



COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES OF GEORGIA

MARCH 2017

WWW.GAACCOUNTABILITYCOURTS.ORG

FIRST STEP

Crystal Page, Richmond Accountability Court Coordinator

The Richmond County State Accountability Court Program has started a radio program titled *First Step* which airs every Sunday evening from 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. on WGAC (AM580 or FM95.1). *First Step* was created by Allen Childs, one of our board members, and our first show aired on Sunday, January 8, 2017. Mr. Childs felt that not only has the issue of addiction been something he personally faced several years ago, but realized through his active participation in assisting others in getting help with addiction, that there are thousands who feel they are lost to this disease and have no idea how to take the *First Step*. The radio program has a different guest each week who discusses addiction. Some are guests who are dealing with addiction personally, others are family members who are affected by a loved one suffering from addiction, and others are professional counselors who offer their expertise and advice for those suffering from addiction. Judge Watkins is the moderator of the program only and is not there to give any legal advice or opinions. Listeners are encouraged to call or email the show.

JUDGES CORNER: HONORABLE VERDA COLVIN

Macon-Bibb Mental Health Court

WHAT WAS YOUR INITIAL INTEREST IN BEING AN ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGE?

I was honored to assume the duty of the Mental Health Accountability Court upon my appointment. It was an honor because it is something that is near and dear to my heart. It is, by far, the single most important thing that I do as a Judge. It brings me unspeakable joy even in times of disappointment.

WAS THERE A SPECIFIC MOMENT/EVENT THAT HAPPENED THAT LET YOU KNOW YOU WERE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT FOR YOUR PROGRAM?

I have had several graduates thank me for my service. One particular graduate told me that she would not have the success she has if it were not for me sitting as the Presiding Judge. Her words assured me that I was in my calling. That's my desire for my life of service- to do work which I am naturally gifted to do. I have a heart for people and I love doing all I can to empower others and remind them of their value. Mental Health Court gives me the ability to do what I love, invest in people and show them their greatness.

TO DATE, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS YOUR COURT'S BIGGEST PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENT?

Our biggest accomplishment is having had the services and heart of our Coordinator, Stephanie Mooneyham, who will soon be leaving to join her husband as his career continues to grow. The success this program has experienced is a direct result of her work, her passion and her love of people. I may be the head but she is our heart. She understood my vision and she has caused our court to experience success.

DOES YOUR PROGRAM HAVE ANY SORT OF SPECIAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY?

Anyone who is connected to outreach programs or works with returning citizens knows of our court's existence. We constantly reach out to our community partners for resources to assist our participants. We invite community partners to our graduations and any events to promote our programs. In turn, they invite us to their graduations and other outreach programs. We make ourselves available to anyone who, like us, seeks to pour into those who struggle, particularly with mental health issues.

Court Start Date:
January 2009

Judge Begin Presiding
April 2014

Current Participants:
25

Graduated
Participants since??
June 2013: 22

JUDGES CORNER: HONORABLE RUSSELL SMITH

Mountain Judicial Circuit Drug Court

WHAT WAS YOUR INITIAL INTEREST IN BEING AN ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGE?

Both of my predecessor judges and our District Court Administrator suggested that I should consider starting a drug court. The DCA recommended that I visit other Drug Courts. I visited Judge Bagley's Drug Court in Forsyth County. Later, I attended drug court graduations in Hall County and the Appalachian Circuit. Those judges were all extremely supportive, helpful and encouraging. I remember listening to the family members at the Hall County Graduation talk about how they had gotten their family members back and the participants proudly talked about their new lives. I think it was during a graduation in the Appalachian Circuit that the young son of a participant said that he was thankful that his mother did not forget to pick him up from school anymore. I think it was at that moment that I decided that I wanted to be part of this process.

WAS THERE A SPECIFIC MOMENT/EVENT THAT HAPPENED THAT LET YOU KNOW YOU WERE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT FOR YOUR PROGRAM?

There were many, but I think that the first time that I had that feeling was early on when we showed a middle-aged participant with hundreds of days of clean time a copy of his booking photo. The difference in his appearance was amazing. He looked 10 years younger. He was not an emotional guy, but he put his head down on the table and cried.

TO DATE, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS YOUR COURT'S BIGGEST PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENT?

I have to say that, for us, the biggest accomplishment is starting and maintaining the program in all three counties in the Circuit. Initially, the same team members staffed all three counties and included the same judge, the elected District Attorney, and the Chief Public Defender. The only way to schedule Court in Stephens County was to have night court and we still regularly go well into the evening hours. Starting and maintaining three Courts in three counties with extremely limited resources remains a challenge. Thankfully, Judge Caudell has graciously accepted the role of presiding in Habersham County.

DOES YOUR PROGRAM HAVE ANY SORT OF SPECIAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY?

Every participant has to complete a Give Back Project, which is not community service, but rather a project that has a long-lasting effect on the community and directly addresses a community need. Some of the events in the past have benefited the local Salvation Army, Domestic Violence Shelters, and local parks. Participants have to be creative and learn project management skills in order to complete this project. We also have collaborations with various agencies in the community, like Prevent Child Abuse Habersham, for example.

"Judge Russell Smith. He is kind-hearted, humble, and always looking for new ways to improve himself and his court. He is strong in his role as the judge, but he is compassionate to the participants, open to feedback from his team, and is fair. I am so grateful that he is our judge, and I feel like he is the epitome of what an Accountability Court Judge should be."
- Beth Pelaccio

SPECIAL EVENTS YOUR PARTICIPANTS TAKE PART IN?

Once per quarter, we take participants who have not had any sanctions in the past 6 months on a special sober activity. We have taken them so far to Six Flags and the Escape Rooms this fiscal year. It is an opportunity for the participants to get to know staff a little bit better, learn that there are fun activities that do not involve getting drunk or high, and to give them incentive to continue doing their best in their recovery and throughout their program.

Court Start Date:
January 2011

Current
Participants: 107

Graduated
Participants as of
Jan 2016: 53

Congratulations on the February Graduations!

Douglas County DUI/Drug Court
Clayton County Drug Court

Blue Ridge Drug Court

Cobb County DUI Court
Troup County DUI/Drug Court