

Developing a Specialty Court from Idea to Implementation

Speakers

Elizabeth “Liz” Wiggins joined JCMH in the summer of 2021 and assisted with the roll out of JCMH’s technical assistance services to courts across Texas. She has experience as both a former prosecutor and defense attorney, and with various leadership roles while volunteering with local organizations. Liz has a passion for identifying and addressing the root issues to reduce recidivism, keep communities safe, and to elevate people to become the best versions of themselves. She is also a Facilitator for PRA’s Sequential Intercept Model Mapping.

Liz Wiggins



Hon. Selina Mireles



The Honorable Selina Mireles is the Associate Judge of the Child Protection Court for Webb, Zapata, Duval and Jim Hogg counties. She also presides over the Webb County Family Drug Treatment Court for parties who have pending child protection cases. The Webb County Family Drug Treatment Court is a drug court that uses TBRI (Trust Based Relational Intervention) methods for parents and children to provide a greater chance of family reunification and build stronger and healthier family units. Judge Mireles practiced fifteen years in the areas of family law, civil litigation (including a focus on medical malpractice), juvenile and adult criminal law, probate and guardianship law, and child protective services cases representing children, parents and intervenors.

Anissa Johnson works as the Children's Court Program Manager and the Problem Solving Courts Consultant and the Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinator for the Office of Court Administration. She provides consultative and technical support services for Texas' Children's Courts, which includes 30 Child Protection Courts and 43 Title IV-D (Child Support) Courts, across the state with a budget of over \$16,000,000. Her work involves extensive hands-on program management, including gathering information and facilitating the sharing of information among the Children's Courts, reviewing case processing and making recommendations for programmatic best practices.

Anissa Johnson

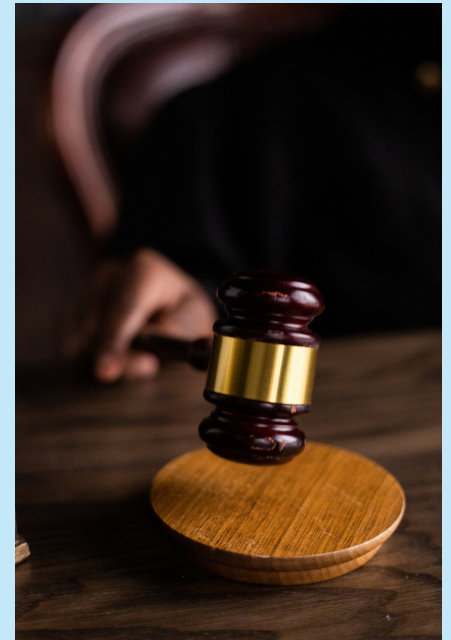


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Summary

In this presentation, each speaker brought a unique perspective to the conversation about Specialty Courts. Anissa Johnson began by explaining the legislation that governs Specialty Courts, as well as how they are funded. She highlighted the growth of Specialty Courts across Texas. In 2012, Texas had 126 Specialty Courts, and ten years later has 204.

Next, Liz Wiggins gave her presentation, which included resources and tips to get started when creating a Specialty Court. Even though there are 204 Specialty Courts in Texas, those courts are only located in 52 out of Texas's 254 counties. Prior to creating a court, a county needs to collect data, choose the target population, and identify community resources. The JCMH provides technical assistance, including Mental Health Court Support.



Judge Selina Mireles presented next, explaining how courts can identify a team to get started. Different courts will require different team members. For example, a Texas Emergency Network Diversion (TEND) Court and a Family Drug Treatment Courts have different purposes and will consist of different teams. Part of creating a court is thinking outside the box when it comes to partnerships. Take a look at all organizations in your community, not just the most obvious.

There will be challenges along the way, which could include: lack of funding, lack of knowledge or experience, conflicting organizational goals, and data collection. The presenters gave their top 10 lessons learned. Some of the top lessons were: be patient, if you fail, get back up, encourage innovative ideas, and take care of yourself and your team.