



FORSYTHCOUNTY
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FORSYTH COUNTY COURTS
BEGIN MENTAL HEALTH COURT C.A.R.E. PROGRAM

Program aims to help defendants with mental illness

FORSYTHCOUNTY, Georgia – Forsyth County’s new Mental Health Court C.A.R.E. (Change, Assist, Restore and Enlighten) Program held its first court session on March 12 to assist defendants with severe and persistent mental illness. The new program began considering defendants for entry into the program on March 1. This initiative is a combined Superior and State Court program allowing access to defendants within the court’s target population. As the Mental Health Court C.A.R.E. Program will include cases involving both misdemeanors and felonies, Superior Court Chief Judge Jeffrey S. Bagley authorized State Court Judge Leslie Abernathy-Maddox to sit in designation as a Superior Court judge and hear those cases where felony charges are involved.

The mission of the Mental Health Court C.A.R.E Program is to provide alternatives to incarcerations for individuals who have been identified with severe and persistent mental health diagnoses by linking those individuals to local, community-based treatment resources with the goal of improving public safety and helping prevent further involvement in the criminal justice system. The C.A.R.E. Program will hold individuals accountable and assist defendants in achieving long-term stability to become law-abiding citizens and successful members of the community.

“This accountability court program addresses an underserved population in Forsyth County by diverting defendants with severe and persistent mental illness from jail and introducing them to treatment services within the community,” said State Court Judge Leslie Abernathy-Maddox. “What we want to do is empower participants to make positive changes in their lives.”

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The services provided by the C.A.R.E Program are conducted under the guidance and supervision of the court for a minimum of 24 months and utilize a combination of treatment, education, drug testing, supervision and judicial accountability. Referrals to the program can be made by the District Attorney's Office, Solicitor's Office and others. Once accepted into the program, participants in the C.A.R.E. Program will receive a personalized treatment plan.

"Each participant in the C.A.R.E. Program will have a plan tailored to their individual needs," said Program Coordinator Carol Simpson. "This will help ensure the participants make connections to the necessary resources within the community that will facilitate the individual's success."

Grant funding was secured in 2013 to provide for the planning phase of the Mental Health Court C.A.R.E. Program. The new accountability court program joins the county's existing State Court Drug Court, DUI Court and Superior Court Drug Court programs.

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