



# Tacoma Municipal Therapeutic Courts

City Council Study Session  
Tuesday April 9, 2024



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## ●●● Agenda



- Introductions
- What are Therapeutic Courts?
- Overview of Tacoma Municipal Mental Health Court and Community Court
- Q&A

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## Introductions



### **Judge Drew Henke, Presiding Judge**

- Elected 2015
- Presiding Judge since 2019
- Has presided over the Mental Health Calendar since 2019
- Established formal Mental Health Court June 2023

### **Judge Dee Sonntag**

- Elected 2022
- Therapeutic Court experience working as a defense attorney in the Pierce County Superior Court Felony Drug Court Program
- Launched Tacoma Community Court in October 2023

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## What are Therapeutic Courts?



- While all courts aim to reduce criminal behavior, Therapeutic Courts take a unique approach to target the root cause that led to an individual's offense
- Therapeutic Courts connect participants with treatment services and community resources instead of traditional sentencing, such as jail or fines
- Designed to feel welcoming, approachable, and supportive
- All Therapeutic Courts are voluntary

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## ● ● ● Key Components of Therapeutic Courts



- Every participant is assigned a case manager to help them identify personal goals and connect with local services to help them achieve those goals
- Incentives and therapeutic sanctions are used to encourage productive behaviors and healthy coping skills
- Treatment providers are an active and important member of the Therapeutic Court team
- Criminal charges are dismissed upon successful completion of the program
- No cost for participants outside of restitution to victims

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## ● ● ● Therapeutic Court Team



In Therapeutic Courts, an interdisciplinary team of Judges, attorneys, coordinators, case managers, treatment providers, law enforcement personnel and peer support staff work together with the participant to develop an individual plan for recovery and success

- Judge
- Prosecutor
- Defense Attorney
- Therapeutic Court Case Manager
- Therapeutic Court Coordinator
- Treatment Provider—Pierce County Alliance, Catholic Community Services
- Peer Support Specialist—Pierce County Alliance
- Greater Lakes Jail Transition Services

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## Tacoma Municipal Therapeutic Courts



- **Mental Health Court**
  - Mental Health Calendar has operated since 2015
  - Formal Mental Health Court launched June 2023
  - Designed for individuals with serious and persistent mental health diagnoses
- **Community Court**
  - Soft-Launch October 2023
  - Designed for a broad group of individuals facing significant life challenges such as housing needs, substance use disorder, minor mental health conditions, unemployment, and more
  - Held outside of the courthouse in a neutral, approachable setting

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# Mental Health Court Overview

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## ● ● ● Mental Health Court Mission Statement



The mission of Mental Health Court is to build a stronger and safer Tacoma. Mental Health Court serves community members with mental health diagnoses who are at risk of repeat criminal offenses. We use a holistic approach that promotes well-being, independence, accountability, and safety in our community.

### **Program Goals:**

- Foster better outcomes by providing equitable access to treatment services and community resources
- Ensure public safety and reduce recidivism
- Increase collaboration between the court and behavioral health providers
- Create a dignified, respectful space for court participants to resolve their legal cases

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## ● ● ● Mental Health Court Eligibility Criteria



- **A diagnosis of a serious mental illness documented by a mental health professional. Examples of qualifying diagnoses include schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder**
- Criminal behavior must be related to or caused by the individual's mental illness
- Individual must be:
  - Willing to meet the time commitments of the program by attending all hearings, case management appointments, and treatment appointments
  - Willing to engage in recommended assessments, participate in treatment services, take prescribed medication and attend to other program activities
  - Willing to abstain from alcohol, marijuana, and all other mind-altering substances for the duration of the program

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## Mental Health Court Exclusions



- Cases in which substance use disorder is the primary diagnosis without evidence of an underlying mental illness
- Cases in which dementia, developmental disability or brain injury is the primary diagnosis without evidence of an underlying mental illness
- Statutory Exclusions:
  - Individuals who are currently charged or who have been previously convicted of a serious violent offense or sex offense as defined in RCW [9.94A.030](#)
  - Individuals who are currently charged with an offense alleging intentional discharge, threat to discharge, or attempt to discharge a firearm in furtherance of the offense
  - Individuals who are currently charged with or who have been previously convicted of vehicular homicide or an equivalent out-of- state offense
  - Individuals who are currently charged with or who have been previously convicted of: An offense alleging substantial bodily harm or great bodily harm as defined in RCW [9A.04.110](#), or death of another person.

