

First District Mental Health Court

ORIENTATION TO PROGRAM PHASES

As referenced in the mental health court (MHC) orientation sheet, the program incorporates four (4) phases or levels of advancement. These phases are considered to be ascending, meaning that movement from one phase to a succeeding phase is intended to be an upward progression. As the participant advances in the program, more is expected in terms of commitment and active participation toward mental health recovery, and in turn, less is required regarding court appearances, program supervision and monitoring, and court imposed restrictions.

Structuring the mental health court program into distinct phases of advancement is consistent with the concept of what are called stage paradigms or models. The value of the stage model is that it structures the work of the program into a more manageable succession of progress that is better suited to the mentally ill offender. Behavior and lifestyle change is not measured as a fixed point in time, but is usually an evolving course of ascending steps to a defined goal.

Recognizing the stage aspects of human change, the First District Mental Health Court utilizes a blend of stage-based models as a logical way to address the issue of program participation and advancement as outlined below:

Phase 1 (Anticipation/departure/functional survival):

Phase I is where participants depart on the journey of self-change and begin planning for legal and clinical rehabilitation, which includes anticipating the prospect of success. At the point of formal entry into the MHC program, the individual must decide the context of their involvement, whether to view it as an opportunity and part of an intentional quest, or as something imposed. Openly addressing the issues of mental illness and criminal justice is intimidating but at the same time heroic.

The social mythology of every culture is rich in stories of the mythic hero who undergoes a succession of trials and labors to, as it were, capture the “Golden Fleece” or in the case of the MHC participant, achieve program graduation. Program entry and orientation, development of treatment/recovery plans, functional living

and community resource acquisition, symptom stabilization, obtaining/maintaining housing, funding, seeking employment, education or other productive pursuits, as well as combating the barriers of ambivalence and resistance to change are all part of the initial work of Phase 1.

Phase 2 (Encounter/initiation/functional assertion):

Phase 2 is where new participants begin to perceive clear discrepancies between their preconceptions of the program and actual judicial and rehabilitative engagement and encounter, where treatment and wellness planning takes more specific shape and direction. Discrepancies between the participant's current life and desired life are also recognized and encountered as participants begin to exercise forethought and intention to take action in the immediate future to change the course of the past.

Effective personal change involves the development of commitment strategies in Phase 2 that will ultimately result in successful program completion. Once the mental health court participant crosses the initial threshold of the program they will naturally encounter a series of trials and tasks that ultimately will help prepare the individual to achieve the goal of program completion. In general, Phase 2 is primarily about achieving functional assertion, which is the further development and application of functional living and coping skills necessary in order to appropriately manage the many challenges and trials that will appear along the heroic path of mental health recovery and legal reconciliation.

Phase 3 (Metamorphosis/fulfillment/functional mastery):

Phase 3 represents a metamorphosis or the transition to full engagement and committed participation where the participant begins to self-initiate program activity and shift from indifference or passivity to a more proactive level of empowerment and self-determination. This is a phase of action in which the individual makes specific changes in behavior and/or life-style that will form the foundation for sustained success beyond the limits of the program. In this phase, program participants must become focused on the acquisition of alternative activities and pursuits that tend to preclude problem behaviors and foster maturity and responsibility.

Fulfillment in the hero's quest for mental health recovery and legal reconciliation is brought about through the incorporation of personal changes achieved in the mental health court journey, where the individual is metaphorically "reborn" or in effect fulfills the process of transformation whereby they learn and apply better tools and choices for health and wellness. Phase 3 should focus on the process of functional mastery, where the skills and changes acquired in Phases 1 and 2 are mastered and put into consistent practice.

Phase 4 (Disengagement/return/functional fulfillment):

Phase 4 represents the completion of the participant's journey and eventual disengagement from the program. Disengagement refers to the individual's graduation from the judicial aspects of the mental health court program (although the individual is expected to continue in therapeutic services). Successful change is an alteration in behavior sustained over time. The factors necessary for maintenance of change are sustained effort, and a restructured lifestyle. Work in this stage is to devalue previous behaviors in favor of the adoption of healthier habits and alternatives.

As the mental health court graduate arrives at an awareness of the personal gains of the program journey, the true spirit of the return is one's bestowal of these gains to the society in which they reside as an act of restoration, which completes the cycle of the individual's quest. The return of investment in the program may take the form of mentoring, in which program graduates, or near graduates, provide support and guidance to newer participants who are still working through the initial phases of the program. Phase 4 is considered a stage of functional fulfillment.