



COUNTY OF YOLO

Office of the County Administrator

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Mental Health Diversion Court Celebrates Graduations

(Woodland, CA) – With a full courtroom at the Yolo County Superior Courthouse on Wednesday, July 19, officials, program participants, and members of the community came together to celebrate two graduates of the Mental Health Diversion Court program (MH-Div). Launched in January of 2022, this groundbreaking initiative is aimed at addressing the needs of individuals with mental health disorders in which their behavioral health issues were a significant factor in the commission of criminal offenses. The ceremony was opened by the Honorable Judge Janet Gaard and featured emotional speeches by the dedicated public servants and CommuniCare staff who played a vital role in guiding the graduates to this important achievement.

Funded by the Yolo County Community Corrections Partnership, the MH-Div program is a collaborative effort, bringing together key stakeholders including the District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, Probation Department, Sheriff's Office, the Court, and CommuniCare Health Centers. The MH-Div program was established to support individuals who do not require as intensive treatment as those who qualify for Mental Health Court but with the same intent to increase treatment engagement and reduce arrests, hospitalizations, and incarceration.

“A graduation from one of our collaborative courts is always cause for celebration,” said Yolo County Superior Court Judge Janet Gaard. “The ceremonies demonstrate that, with hard work and commitment on the part of the participants, and with the support of an amazing team, people who are involved in the criminal justice system can change their lives in so many positive ways. They can repair family relationships, get jobs, go to school, get off drugs and alcohol, obtain housing, and mentor others. They make us proud, but more importantly, they make themselves proud.”

The MH-Div program operates on a minimum 1-year court-based treatment and monitoring system for adult offenders, specifically tailored to address the growing number of defendants struggling with mental health and cycling through the courts and jails. Currently serving 30 participants who facing felony or misdemeanor charges, the MH-Div program provides individualized treatment plans that address participants' specific needs, interests, and capabilities, focusing on physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

The graduation ceremony featured heartfelt speeches from the two graduates, a man and a woman, who shared their remarkable journeys of personal growth and recovery. The male graduate was the first to successfully complete the MH-Div program, he proudly announced 451 days of sobriety at the ceremony, a testament to his dedication and hard work. He expressed gratitude to CommuniCare staff for their unwavering support, highlighting the program's significant impact on his life. The female graduate's transformative journey was equally compelling, as she spoke passionately about the program's role in rebuilding her life, finding a career,

and strengthening family bonds. She emphasized the invaluable insight gained through the trust developed with the CommuniCare team, enabling her to address her struggles effectively.

“It’s inspiring to watch the transformation and evolution of individuals in this program who have been given a second chance by the criminal justice system. Our collaborative team provides incredible support, but it’s the motivation and dedication of the individuals that really make the difference,” said Yolo County District Attorney Jeff Reisig. “My hope now is to find additional funding to expand the program, which currently has a waitlist, so we can help others who are struggling.”

The MH-Div program is currently at its full capacity with 30 participants enrolled. 13 participants have successfully completed outpatient substance use disorder treatment, and 4 have successfully completed residential treatment. The MH-Div program's success was passionately emphasized by a representative from the Public Defender's Office at the ceremony, who praised the graduates and the program's commitment to supporting individuals on their path to healing and flourishing in society.

“The Mental Health Diversion graduation stands as a testament to the transformative power of collaborative efforts, compassionate support, and a dedicated commitment to helping individuals with mental health issues reintegrate into society with strength and resilience,” said Tracie Olson the Public Defender of Yolo County.

For more information about the MH-Div program and Yolo County Community Corrections Partnership, please visit YoloCounty.org/CCP

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