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## Mental Health Court Overview



- Eligible participants enter a 12-month Stipulated Order of Continuance (SOC). During the program they receive comprehensive case management assistance and referrals to any needed services, such as mental health treatment, substance use disorder treatment, housing resources, social security navigation, insurance enrollment, employment assistance, education programs, and more
- Participants are directed into one of two tracks: Track A (low-risk) or Track B (high-risk) based on the outcome of a risk and needs assessment that is completed during the referral process

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## Mental Health Court Phases



- Mental Health Court is divided into four phases over 12 months
- Participants have more frequent court appearances in early phases and transition to less frequent appearances as they progress through the program and work on building independence
- Focusing on one phase at a time makes the program more attainable. It also provides incremental positive reinforcement when celebrating advancement from one phase to the next

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## Standardized SOC Conditions



- All Mental Health Court SOC's are 12 months
- Participant agrees to:
  - Complete MH Evaluation and Treatment
  - Complete SUD Evaluation and Treatment, if indicated
  - Sign consent paperwork to allow treatment providers to update the court on treatment attendance and engagement
  - Take all medications as prescribed
  - Abstain from the use of alcohol, marijuana (including medical marijuana), non-prescribed drugs
  - Complete random Urinalysis testing when asked
  - Pay any restitution prior to graduation from MHC
  - Maintain law abiding behavior

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# Community Court Overview

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## Community Court Mission Statement

The community court mission is to build a stronger and safer Tacoma. This model will promote increased accountability and personal growth by connecting community members to needed health and social services. Individuals who are charged with misdemeanor offenses are often dealing with significant life challenges such as education barriers, food insecurity, housing instability, mental health concerns, limited job opportunities, substance use disorder, and trauma. In community court, we utilize a collaborative and problem-solving approach that brings together case management, community partnerships, and treatment providers to reduce recidivism and increase overall independence and rehabilitation.

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## Community Court Eligibility



There is a presumption of admission for justice-involved potential participants dealing with significant life challenges such as education barriers, food insecurity, housing instability, mental health concerns, limited job opportunities, substance use disorder, and trauma.

### LIMITATIONS

- This presumption is limited to those who are willing to engage in the screening process and complete recommended assessments, treatment, and other program activities.
- This presumption is limited by certain charges that may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis:
  - Driving Under the Influence charges pursuant to RCW 46.61.502;
  - Physical Control charges pursuant to RCW 46.61.504;
  - Domestic Violence charges pursuant to RCW 10.99.020(7 – 8).
  - Unlawful Exhibition of Speed charges with allegations of organization and/or promotion pursuant to TMC 11.05.132.

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## Community Court Eligibility Continued



### EXCLUSIONS

- This presumption is limited by statutory requirements pursuant to RCW 2.30.030(3) which excludes:
  - Previous conviction of a serious violent offense or sex offense as defined in RCW 9.94A.030;
  - Currently charged with an offense alleging intentional discharge, threat to discharge, or attempt to discharge a firearm in furtherance of the offense;
  - Previous conviction of vehicular homicide or an equivalent out-of-state offense;
  - Previous conviction of an offense alleging substantial bodily harm or great bodily harm as defined in RCW 9A.04.110.
- This presumption is limited by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) as grantees of federal funds are prohibited from using federal funds to support programs or activities that violate the Federal Controlled Substance Act, 21 U.S.C. § 801 et seq, regardless of local or state practices or laws. Potential Community Court Participants will be advised that they are not permitted to use any federally illicit substances for the duration of their participation in the program including, but not limited to, marijuana and medical marijuana.

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## Community Court Matrix

### Charges and Offense Level

LOW LEVEL OFFENSE 3 Months	MED LEVEL OFFENSE 6 Months	HIGH LEVEL OFFENSE 9 Months
Destruction of Property	Animal Cruelty	Assault 4
DWLS 3	Dangerous Weapon Possession	DWLS 1
False Statement	DWLS 2	Harassment
Graffiti / Vandalism	Hit & Run Unattended	Hit & Run Attended
Ignition Interlock	Loitering for Drug Purposes	Negligent Driving 1
No Valid Operation License W/O	Malicious Mischief 3	Protection Order Violation
Public Disturbance	Obstruction	Reckless Driving
Supplying Liquor to Minor	Possession of Stolen Property 3	UPCS
Trespass 2	Reckless Burning 2	
Unlawful Exhibition Attendance	Theft 3	
Unlawful Transit Conduct	Trespass 1	
Vehicle Prowling 2	Resisting Arrest	
	Unlawful Exhibition of Speed	

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## Community Court Matrix

### Track and Offense Level Matrix

	LOW LEVEL OFFENSE 3 Months	MED LEVEL OFFENSE 6 Months	HIGH LEVEL OFFENSE 9 Months
	Track A	1 hour (Court 1x first month)	2 hours (Court 1x first month)
Track A-1	2 hours (Court 2x first month)	3 hours (Court 2x first month)	4 hours (Court 2x first month)
Track B	3 hours (Court 3x first month)	4 hours (Court 3x first month)	5 hours (Court 3x first month)
Track B-1	4 hours (Court 4x first month)	5 hours (Court 4x first month)	6 hours (Court 4x first month)

