



DEKALB MISDEMEANOR MENTAL HEALTH COURT

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this issue

Q & A with Judge
Rhathelia Stroud
P. 1

Graduate Gab
P.2

Q & A (cont'd)
P. 3

Stress and Burnout
P. 4

Spotlight On...
P. 4

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Q & A with Judge Rhathelia Stroud



On December 7, 2020, Judge Rhathelia Stroud, Presiding Judge of the Misdemeanor Mental Health Court, was featured in an article published by SAM-HSA's GAINS Center. The focus of the article was to learn more information about the DeKalb County Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC). Please see the published article below.

The Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC), formerly the Diversion Treatment Court, is the longest-running mental health court of its kind in Georgia. What outcomes are you most proud to see come from this program?

One of the most significant outcomes is that, as the Diversion Treatment Court, our court evaluation revealed an eight-percent recidivism rate among our graduated participants, which suggests many are not returning to the criminal justice system. However, that evaluation was conducted approximately 10 years ago. Since that time, the court has

evolved to include dedicated full-time staff members, including a coordinator, a case manager, a licensed master social worker, and a part-time licensed clinical social worker. The MMHC now offers in-house, gender-specific group therapy, Thinking for a Change group cognitive behavioral therapy, and a National Alliance on Mental Illness group. In addition, the court's partnerships with entities like the public defender, solicitor general, probation, jail mental health, the Council of Accountability Court Judges, Institute of Continuing Judicial Education, Community Service Board, and the Georgia Public Safety Training Center—which are all critical to our work—have expanded to the benefit of our participant base.

Further, the court's 501(c)(3) DeKalb Criminal Justice Treatment Coalition became active. It provides unbelievable support to the court and its participant base in the form of housing and utility assistance, food and medication assistance, along with educational expense assistance. When the MMHC is re-evaluated soon, with the court's involvement and growth, we hope the recidivism rate will have decreased further, and the productivity and success of the graduated participants will have increased significantly.

Finally, we believe the MMHC to be a flagship of sorts here in Georgia as the first and longest-running court of its kind, especially since there are now 43 adult mental health courts in Georgia and codified standards for them.

In the 9 years you have been the presiding judge, is there a story from a case you heard that signifies the importance of this work?

Yes, last year we had a young man about the age of 22 or 23 enrolled in our court. His mother's boyfriend, who was only 23 himself, got into a fight with our participant, who was attempting to protect his mother, about age 45. Our participant was preparing to come to court at the time, but instead called the authorities, then contacted his case manager to alert them of the situation and notify them that he would not make it to court. Amazingly, his mother aligned herself with her boyfriend to get our participant, her own son, arrested. Fortunately, it did not work. This young man, who worked hard and had been promoted to manager at his job, moved into his own place with the support of his girlfriend and her mother. Just prior to completing our court, he tested and was accepted into a branch of the U.S. military. This young man took advantage of the various therapies and other opportunities offered through the court and engaged with his mental health providers about his diagnosis. He worked hard the entire time he was with us. This was a proud moment and a great story for our court. We are eagerly awaiting his update!

(continued on page 3)

Resource Information

Hotlines & Helplines

SAMHSA's National Helpline

1-800- 662-HELP (4357) or
1-800-487-4889 (TDD)

(<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>): Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential information and treatment referral for mental and substance use disorders in English and Spanish.

SAMHSA's

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

(<https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>):

Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

Crisis Text Line

TEXT HOME to 741741

(<https://www.crisistextline.org/>):

Provides 24/7 support for individuals experiencing a crisis via text message.

Graduate Gab

We are proud to highlight three recent graduates of MMHC!



