

# Franklin County Municipal Court



PRESS RELEASE

October 31, 2024

## Graduates of the Franklin County Municipal Court's Specialized Dockets Show that Recovery is Within Reach

After more than a decade of providing individualized support and treatment to participants with drug abuse and/or mental health issues, the Franklin County Municipal Court's Specialized Dockets celebrated inspiring victories in October, including a pair of graduates who stood out from the hundreds of others to date.

A married couple was among the 25 graduates from LINC and h.a.r.t. Courts in October, two of the Municipal Court's five Specialized Dockets.

LINC Court provides help to those suffering from mental health issues, which have contributed to their repeated noncompliance and involvement with the court system, while the h.a.r.t. Court assists those like the couple who battled opiate addiction. Recidivism for both groups is high nationally, but the specialized dockets tailored approach has proven to be the most successful way for participants to plant their feet firmly on the road to recovery.

History has shown that 70% of the LINC and h.a.r.t. program graduates remain in recovery, don't recidivate, and have better social relationships.

Remarks made by the graduates as they accepted their diplomas brought guests and some court officials to tears. They often spoke of their life before the program, when many lived on the street, and their successes in living independently and maintaining employment.

"We are incredibly proud of our participants' remarkable transformations during their journey through the program. Their resilience and determination to rebuild their lives have been nothing short of inspiring. This success speaks to the power of support, community, and the courage to embrace change. We are committed to continuing this vital work and supporting individuals as they reclaim their futures," said Judge Jodi L. Thomas, presiding judge over the h.a.r.t. docket.

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The programs' titles reflect the encouraging environment provided by the Specialized Docket programs, with h.a.r.t standing for Helping Achieve Recovery Together and LINC standing for Learning to Identify and Navigate Change.

"It is a true joy to witness our participants completely transform their lives and to complete our LINC program. Their dedication and commitment to embracing true and lasting life change is courageous and admirable. While their achievements are their own, our LINC Team will remain connected with each and every one of them in our joint mission of sustained recovery, success, and wellness. We look forward to continuing this important work and supporting the many participants to come who will likewise follow in our graduates' successful footsteps," said Judge Gina Russo, presiding judge over the LINC docket.

Both are two-year programs that follow Supreme Court of Ohio guidelines. They offer defendants holistic support, including treatment and social support, links to housing and transportation, and individualized assistance based on need, such as assistance getting a driver's license, job coaching, and interview training.

The two programs have a structured approach that teaches tools for better decision-making, deciphering unhealthy habits from healthy ones, and recognizing warning signs in your environment and behavior.

The graduation ceremonies demonstrate the court's unwavering commitment to providing second chances, promoting long-term recovery, and reducing recidivism.

The Franklin County Municipal Court is the largest and busiest court in the state and has three other specialty dockets. In addition to LINC and h.a.r.t courts, the Municipal Court also offers MAVS Court, which assists military veterans, CATCH Court for those who have been sexually exploited, and Recovery Court, whose addictions to alcohol and drugs other than opioids serve as their primary dependency.

Anyone wanting more information on LINC Court can email [LINC@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org](mailto:LINC@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org).

Questions on h.a.r.t Court can be sent to [hart@franklincountymunicourt.org](mailto:hart@franklincountymunicourt.org).

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# h.a.r.t and LINC Courts 2024 graduations

*Twenty-five graduates, endless opportunities*

The LINC Court graduation was held Oct. 2, 2024, in the Franklin County Building auditorium, 373 S. High St., Columbus, while the h.a.r.t. Court graduation was held at the Linden Community Center, 1350 Briarwood Ave.

## LINC Court

Right: LINC Presiding Judge Gina Russo gives remarks at the court's 2024 graduation Ceremony.  
Below: LINC staff provide congratulations to each graduate.



Below: Former LINC Presiding Judge Cynthia Morehart (not pictured) attends graduation with her dog, Wallace.



Above: Judge Russo reminds graduates of various court programs where they can still receive help. Left: LINC staff welcome guests.

Right: LINC staff with Judge Russo, fourth from the right.



# h.a.r.t.Court



Below: An advocate hugs a program graduate as Presiding Judge Jodi L. Thomas waits to award the diploma.

Right: The Graduation Ceremony held at the Linden Community Center attracts a packed house.

Far Right: Judge Thomas congratulates a man who had struggled with addiction for decades.



Center above: Graduation attendees are offered a variety of food, including cupcakes.

Right: A h.a.r.t. staff member announces the next graduate as Judge Thomas looks on.