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# Therapeutic Court Data

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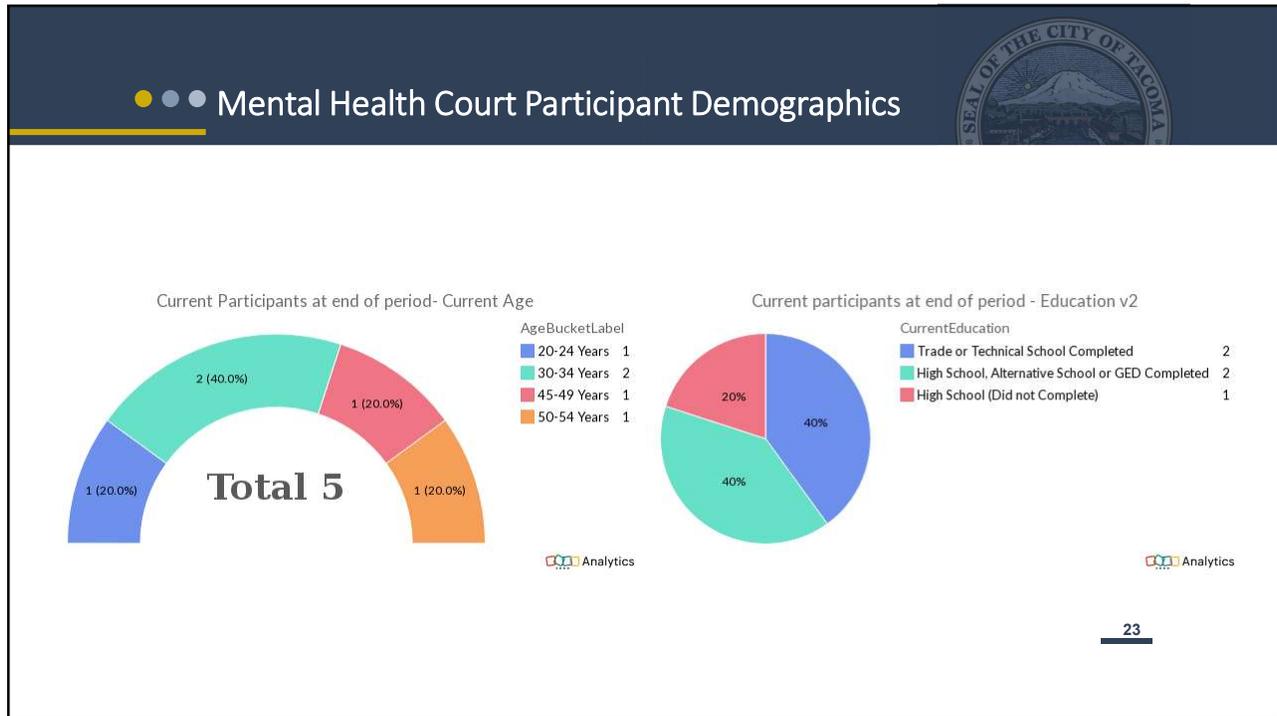
## Current Program Statistics

**Mental Health Court**  
NUMBER OF REFERRALS: 13  
NUMBER OF ENTRIES: 5  
NUMBER OF GRADUATIONS: 0  
NUMBER OF CURRENT PARTICIPANTS: 5