Congratulations to Ms. P., a 37-year-old African American female who completed the DeKalb County Misdemeanor Mental Health Court in September 2020. Ms. P. entered the MMHC after being arrested for Theft by Shoplifting. Ms. P., a devoted mother of three children has a diagnosis of Schizoaffective disorder. While participating in MMHC, Ms. P. faced some challenges with her housing. The DeKalb Criminal Justice Treatment Coalition, Inc. (DCJTC) was able to step in to assist Ms. P. with maintaining a stable housing environment. Ms. P. also had some domestic issues at home. The MMHC interdisciplinary team intervened and offered Ms. P. more clinical support to manage the stressors at home. The court increased Ms. P.'s sessions in the gender-specific group to help her develop alternative coping mechanisms. Ms. P. also made connections to her local NAMI group for crisis intervention and support services. Ms. P. now has ongoing support to maintain her mental health and wellbeing.

Congratulations to Mr. P., a 22-year-old Asian male who completed the DeKalb County Misdemeanor Mental Health Court in September 2020. Mr. P. entered the MMHC program after being arrested for Family Violence and Battery. Mr. P., a budding student at a local university, has a diagnosis of Bipolar disorder with psychotic features. Mr. P. encountered some challenges while in school due to his inconsistency with his mental health treatment ultimately causing him to have to withdraw from school. The MMHC interdisciplinary team worked with Mr. P. and his family to help them locate appropriate mental health care. The team connected Mr. P. with a therapist and a psychiatrist for long term, consistent treatment. Additionally, the team connected Mr. P. to his local NAMI group for crisis intervention and support services. Before graduating from MMHC, Mr. P. reenrolled in school and now has a stable support system.



"Names are always safeguarded or redacted in order to protect the identity of the Participants"

Q & A with Judge Rhathelia Stroud (cont'd)



Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL)
1-800-715-4225



CARES Warm Line
1-844-326-5400
Substance Abuse Challenges
Call or Text Every Day of The Year
8:30AM - 11:00PM



COVID-19 Hotline (844) 442-2681

The State of Georgia has a new COVID-19 hotline. If you believe that you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed to the novel coronavirus, please contact your primary care doctor or an urgent care clinic. Please do not show up unannounced at an emergency room or health care facility.

What advice do you have for others involved in operating a mental health court?

One of the most important pieces of advice I can offer is this—please understand that those we serve suffer from mental health disorders, and as such, are not perfect beings and will sometimes decompensate. But although they relapse or decompensate, all is not lost. Yes, the challenge has intensified, but the opportunity to get them back on track still exists. It's remarkable what a court team's commitment to staying with these individuals garners from them. Many of our court participants have experienced abandonment and lack of support and, sadly, expect more of the same.

Also, embrace the concept of self-care for court staff; it's critically important!

From your years of experience and leadership, what innovations or changes do you foresee as critical regarding how we serve individuals with mental or substance use disorders who become involved in the justice system?

The question I often get from family and community is, "Why do they have to commit a crime before they can get the type of help offered through the accountability court?" This is a critical issue and a fair question. I was happy to hear about and see the release of SAMHSA's National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care—Best Practice Toolkit, which I believe can begin to help answer that question. There are also structured projects in Arizona and New Mexico that give law enforcement a tangible option to not arrest an individual and instead take them somewhere to get an immediate assessment and, ultimately, the help they need, versus a jail cell. If they take an individual to one of the project's emergency receiving facilities, they are guaranteed a 30-minute sign-in and sign-out. The option must be tangible, present, and accessible to police, or they will choose what is—jails, which are de facto mental health hospitals. There are also a few crisis stabilization units in Georgia, and I would like to see those developed across the nation. I want to see those experiencing serious mental illness able to get the same treatment and care regardless of what state, city, or county they reside in and call home.

At the end of the day, what is your greatest hope to have accomplished through your role as a judge?

An understanding that a large part of this population (those thrust into the criminal justice system because of the symptoms of their mental health disorder) can and do function and participate productively in family, community, society, and relationships just as others of us do. This can be achieved via concerted effort, commitment to getting them into treatment for the first time or back in treatment, appropriately medicated, and engaged with other therapies (e.g., gender-specific groups, Thinking for a Change cognitive-behavioral curriculum, peer support). Good stories, great outcomes, decreased recidivism, and committed court teams promote this narrative and bear witness to this truth daily.

