

## **News from Treatment Courts Across North Carolina**

### **Mecklenburg County**

Mecklenburg County operates six (6) Recovery Courts: Superior Court, District Court, DWI Recovery Court, Wellness Court, FIRST Recovery Court (family treatment court) and a Youth Recovery Court. We successfully transitioned to remote operations and virtual programming on March 18, 2020. All staff were provided with laptops and cell phones in order to continue operations. We increased the amount of contact our case managers were having with our clients to a minimum of twice per week and continued to hold virtual team staffing and court sessions beginning the week of March 30, 2020.

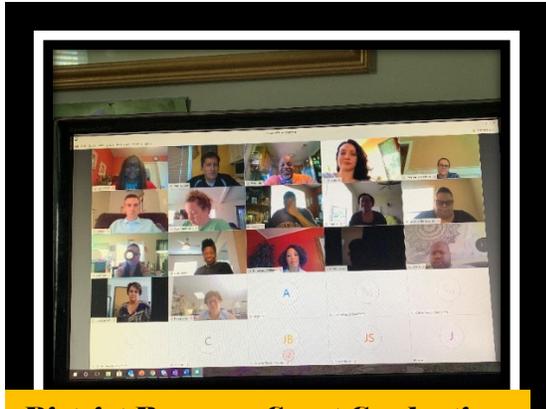
Our peer support agency created a private, restricted Facebook group for all Recovery Court participants to safely discuss their concerns. Additionally, our partners began offering classes, recovery support groups, yoga, and SA/MH treatment within weeks of the initial shelter-in-place order. Our probation officers continued to make curbside visits on clients and our partnership with the Youth Advocate Programs provided in-person support for all youth and their families.

Between March 23 and June 30, 2020, we admitted 16 individuals to one of the six Recovery Courts. We have held two, quarterly graduation on a virtual WebEx platform with a total of 30 participants successfully completing one of the Recovery Courts. For our July graduation, we also hosted a drive-thru celebration for graduates to come and pick up their certificates, court paperwork documenting charge dismissals and probation terminations, plaques and other items from our treatment providers.

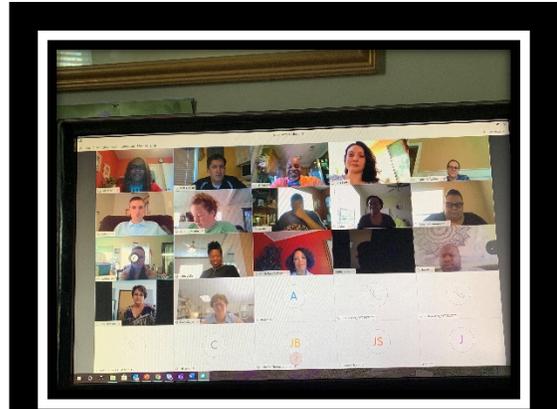
We have revised our policy and procedures to incorporate how to operate during a pandemic. Legal forms for participants were also updated to reflect the new operations and requirements, with amended forms being signed by all participants.

We expanded our data tracking specific to the pandemic operations to include requests for crisis assistance, hospitalizations, supportive housing, employment, technology, etc., as well as client engagement on the virtual platforms being used by the court and service providers. To date, we are averaging 80% attendance for Recovery Court virtual court sessions. We have seen an increase in the number of relapses and overdoses which have increased the need for supportive housing and inpatient treatment.

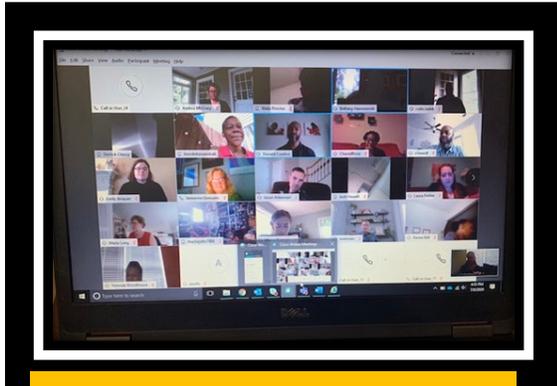
While a couple of our providers continued performing urinalysis testing, we incorporated the use of transdermal patches in June and were able to re-open our onsite drug test lab on July 13, 2020.



**District Recovery Court Graduation**



**Superior Recovery Court Graduation**



**DWI Recovery Court Graduation**



**Youth Recovery Court Graduation**

## **Buncombe County**

The Buncombe County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) is an 18-month, non-punitive, post-plea court available to justice-involved veterans with felony charges. They foster veteran accountability and recovery through a coordinated effort amongst the VA Hospital, County, City, and community mental health providers, NCDPS, District Attorney and Public Defenders office, and other veteran-based organizations. Upon successful completion of the program, a veteran is eligible to have their charges dismissed. Through treatment and habilitation, veterans are afforded a new sense of purpose, hope, and redemption in their lives.

As a result of the global pandemic, the majority of organizations in the Asheville area moved into the virtual realm. This shift from in-person support to virtual meetings hit the veteran community hard. The VTC noticed a marked increase in substance use, and other mental health symptomatology starting in late March 2020; Isolation served as a catalyst to decompensation. Recognizing the challenges in this new global reality, the VTC was forced to get creative. The VTC Program Director (also a combat wounded veteran), Kevin Rumley, LCSW, LCAS, and the VA Hospital Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Staff Teamed up to operate what they called a 'mobile social work squad'. This approach closely mirrors that of the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) modality. Wearing the proper PPE and following CDC guidelines, the VTC Staff were able to not only continue engagement with their veterans, but in many ways, strengthen their clinical efficacy.