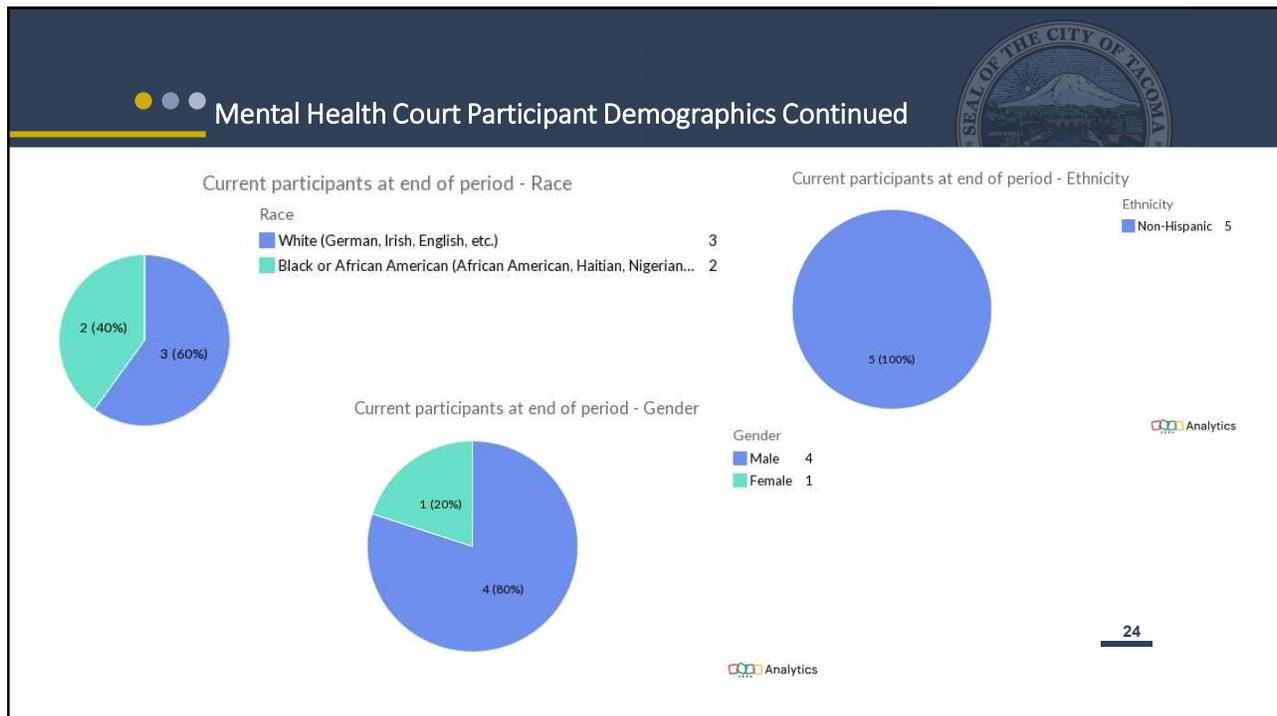
**Community Court**  
NUMBER OF REFERRALS: 33  
NUMBER OF ENTRIES: 12  
NUMBER OF GRADUATIONS: 5  
NUMBER OF CURRENT PARTICIPANTS: 7

