

Lancaster County Mental Health Court **History**

In 2008, with strong support from the community, mental health providers and advocates, Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas initiated the formation of a Mental Health Court Task Force. The goal of this Task Force was to create a specialized court docket to address the overrepresentation of those with serious mental illness in the criminal justice system; Mental Health Courts accomplish this by providing resources to link participants to employment, housing, treatment and support services through a structured program that includes frequent judicial contact. Upon the awarding of grant funding through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), planning and implementation were finalized and in March 2010, Lancaster's Mental Health Court began operation.

The Mental Health Court team is led by the Mental Health Court Judge, and composed of members from the District Attorney's and Public Defender's offices, drug and alcohol treatment provider, Drug and Alcohol Commission Case Manager, Mental Health Court Coordinator, Probation Officer, Mental Health Case Manager, Peer Support Specialist, a housing specialist, mental health clinician, and a representative from Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (BHDS). This team oversees the daily operations and supervision of Drug Court participants.

On average, the Mental Health Court supports 25 to 30 participants at any given time. The Mental Health Court participants must complete an intensive program that includes supervision/probation appointments, regular drug testing, judicial review hearings, community service or other pro-social activities, and any additional services needed such as drug and alcohol treatment or support with job placement. The four-phase program requires a commitment of at least one year, but typically two, from the participant. The intense nature of the program is designed to assist participants with reintegrating into their community using individualized support, while addressing criminal charges. In 2012, Mental Health Court celebrated the graduation of its first participant, and as of 2013, 6 participants had successfully completed the program.

The Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas Mental Health Court sessions are open to the public at 1:30 p.m. Wednesdays in Courtroom 4. An account has been established at the county treasurer's office to accept donations from the public. These donations are used directly to enhance the Mental Court program operations. Members of the Mental Health Court team welcome the opportunity to speak to community groups and organizations.