

Cobb Mental Health Court hosts first graduation

by [Kimeko McCoy](#)
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MARIETTA — For years, a 51-year-old Marietta man said he had numbed himself to the point where he wouldn't and couldn't cry.

But Thursday morning, Tim, who asked that his last name be withheld, stood with tears in his eyes in front of a group of judges, lawyers, family and friends there to support him and six others who were the Cobb County Mental Health Court's first graduates.



The program launched under the direction of Cobb Superior Court Judge Mary Staley in 2012.

It is a 24-month treatment-based program for defendants with a documented mental illness that brings together the resources of the mental

health and the criminal justice systems. According to the Cobb County Sheriff's Office, 33 percent of the current inmate population is diagnosed with a mental illness, and an estimated \$300,000 is spent annually on medications to treat these illnesses. The mental health court seeks to stop the revolving door of people diagnosed with a mental illness, and address the problem instead of the symptom. The court strives to improve mental health, promote self-sufficiency, reduce recidivism and offer cost-effective alternatives to incarceration and hospitalization, according to Staley.

Standing before the audience, Tim said he once believed success was not final and failure was not fatal.

"But for many of us, failure can be fatal," he said. "I've known a lot of people that died from this horrible addiction whether it be heroin, alcoholism, mental health, suicides and yet, I'm very thankful for this program because I don't know where I'd be — probably not alive. I definitely wouldn't have my family back."

Tim's older sister, Mindy, stood to address her brother during the graduation ceremony, thanking the court and those involved in the program.

"I just want to thank everybody here that helped bring my brother back to me," she said. "I've been waiting 30 years for this."

Tim said he's struggled since joining the Marine Corps at 19 and serving in Japan, finding himself in a psychiatric ward for three months.

“That’s when they started experimenting and I was on all kinds of medication,” he said.

Tim said he suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder and other mental illnesses, often drinking to cope while entering and exiting rehabilitation facilities and incarceration.

“Right before I was discharged from jail, I remember praying. I was scared,” he said.

Now, Tim says he’s no longer medicated and is working to start his own cleaning business.

“What keeps me sober really is to treat people kindly and going to bed with a clear conscience,” he said. “I’m happy the way it is now and I just want to spread joy to whoever I meet.”

QUITA AND TRACY

Two other graduates included Tracy Traver, 42, of Marietta, and Quita, 30, a Marietta resident who asked that her last name not be used.

Quita said she is a mother of six who turned herself in after she and her then-boyfriend got into an argument, prompting her to light a plant in front of his house on fire.

Quita said she discovered she had bipolar disorder after originally diagnosing herself with post-traumatic stress disorder. When she went to court for a probation violation, Quita was offered the chance to participate in the mental health court program.

“Cobb County may be tough, but Cobb has opened my eyes and made me a better woman,” Quita said.

She has been reunited with her children and said she keeps a clean house while working as a restaurant shift manager and running a cleaning service side business without the help of Section 8 housing or welfare.

“People want to judge you, but they don’t know your story,” she said. “Everything imaginable has been done to me, but it hasn’t broken my spirit.”

Traver said she faced abuse and molestation growing up and found herself involved in prostitution, sex trafficking and drug use. She said she suffered anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar disorder.

Traver said although she was enrolled in the mental health court program, she wanted to do things her way. After staff convinced her the program works, she decided to cooperate.

“No matter what, there’s two things that will happen in MHC. Either you’re going to fail or you’re going to make it,” Traver said.

But when she graduated from the program, her outlook on her childhood and three siblings changed. Today, she says she has a positive relationship with her mother.

“(My parents) learned to better themselves as they had more kids and it s----- for me being the oldest,” she said.

Today, Traver has a full-time job as a waitress in Alpharetta and only takes medication as needed.

“I know they say to look at the bigger picture but ... if I could just have what I have, I’ll be happy,” she said.

Staley thanked everyone for making the program possible — especially the lawyers who advised their clients to participate in the new program.

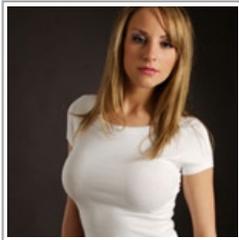
“It was a true leap of faith,” Staley said.

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