Kevin Rumley, LCSW, LCAS asserts, "It has actually allowed me to build greater rapport with the veterans. I am in their homes and I know their neighbors now because I am seeing them there 3-times a week." Before the Pandemic, veterans would report to the Courthouse to meet and work with Kevin Rumley and Staff. Now, the VTC is hitting the streets and meeting their clients at their homes and in their communities. This approach has allowed for Staff to not only assist the veterans in mapping out their goals and action-steps (which was the traditional approach), but to actually walking with them through that process (see RG photo attached). This face-to-face interaction has served as a platform for increased Recovery Capital and healthier inter-personal relationship building. Another approach that the VTC has capitalized on during this Pandemic is training their volunteer Mentor Staff.

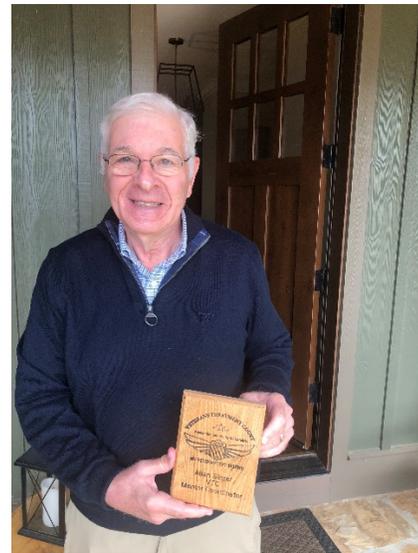
The VTC Mentors are an all-volunteer brigade of veterans that serve as an ally, sponsor, and 'battle-buddy' to the VTC clients. During regular (non-COVID-19) operations, as Kevin Rumley states, "It can be like herding cats to get all of the veteran Mentors together in one place every week... because they have busy lives, jobs and families...rightfully, we don't want to ask too much of them as volunteers." Since the pandemic started, they have seized this opportunity (of "Stay Home orders") to train their Mentors. The VTC instituted bi-weekly Mentor Trainings over Zoom during which they explore pertinent topics, including trauma, addiction, rapport-building, boundaries, and the basics of motivational-interviewing. As one mentor stated, "I can easily make it to these virtual trainings, even if I am at work at the Fire Station, or home with the family, I can still quickly Zoom-in for the trainings."

While there is no arguing that the Pandemic has ravaged the social fabric of the community, the Buncombe County Veterans Treatment Court is working hard to identify the silver-linings from this experience. They continue to problem-solve and identify creative ways to best support their

veterans moving forward. If there is anything that Kevin Rumley, LCSW, LCAS has learned from this experience it is that “the mother of invention is surely necessity, and our VTC proof of that.”



Mr. RG. A Vietnam-era veteran with his Learners Permit. RG has not had a license for 30-years. Using this new ACT approach, VTC Staff have been able to support veterans like RG during the Pandemic. This approach has garnered even greater success, empowering veterans to achieve their goals (despite a Pandemic), and foster Recovery Capital.



Despite a busy schedule, VTC Mentors Dave Sauer (left) and Allan Singer (right) are now able to participate in regular bi-weekly VTC Mentor Trainings because the classes have gone virtual.

## Cumberland County

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, the Cumberland County Sobriety Court promoted seven participants in the program to different phases, while two Participants Graduated from the Sobriety Court. During the COVID-19, these participants continued to work on their Sobriety by attending their meetings virtual.



### **Burke County**

Burke County Recovery Court has worked hard to employ innovative techniques to keep clients engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. We implemented virtual telehealth early on to ensure clients could attend groups through their phones or computers. Also, virtual individual therapy and telehealth for our MAT participants were put in place to help keep participants connected. Partners Behavioral Health Management assisted us with keeping clients engaged by providing phones to clients that did not have access to the internet so they could participate in group therapy online. We also encouraged participants to join All Recovery meetings that are being offered online.

We have switched to using mouth swabs for drug screens at court sessions since our Probation Officers cannot directly observe urine drug screens. Lastly, we are following all the CDC guidelines at court sessions to ensure we are following all the COVID-19 procedures.

### **Durham County**

The Durham (Adult) Drug Treatment Court (DTC) has been making strides in the midst of COVID-19. Treatment providers are holding virtual groups and clients are encouraged to attend virtual recovery meetings weekly. In an effort to keep everyone safe while also practicing social distancing, "Drive Thru" oral swab drug screens are being performed in the parking lot and sent to the lab for testing. To further our efforts in remaining socially distant, Durham DTC is holding court virtually as well via WebEx. Essential court personnel and clients facing higher level sanctions are the only people required to report in person. Clients are being encouraged by the court coordinator through regular virtual lunch meetings and are still receiving incentives outside of court. Durham DTC held its first virtual Graduation in July.

### **Catawba County**

As you all know the COVID-19 pandemic has come with struggles especially with our Adult Drug Court Participants. We have implemented virtual group and individual therapy, tele-health for our MAT participants, and all recovery self-help virtual group meetings, and thanks to Partners Behavioral Health Management we were able to supply some of our participants telephones so they would have access to these services. We have also implemented oral swabs, for our Catawba County Recovery Court participants. since our Probation Officers cannot directly observe urine drug screens for our scheduled court sessions.

During our court sessions we are following the CDC guidelines and are socially distanced, we recognize the compliant participants and they are then allowed to leave the courtroom.

Catawba County Recovery Court is also going to be implementing an Alumni Group for our past graduates, participants in Phase III and participants in the After-care program. These participants will be mentoring the new participants and helping them through the Recovery Court process.