I also hope to impart somehow that a sensitive, compassionate, and passionate judge who does this work is not a soft judge, but one that is committed to and sees and engages humanity under these uniquely challenging circumstances.



The Georgia COVID-19 Emotional Support Line provides 24/7 free and confidential assistance to callers needing emotional support or resource information as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Emotional Support Line is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals and others who have received training in crisis counseling

A partnership between The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities, Beacon Health Options and Behavioral Health Link

Mental Matters



"Mental health...is not a destination, but a process. It's about how you drive, not where you're going."

— Noam Shpancer, PhD

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 of the 5th Thursdays of each month. Please contact for COVID -19 updates.

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

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

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Stress and Burnout: How to tell the difference and the impact of the pandemic.

By: Septima Riley, LMSW

2020 caught us all by storm as nothing could've prepared us for a pandemic that has impacted over 19 million families in the US and at the time of this article, the New York Times reports has claimed the lives of over 357,000 Americans.

As thousands of first responders and healthcare workers have begun to receive the vaccine with the hopes to reduce the risk of transmission, many of us are still recovering from the impact of the virus. In this article, we hope to provide the necessary tools to distinguish whether you are coping with increased stress due to the pandemic or if you're experiencing symptoms of burnout, a condition that should be addressed with a mental health professional.

As many businesses closed and Americans shifted to meet the demands of the pandemic, many organizations transitioned to telecommuting and platforms such as Zoom became the norm. According to Remote Global, 1 in 5 people worked from home prior to the COVID19 pandemic. While 47% of the employees surveyed report that they are happy working from home, telecommuting has been a major adjustment for those who primarily worked in an office setting prior to 2020.

Here are a few tips to help you deal with the stress of working from home and/or transitioning back into the workplace:

Gain some "Remote-Control!"

If you are amongst many Americans who transitioned to working from home full time or on a hybrid schedule due to COVID19, you may feel like the walls of your home office are closing in on you. Move around! Hiking, cycling, nature walks, yoga & meditation are pandemic-safe activities when you need to get out of your home.

Create a routine that works for you, listen to your favorite music or watch your favorite show while you work, & communicate any changes in your schedule or deliverables with your boss and colleagues so that you remain connected to your team.

Prioritize your time and your to-do list.

Statistica.com reports there were over 804,000 businesses that were under one year old at the close of 2020, and perhaps you are one of these individuals who turned your hobby or passion into a business. Balancing time for self-care while nurturing a new business during a pandemic can certainly be a recipe for increased stress. Utilizing apps and services to assist with bookkeeping, customer service and inventory can be beneficial to small business owners.

Be gentle with yourself.

No one included "survive the effects of a pandemic" on our 2020 vision boards. As some prepare to reenter the workforce fulltime, being stressed about the continued impact of the virus is normal. Ensure that you are doing your part to reduce the spread of the virus & schedule time to discuss any concerns with your employer, if needed.

Many companies also offer Employee Assistance Programs & some provide counseling services regardless of your insurance status. Please check with your HR department to determine which services may be available to you.

SPOTLIGHT ON:

Heidi Wolfgruber



Mrs. Heidi Wolfgruber is the newest member of the MMHC team serving as the Public Defender representative. Her role is to ensure that all participants' rights are preserved, and that all procedural requirements are upheld. She also represents clients from the Public Defender's Office who wish to participate in the program.

Mrs. Wolfgruber has been a Public Defender for over 5 years. She started her career in Colorado and joined the DeKalb Public Defender's Office when she moved to Georgia in 2018. She is passionate about working to minimize the detrimental effects of the criminal justice system on the lives of individuals, and thrilled to be part of MMHC, which works towards this same goal.