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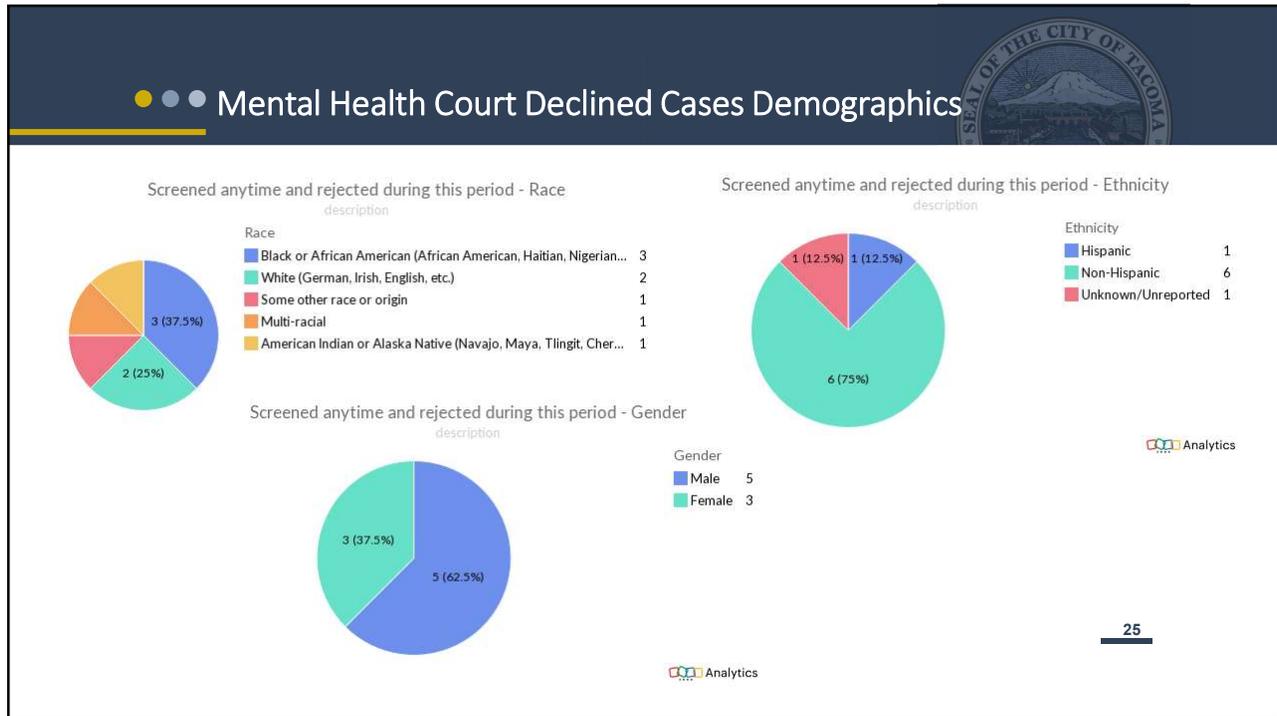
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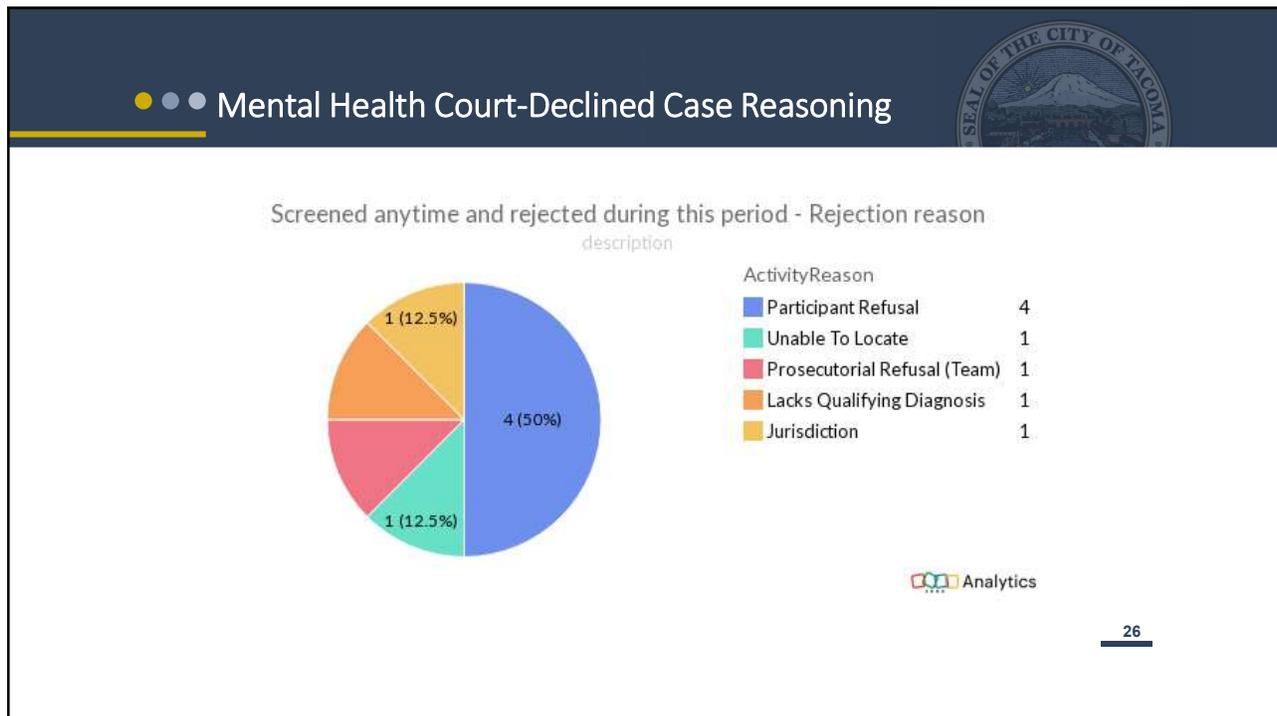
