

FRANKLIN COUNTY MUNICIPAL COURT

Drug Courts - h.a.r.t. and Recovery



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COURT GRADUATIONS ASSIST IN ROAD TO RECOVERY

The Franklin County Municipal Court, which offers specialized dockets that offer drug treatment instead of incarceration, is celebrating those who have achieved sustained recovery after battling addiction and legal issues.

Franklin County Municipal Court has five specialized dockets, including h.a.r.t. (Helping Achieve Recovery Together), which is a tailored program for those battling opiate addiction and Recovery, a docket for defendants who have a dependency on alcohol and non-opiate drugs.

Both programs are certified by the Ohio Supreme Court and often take two years to complete. Recovery will host its graduation at noon today at the 373. S. High St. auditorium and the h.a.r.t. graduation was held on December 6.

Graduations do more than celebrate recovery. Graduates, past and present, also show how the specialized courts lower recidivism.

In all, 46 people are graduating and have or will soon have completed their court-ordered probation. This includes 14 people from h.a.r.t. and 32 from Recovery

“Our programs are where treatment and justice meet. Graduates receive assistance in many different areas such as employment, housing, transportation, and family reunification. However, participants must attend weekly meetings and be subject to random drug screenings. They are an inspiring example that recovery is possible, and a better life awaits,” said Municipal Court Judge Jodi Thomas, who presides over the h.a.r.t. court.

Both dockets offer a therapeutic approach. In addition to meetings and screenings, participants are also required to go to treatment, participate in counseling, maintain strict adherence to doctors’ orders, and avoid illegal substances.

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“Completing this program is not easy. Struggles are inherit during the first two years of recovery and are compounded by life trauma, which many have faced,” said Municipal Court Judge Jessica D’Varga, who presides over Recovery Court. “These graduates display perseverance, resilience, thoughtfulness, grit, and tenacity, and their accomplishment should be celebrated.”

In addition to this month’s graduates, the Franklin County Municipal Court has had 120 h.a.r.t. and 94 Recovery graduates in the last three years.

By the end of 2022, 85% of h.a.r.t. and 93% of Recovery graduates have not re-entered the criminal justice system, demonstrating the programs’ enormous success.

Addictions continue to be a pervasive problem locally. Roughly 48 out of every 100,000 people die annually in Franklin County due to opiate addiction. This rate contributes to Ohio having the seventh-highest opiate overdose rate in the country.

In addition, the court also hears an average of more than 3,500 OVI-related cases a year. Last year, there were 129 drunk driving arrests for every 100,000 people.

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