

GRADUATION DAY
FAIRFIELD MUNICIPAL COURT TREATMENT
ALTERNATIVE COURT (TAC)*
JUDGE JOYCE CAMPBELL**

This is the thirteenth article from the Supreme Court of Ohio Advisory Committee on Mentally Ill in the Courts about effectively dealing with mentally ill offenders in the criminal justice system. This article highlights the Fairfield Municipal Treatment Alternative Court, in Butler County, Ohio, a program that has made a difference in the lives of many of the people our Advisory Committee is trying to reach.

Graduation day. A time of pride, joy, tears, anticipation, relief and perhaps a bit of apprehension. All of these emotions were experienced by the Fairfield Municipal Court Treatment Alternative Court (TAC) team at the recent first graduation ceremony. Our first graduate came to us hostile, uncommunicative, out of control, and unable to function in society due to her bipolar mood disorder. Two years later, she left the program confident, talkative, healthier, and reconnected to her family and her life.

The Butler County Mental Health Court Planning Task Force, a 20 member collaborative planning team, representing a broad range of local stakeholders, was formed for the purpose of designing a pretrial diversion program to serve mentally ill persons charged with misdemeanors in municipal court. The stated goals of the program are to divert these defendants into court-monitored treatment at the earliest stage of the criminal proceeding, to improve the clinical impact of the case processing on these defendants, to reduce recidivism among mentally ill defendants, to establish and maintain collaboration between the criminal justice and mental health systems, and to empower these defendants to lead more clinically stable, safe, and law-abiding lives in the community.

With these lofty goals in mind, the TAC program was commenced in the Fairfield Municipal Court on January 1, 2001. The program accepts offenders with Axis I conditions such as bipolar disorder, schizo-affective disorder, major recurring depression, and others. Since its inception, 81 potential participants have been screened for the program. Currently, there are 13 participants, 4 pending participants, and 12 offenders on probation review. Of those not accepted to the TAC program, 13 were out of county or state residents and 4 that were eligible declined to participate. Of those participating, 46% are bipolar, 42% suffer from depression, and 13% are schizophrenic.

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But these are just statistics and nothing made that more apparent than embracing our first graduate and seeing her return to the world headed in the right direction. As she agreed to be interviewed by the local paper covering the graduation, we were apprehensive as to how she would be portrayed to the public. To our great delight, she was accurately portrayed as a woman suffering from a disorder who fought her way back with determination, courage, and hopefully a little help from the TAC program. Watching her obvious pride and confidence at her graduation, the TAC team felt that we had accomplished our goal of having the TAC program and the efforts surrounding it make a big difference in how the mentally ill are treated not only in the Butler County criminal justice system, but in the community as a whole.

For more information about the Fairfield Municipal Treatment Alternative Court, please contact Judge Joyce Campbell at (513) 867-6002, or email her at jcampbell@fairfield-city.org.