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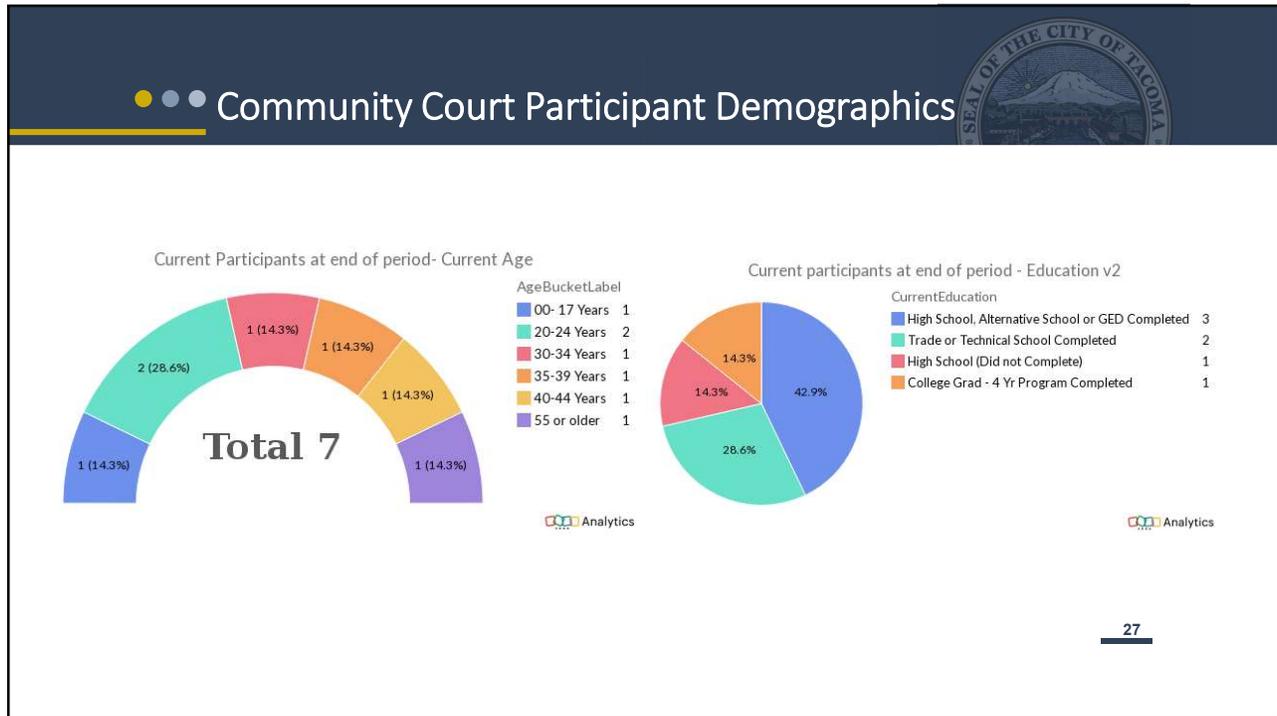
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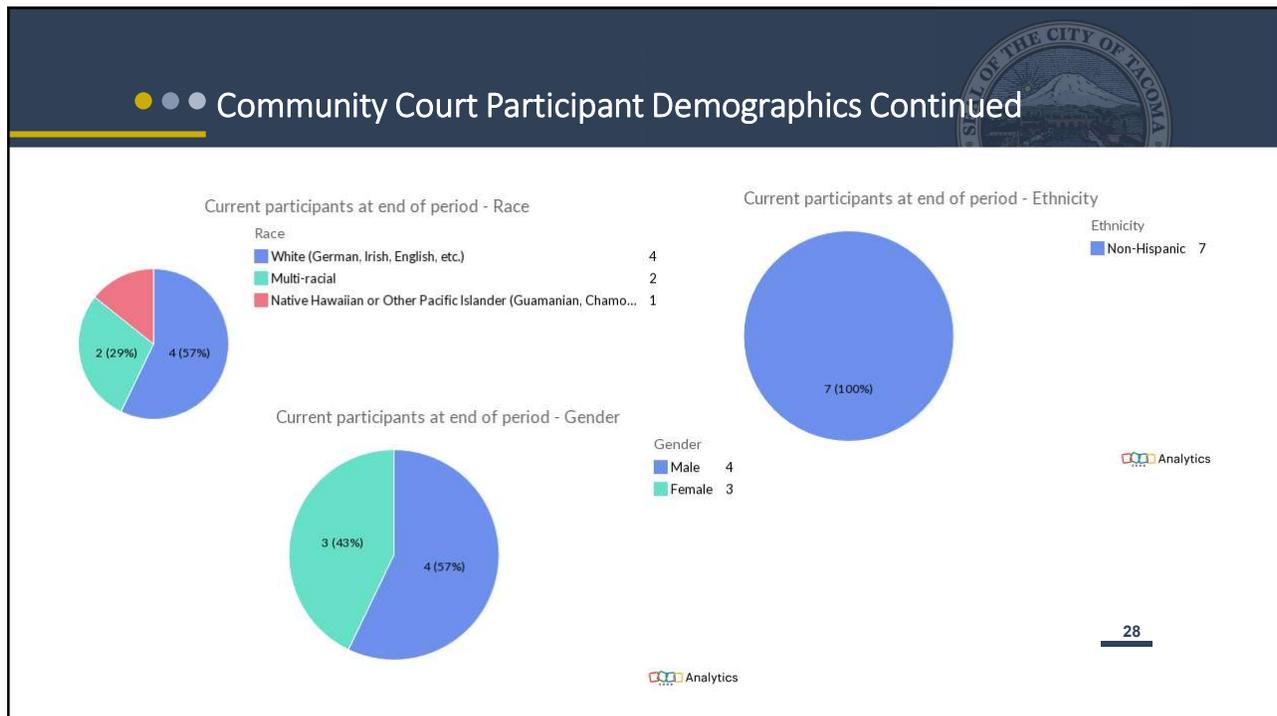
