

# Florida Association of Drug Court Professionals Newsletter

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November 2021

## Executive Committee

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Acting Chair /Vice Chair, 4th DCA

Jennifer Grandal, Treasurer, Statewide

The Honorable Michele Towbin- Singer,  
Secretary, 17th Judicial Circuit

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Stephanie Coberly, 17th Judicial Circuit

Anita Cocoves, 19th Judicial Circuit

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Dear FADCP Members:

Well, Fall is here and we are still in the midst of the pandemic. I know I thought that a second surge in the Fall/Winter of 2020 was more than we could tolerate. I guess I was wrong. And yet, I think I see light at the end of the tunnel. I think that's called "Hope".

And it's HOPE that all of you bring to the defendants you work with. That hope is something many of them thought impossible and yet you make them see that they can succeed. How many times have you heard a graduate say: "You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself." It is that belief in others that all of you bring to the table and it is worth its weight in gold.

On October 6, 2021, we held our second networking session. We picked up where our May session left off and you all shared the good, the bad, and the ugly. It was another great opportunity to network with your peers around the State. Simply being able to discuss drug court issues from your perspective and realize others are having similar experiences is reassuring. The opportunity to share innovative processes and techniques helps us spread the wealth of your individual experiences. Hopefully, we can do that in person in the not too distant future.

We are happy to report on our new and returning members. Please see our membership article in the newsletter. This will be the last newsletter sent to non-members. Our newsletter will be reserved for our membership in the future. So don't miss out. It's not too late to join!

We will now begin reorganization of our leadership. So, if you have an interest in serving on the board or becoming an officer, please don't be shy about it.

I hope you were able to take advantage of OSCA's wonderful training opportunities.

Keep up the good work! You do make a difference!

Sincerely,

FADCP Acting Chair

## **“DRUG COURT: A PROSECUTOR’S PERSPECTIVE”**

*By: R. Scott Ragan  
Assistant State Attorney  
Fifth Judicial Circuit*

After being hired as an assistant state attorney in the Fifth Judicial Circuit in Sumter County, I was given the responsibility of covering Drug Court in addition to a full misdemeanor docket. At the time, I viewed the Drug Court cases as almost an afterthought to my other cases. These cases, after all, were not being contested and I wasn't exactly sure how an assistant state attorney could play a meaningful role.

As a prosecutor, naturally, I was prepared to advocate that defendants be held accountable for their actions and this often would mean punishment. I also expected defense counsel to vigorously oppose me every step of the way. The adversarial system of justice, I believed, was the best system to arrive at truth. Although I still believe that I also came to understand that all cases are different, and that Drug Court offered another way to achieve justice. Eventually, I came to understand that Drug Court, while perhaps not as exciting as my regular docket, could be as rewarding as any of my cases.

In Drug Court, the parties truly work together as a team. Although we may argue over whether a certain candidate *should* be admitted, once they are approved, we all work together to see that they succeed. In Sumter County, we are very fortunate to have Judge Paul Militello presiding over our Drug Court docket. The Drug Court manager is Kathy Glover and, without her efforts, I can say we would not be nearly as effective.

A typical case will involve a defendant submitting an application to be considered by the Drug Court team. Drug Court applicants are reviewed strictly in our circuit. The State always makes sure to contact any victims and get their input before approving an applicant. The State also views participation in drug court as a privilege, not a right, and we make sure that violent offenders or those clearly unsuitable are not let into the program.

*By R. Scott Ragan*

After a defendant is admitted, they enter “Phase I” of the program and are quickly directed to various services, must obtain employment, attend support meetings, seek treatment from an approved provider, and attend Drug Court every other week. I think the first few weeks after admission can be a real eye opener for some people. If their impression was that Drug Court would be an easy alternative to jail or probation, they are quickly shown otherwise. It is not unusual to see folks stumble at the beginning and we are not expecting instant sobriety from members. If, however, improvement is not shown, then sanctions will be applied—usually in the form of a warning, then work detail, a weekend in jail, and lastly, expulsion from the program.

