss of interest or pleasure, among other symptoms present nearly every day for at least a two-week period. In children and adolescents, MDD may manifest as an irritable rather than a sad disposition. Suicidal thoughts or plans can occur during an episode of major depression, which can require immediate attention (to be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a local crisis center, people can call 1-800-272-TALK (8255) anytime 24/7).

Based on the [2014 National Survey Drug Use and Health data](#), 6.6% of adults aged 18 or older had a major depressive episode (MDE) in 2014, which was defined by the 4th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV). The NSDUH data also show that the prevalence of MDE among adolescents aged 12 to 17 was 11.4% in 2014, while female youths were about three times as likely as male youths to experience a MDE.

MDD is thought to have many possible causes, including genetic, biological, and environmental factors. Adverse childhood experiences and stressful life experiences are known to contribute to risk for MDD. In addition, those with closely related family members (for example, parents or siblings) who are diagnosed with the disorder are at increased risk.

A diagnosis for MDD at a minimum requires that symptoms of depressed mood (for example, feelings of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness) and loss of interest or pleasure in activities are present. Additional symptoms may include significant weight loss or gain, insomnia or hypersomnia, feelings of restlessness, lethargy, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, distractibility, and recurrent thoughts of death, including suicidal ideation. Symptoms must be present for at least two-weeks and cause significant impairment or dysfunction in daily life.

For information about the treatment of depressive disorders, visit SAMHSA's [Treatments for Mental Disorders](#) page. Find more information about depressive disorder on the [NIMH website](#).

SPOTLIGHT ON

Sharla Taylor



In October 2017, Sharla Taylor became the newest member of the DeKalb Misdemeanor Mental Health Court as the Court Coordinator. She oversees Court administration and operations. In addition, she coordinates court calendars, monitors court effectiveness and facilitates presentations to educate and garner support from the community. Additionally, Ms. Taylor has experience working in the criminal justice arena. She is excited to be a part of a team

whose mission is to "decriminalize mentally ill offenders by offering treatment instead of incarceration" and looks forward to fulfilling her passion to help others.

JOIN US FOR AN OBSERVATION OF A MISDEMEANOR MENTAL HEALTH COURT SESSION

You are welcome to observe a MMHC court session. MMHC convenes every Thursday at 9:00a.m with the exception 5th Thursdays of each month.

DeKalb County Courthouse,
Magistrate Court of DeKalb County
First floor, Courtroom 1200 D

For further information, or if you would like to receive the MMHC newsletter or submit an article for consideration, contact:

Dr. Vickie Jester, Clinical Director
vjester@dekalbcountyga.gov
phone 404-371-7042

Sharla Taylor, Coordinator
[syttaylor@dekalbcountyga.gov](mailto:sytaylor@dekalbcountyga.gov)
phone 404-371-3254

Ingrid George, Administrative Assistant
ihgeorge@dekalbcountyga.gov
phone 404-371-2241,
fax 404-371-2683

Meet the Misdemeanor Mental Health Court Interdisciplinary Team

Judge Rhathelia Stroud, Presiding Judge

Judge Winston Bethel, Senior Retired Chief Magistrate & Founder

Judge Lindsay R. M. Jones, Alternate Presiding Judge

Vickie Jester, PhD, MMHC Clinical Director

Sharla Taylor, MMHC Court Coordinator

Vanessa Bernstein, Public Defender

Kimberly Croom, DeKalb Sheriff's Office

Rhonda Haile, Jail Mental Health

Braddye Smith, Pretrial Services Director

Jerry Smith, DeKalb Community Service Board

Denienne Steele, Assistant Solicitor-General

Officer Regina Taylor, DeKalb State Court Probation



*Magistrate Court of DeKalb County
Misdemeanor Mental Health Court*

Judge Berryll A. Anderson, Chief Magistrate

www.dekalbmisdemeanormentalhealthcourt.org