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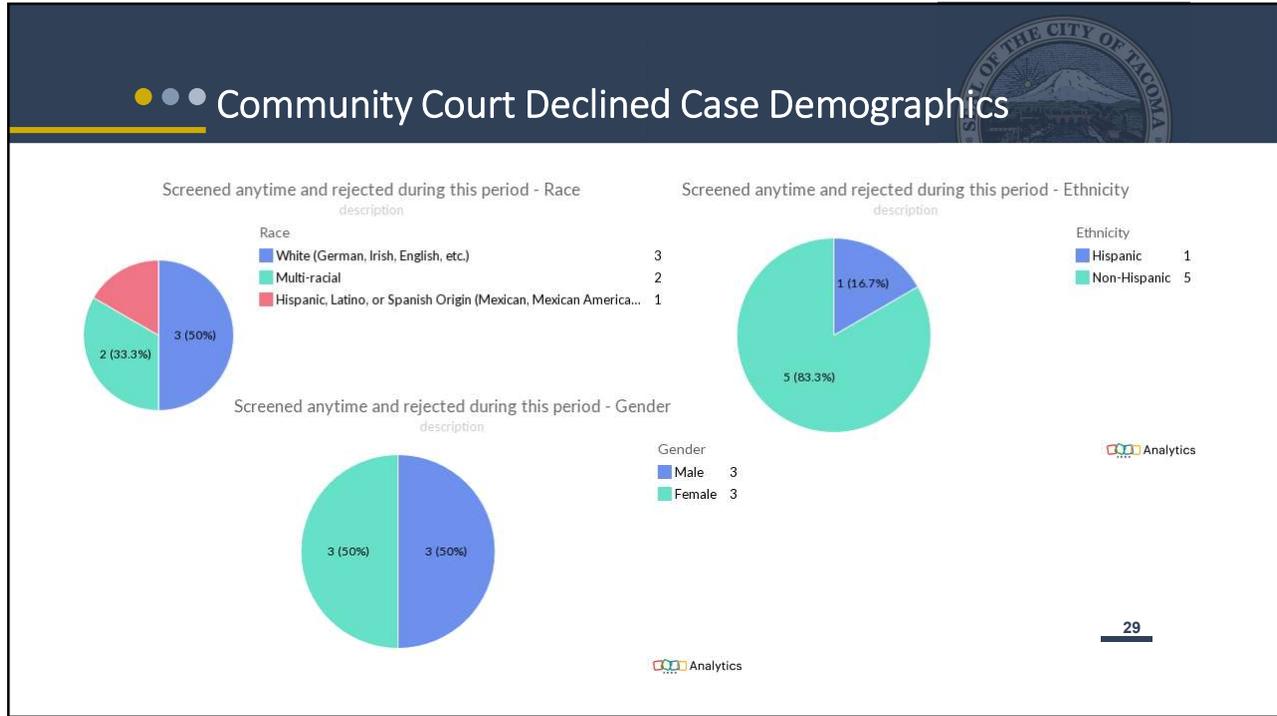
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