After approximately five months, the successful applicant will move on to “Phase II” and, hopefully achieve “Phase III” and graduation in another five months barring a setback. I always look forward to graduation day. During Covid, Drug Court was held online, and it has only been since midway through 2021 that we have gone back to in-person sessions. Although we still did graduations, it is always better to see the ceremony in person.

At graduation, a picture of the defendant when they were arrested is shown and contrasted to a more current photograph—the transition and progress is always incredible to see. We also expect our graduates to give a few parting words at the ceremony and they never disappoint. Our graduates are an inspiration in many ways, and I am sure anyone who has attended a similar ceremony will agree. Sometimes family members attend, and you can see how proud they are of their son, husband, wife or daughter. At the last graduation, one of the defendants even mentioned my name, thanking me personally, which was an honor. I am always sure to let them know that, as the prosecutor, I will now file a formal “nolle prosequere” in their case, as a result of successfully completing the program. This pronouncement has become one of my favorite parts of my job.

In conclusion, I’ll just note that I am a firm believer in Drug Court. Of course, not everyone graduates and not all of the endings are happy ones, but the successes outweigh the failures and I’ll continue to be a part of the process for as long as I can.

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## Fifth Judicial Circuit Drug Court Team



Pictured above from left to right are: Assistant Public Defender Andrew Sigler, Assistant State Attorney and author Scott Ragan, Kathy Glover, Lisa Fehmerling, Judge Paul Militello, Deputy Mike Dragneff, and Judicial Assistant Bryceann Twitty.

## “HOW IT ALL GOT STARTED”



A long time ago (late 90's) in a place not all that far away (Naples, FL) a few Florida drug court professionals met at the Naples Beach Club Hotel for lunch and to devise a plan for the Florida Association of Drug Court Professionals. Among the participants were: Drug Court Judges Donald Evans and Jack Espinosa and Coordinator Gail Holly from the Hillsborough County Drug Court, Drug Court Judge Melanie May and Treatment Coordinator Guy Wheeler from the Broward Drug Court Judge. Through the coordination of funding from the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Corrections, the Court System, the FADCP began annual conferences where drug court professionals from all over the State could come and share experiences, challenges, and innovations. The rest is history!

## “FADCP’s October 2021 Networking Session”

*By Melanie G. May  
Fourth District Court of Appeal*



**Carson Fox**, CEO of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals addresses participants at the October 6, 2021 FADCP networking session.

October 6, 2021, marked another great opportunity for drug court professionals to gather via Zoom and share experiences, challenges, and solutions. Carson Fox, CEO of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals joined us to say hello, thank you, and share one of his success stories when he was a prosecutor in the South Carolina drug court. His words were truly inspiring and enjoyed by all. Thanks Carson!

Once again, participants were magically moved to breakout groups by profession to share experiences, lessons learned, innovations devised, and obstacles overcome. Each group chose a reporter who shared the group’s discussion during the Report Out section of our meeting.

Participants returned to the larger group during the last fifteen minutes to share their discussions. Please see a report of the discussion highlights held by the various breakout groups sent as an attachment to the email.

Some new faces joined this networking session as well as returning participants. FADCP will host another session in early 2022.

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We wish to recognize and thank SCRAM Systems for their Bronze Level Corporate Membership. SCRAM Systems support of the Florida Association of Drug Court Professionals will help our efforts when we coordinate our next statewide training conference.

### FEEDBACK AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



Let us know how FADCP can be of help to you. Your ideas and suggestions are important to us so that your membership is valuable to you.

Our ultimate goal is to return to the day of annual conferences where top national presenters appear and provide you with the latest and greatest information on how to be successful in your problem-solving courts.

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FADCP leadership consists of a Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Past-Chair, and two at-large members of the Executive Committee. It is ably assisted by seven board members. We strive to have representation from all professions and areas of the State.

If you are interested in serving as a board member or as a member of the Executive Committee, please let us know. The board meets two times per year and the Executive Committee meets two additional times per year via Zoom. Please feel free to self-nominate or nominate someone you think should serve in a leadership capacity. We will be accepting nominations in November after the close of our membership drive. Please e-mail nominations to Eve Janocko at [evejanocko@aol.com](mailto:evejanocko@aol.com).

