



DEKALB MISDEMEANOR MENTAL HEALTH COURT

www.dekalbcountymagistratecourt.com

February 2026

Volume XVIII

Issue 01

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MMHC Celebrates 25 Years of Justice with Compassion

For 25 years, the DeKalb County Magistrate Court’s Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC) has transformed lives by redefining justice—prioritizing treatment over incarceration for individuals with mental illness charged with non-violent misdemeanors. And Judge Rhathelia Stroud has proudly served as the presiding judge for 15 years.



MMHC traces its when the DeKalb Criminal Justice 58 organizations—visionary efforts of cate; the late Jim le Risby, psychiatrist and retired Chief Bethel. Together, unified goal: to di- tal illness from jail into treatment.



roots to October 26, 1999, County Mental Health Taskforce—representing was convened through the Flo Giltman, NAMI advo- Sanders, attorney; Dr. Emi- with Emory University; Magistrate Judge Winston they embraced a bold and vert individuals with men- tal illness with men-

That vision became reality on May 1, 2001, when the first Mental Health Court session was held at the DeKalb County Jail.



Originally launched as the Jail Diversion Treatment Court, the program evolved into a certified Georgia Accountability Court in 2016 under the Council of Accountability Court Judges, qualifying MMHC for state funding and long-term sustainability. Today, MMHC operates as a 12-month accountability court, offering evidence-based treatment, substance abuse services, NAMI programming, and peer support.

With continued support from Chief Magistrate Berryl A. Anderson, the Magistrate Court bench, dedicated staff, justice system partners, and the DeKalb Criminal Justice Treatment Coalition, Inc., MMHC remains a model of compassion-driven justice.

After 25 years, and a steady commitment, the Misdemeanor Mental Health Court’s mission endures: **to decriminalize mental illness by offering treatment instead of incarceration.**

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.

Crisis Text Line

TEXT HOME to 741741

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

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

Other help lines: Veteran's, SAMHSA, Teen Suicide, Violence:

Veteran's Crisis Line:

1-800-273-8255 (press 1) text: 8382355

www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/hotline

Help for veterans and their families.



988 has been designated as the new three-digit dialing code that will route callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. While some areas may be currently able to connect to the Lifeline by dialing 988, this dialing code will be available to everyone across the United States starting on July 16, 2022.

25 years of justice with compassion: Court Teams Over the Years



Resource Information (continued)

Hotlines & Helplines



Georgia Crisis
& Access Line

1-800-715-4225
mygal.com

Sponsored by the  Department of Behavioral
Health and Developmental
Disabilities
DBHDD

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



Consider these options when you or someone you care about is experiencing a mental health crisis:

- **Call 911 if the situation is a life-threatening emergency.**
- **Call the Claratel DeKalb Regional Crisis Center at 404.294.0499, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**
- **Visit the Claratel DeKalb Regional Crisis Center (DRCC) located at 450 Winn Way, Decatur, Georgia 30030.**

For non-crisis situations, Central Access serves as the central point of contact for Claratel Behavioral Health. Call 404.892.4646 for information about services.

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

Graduate Gab



Mr. C.

Mr. C. entered into MMHC determined to complete it. Prior to entering MMHC, he enrolled in school for an HVAC certification and continued to work on his education while in MMHC. We were so proud to learn that he graduated from school shortly after graduating from MMHC! Even through all his challenges, Mr. C. never gave up. Instead, he continued to show up and remained honest and transparent throughout his journey. There are many words to describe Mr. C. but the one that stands out the most is resilient. Upon graduation, Mr. C. left us with some words to remember and live by: "People will quit on you. You got to get up every day, and make sure you don't quit on yourself." ~ Mr. C.

Ms. M. was a model participant. Within two months of securing employment, she received a raise and promotion to shift lead and then worked her way up to sous chef! And she was able to save enough money from work to purchase her very own car. While in the court, she excelled in her skills group and was always supportive of her peers. She never "missed a beat" as it related to her responsibilities at work or in MMHC. She showed dedication and determination and completed MMHC without any sanctions! Ms. M. also shared some words of wisdom, so we thought we would share them here. She said, "It's your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself, that determines how your life's story will develop." And she is living proof of that!

Ms. M.

Mr. D. came into MMHC pushing **Mr. D.** full speed ahead with a "can-do" attitude. He wanted to master everything that was asked of him. He started out volunteering but later spent time with an organization gaining valuable employment skills. He utilized the support and skills he learned through MMHC to help him achieve some of his goals. Mr. D. remained open to suggestions and feedback even when it wasn't what he wanted to hear. Mr. D. was able to persevere despite any obstacles encountered. Prior to graduating from MMHC with numerous incentives, he shared that he had goals to secure employment and achieve more self-sufficiency by living independently.

Mental Matters



Your mental health is a priority. Your happiness is an essential. Your self-care is a necessity.

MELODY BEATTIE

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

You are welcome to observe a MMHC court session. MMHC convenes every 1st and 3rd Thursday at 9:00 am and every 2nd and 4th Thursday at 10:30 am. Please contact the court's coordinator below for more information.

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:

Connie Morris, Coordinator

cmorris@dekalbcountyga.gov

phone 404-371-3254

fax 404-371-3206

MINDFULNESS



Practicing Mindfulness

Mindfulness can take place through meditation sessions or smaller moments throughout the day. To cultivate a state of mindfulness, you can begin by sitting down and taking deep breaths. Focus on each breath and the sensations of the moment, such as sounds, scents, the temperature, and the feeling of air passing in and out of the body.

Shift your attention, then, to the thoughts and emotions that you're experiencing. Allow each thought to exist without judging it or ascribing negativity to it. Sit with those thoughts. The experience may evoke a strong emotional reaction. Exploring that response can be an opportunity to address or resolve underlying challenges.

How do I practice mindfulness?

To cultivate awareness, observe your thoughts and emotions and explore why those specific ideas might be surfacing. To cultivate acceptance, avoid judging or pushing away unpleasant thoughts. Emotions are natural and everyone has them—acknowledging them can help you understand yourself better and move forward.

How can I be more mindful?

Mindfulness can help bring you into the present moment throughout the day. As you wake up, you can focus on your breathing and the way your body gradually becomes more energized. You can incorporate a brief meditation into your work day, perhaps on your lunch break, and focus and appreciate the experience of eating during meals.



The benefits of practicing mindfulness

Mindfulness has many purposes and benefits. It is frequently used in meditation and certain kinds of therapy. Its benefits include, but not limited to, lowering stress levels, reducing harmful ruminating, and protecting against depression and anxiety. Research even suggests that mindfulness can help people better cope with rejection and social isolation. Introduce some mindfulness in your life and see what it can do for you.

Spotlight On: Judge Cinque Axam



Judge Cinque Axam became a DeKalb County Magistrate Court Judge in January 2020. While serving on the bench, he branched out and started sharing his expertise as an Associate Presiding Judge of the Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC) in August 2020. Judge Axam brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to MMHC.

Spotlight On: Judge Derek Johnson-Gage

Judge Derek Johnson-Gage became a DeKalb County Magistrate Court Judge in November 2024. Prior to serving on the bench, he worked as an attorney representing many clients living with mental illness and served on the board of the DeKalb Criminal Justice Treatment Coalition, a designated 501(c)(3) nonprofit advisory council to the DeKalb County Misdemeanor Mental Health Court (MMHC).

