

experiencing severe mental illness—Lake County provides access to housing with on-site services. Lake County is unique in its commitment to ensuring participants have everything they need—from rides to appointments to medication pickups. The biggest thing about the court and the team at Lake County is that they care. Comparatively, MHCs are small but thorough; they only take a limited number of participants at a time to ensure proper care. Yet many more individuals need help. That is why, as we move into the next stages of our lives, we must reflect on where we can make an impact.

The Impact

When an individual enters the Lake County Court, they join a family that wants them to succeed. They are required to attend court every Monday, where Judge Bishop or Judge Novak checks in with them, starting by asking how they are doing and genuinely trying to build connections. Manager of Probation Frank Morelli makes it clear that this leaves the individual vulnerable during treatment and in court (F. Morelli, personal communication, August 24, 2025). Then, the judge reviews their treatment progress by holding them accountable or offering incentives. Incentives include \$10 gift cards, increased privileges such as an extended curfew, or having their case called first in court (Judge Bishop, personal communication, August 24, 2025).

Once probation is completed, individuals are encouraged to stay in contact with the team. Major outcomes I observed during my time at MHC included individuals gaining employment and achieving mental health stability. Beyond those outcomes, I witnessed people reconnecting with family, continuing their education, and most importantly, finding a support system. This system allowed them to make their own choices. Like Dix, I saw individuals who were struggling with their mental health finally begin to move forward (Dvoskin et al., 2020).

Thus, Mental Health Courts create a foundation of care and respect; they remind us that there is room for both justice and compassion. By challenging the idea that punishment is the only response to unwanted behavior, they offer something more that allows an individual to reflect, grow, and adapt to new and uncomfortable challenges. As we move forward in our academic and professional lives, it is imperative to ask ourselves whether the systems we want to build and grow within criminalize individuals for being different or recognize their humanity. The work being done in Lake County is not just legal work; it is rooted in emotional and scientific understanding. It shows what can be the outcome when an individual has support, a community, and someone who truly sees them. And that is the kind of justice worth working towards.

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