## “Say Farewell to Drug Court”

By The Honorable Michele Towbin-Singer  
Seventeenth Judicial Circuit



“If nothing ever changed there  
would be no butterflies”

Judge Michele Towbin-Singer  
Broward County’s Fourth Drug Court Judge

Every judge I have met who has previously served in drug court has said the same thing: *serving as the judge in drug court was the most rewarding experience of their judicial career.* I echo their sentiments.

In May, 2020, after being the Adult Felony Drug Court judge for over ten years, I transferred to the civil division. It was a difficult decision, but I wanted to return to the civil division before I retired as a judge. Before I left, I made sure that there would be an excellent judge taking over drug court. Judge Tarlika Navarro did a wonderful job not only taking over drug court but also stewarding the court through the difficult pandemic.

While I am enjoying the intellectual challenges of the civil division, I will always miss drug court. I miss seeing the positive changes in people’s lives and being a part of that process. I miss being able to get feedback from a team before making decisions that impact people's lives. I miss being able to give people a second chance.

Drug court was a meaningful part of my life that I will always cherish.

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**The FADCP general membership meeting will not take place this year due to the court system's travel restrictions.**

## **National Association of Drug Court Professionals**

### [NADCP 2022 Annual Conference](#)

NADCP's 29Th Annual Drug Court Training Conference

Location: Nashville, Tennessee

Dates: July 25-28, 2022

NADCP provides training to over 6,000 treatment court professionals annually at its national conference – the largest training conference in the nation addressing substance abuse and mental health disorders in the justice system. RISE21 is specifically tailored to enhance the skills, leadership, and training of the treatment court team with approximately 180 cutting-edge sessions, opportunities to connect and learn from colleagues around the world. You will come away educated and energized! RISE21 offers courses for the new practitioner and team members who have been in the field for years. The sessions will be a blend of providing what to watch for now and in the future and practical ways to implement these concerns at a minimal cost. The focus will be on the highest risk areas given how stretched our resources are.

## **CERTIFICATION UPDATE**

*By Judge Melanie G. May  
Fourth District Court of Appeal*



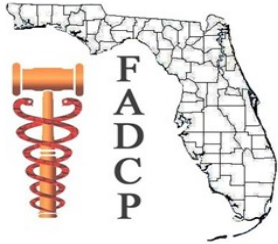
Some things change, and some things stay the same. The update on certification remains the same.

We are still awaiting the approval of the proposed certification plan considered by the Florida Supreme Court on April 20, 2021. Once the plan is approved, we can set a schedule for certification applications. In the meantime, we are working on producing a webinar to bring you more information about the proposed plan. More news to follow!



The Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) has adult drug court training and technical assistance resources available through a Bureau of Justice Assistance Grant to support training and education on the Florida Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards. If your adult drug court team is interested in obtaining local training or technical assistance on best practices, please contact Peria Duncan at [duncanp@flcourts.org](mailto:duncanp@flcourts.org) or Jennifer Grandal at [grandalj@flcourts.org](mailto:grandalj@flcourts.org) for more information!

# FADCP SNIPPETS



## FADCP MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

**Thank you for Joining!**

**WE WANT YOU!**



We have 122 FADCP Members for 2021-22! We appreciate your support and look forward to advancing our problem-solving courts together and address the many challenges we have faced over the past 18 months. Please think about joining the FADCP Board! We need new voices and ideas as we continue to advocate for Florida's Problem-Solving Courts.

Your membership supports our statewide association - - the voice of Florida's problem-solving courts. We thank you!!!

## **Drug Court and Other Problem-Solving Court Happenings and Resources**

The Office of the State Courts Administrator is working to revamp its Problem-Solving Court related websites. Check out the latest information at the links below:

**Problem-Solving Court Website:**  
[Problem-Solving Courts Resources](#)

**Florida Courts Opioid and Stimulant Initiative (FCOSI):**  
[Opioid and Stimulant Initiative](#)

Visit the [FADCP Website](#) for more information on initiatives and training opportunities.