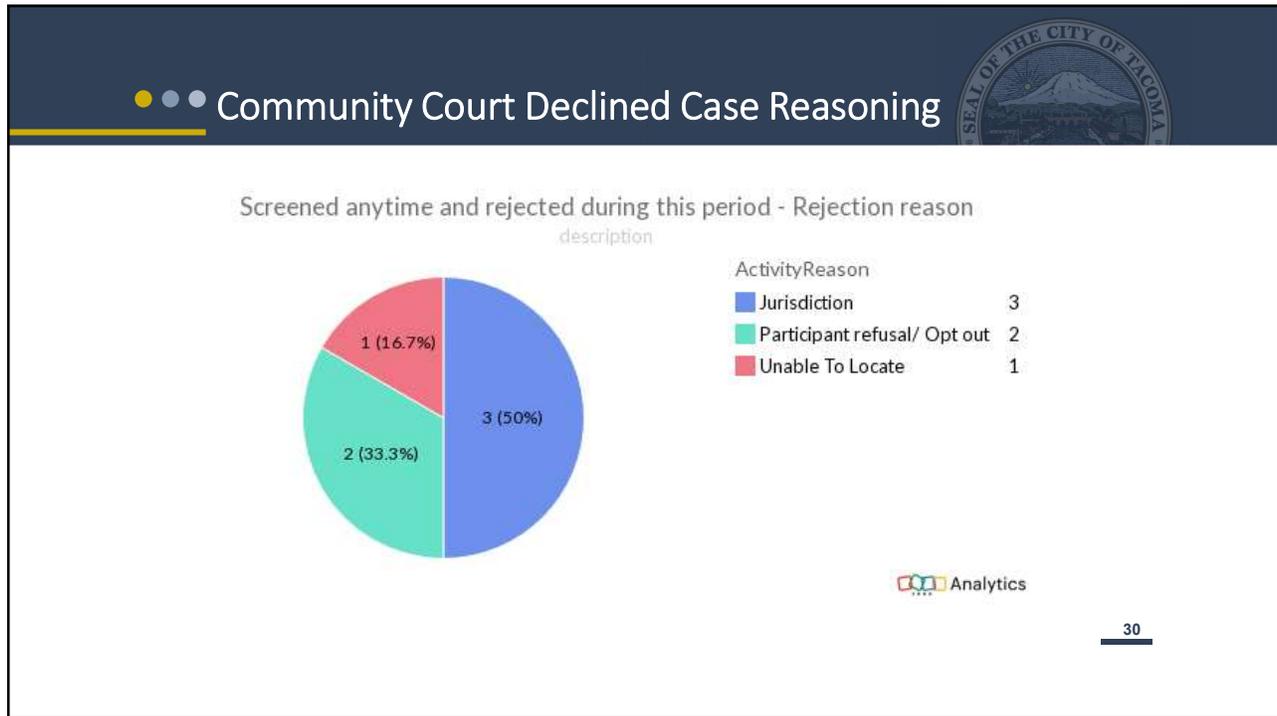
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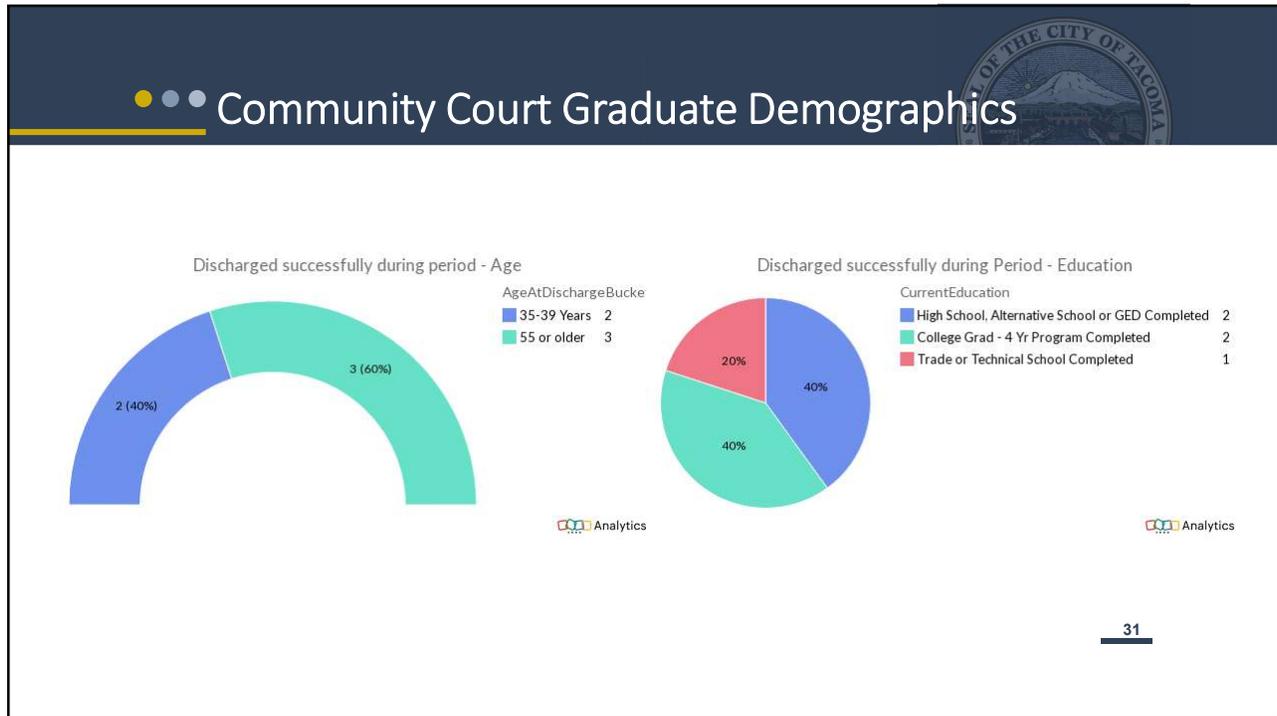
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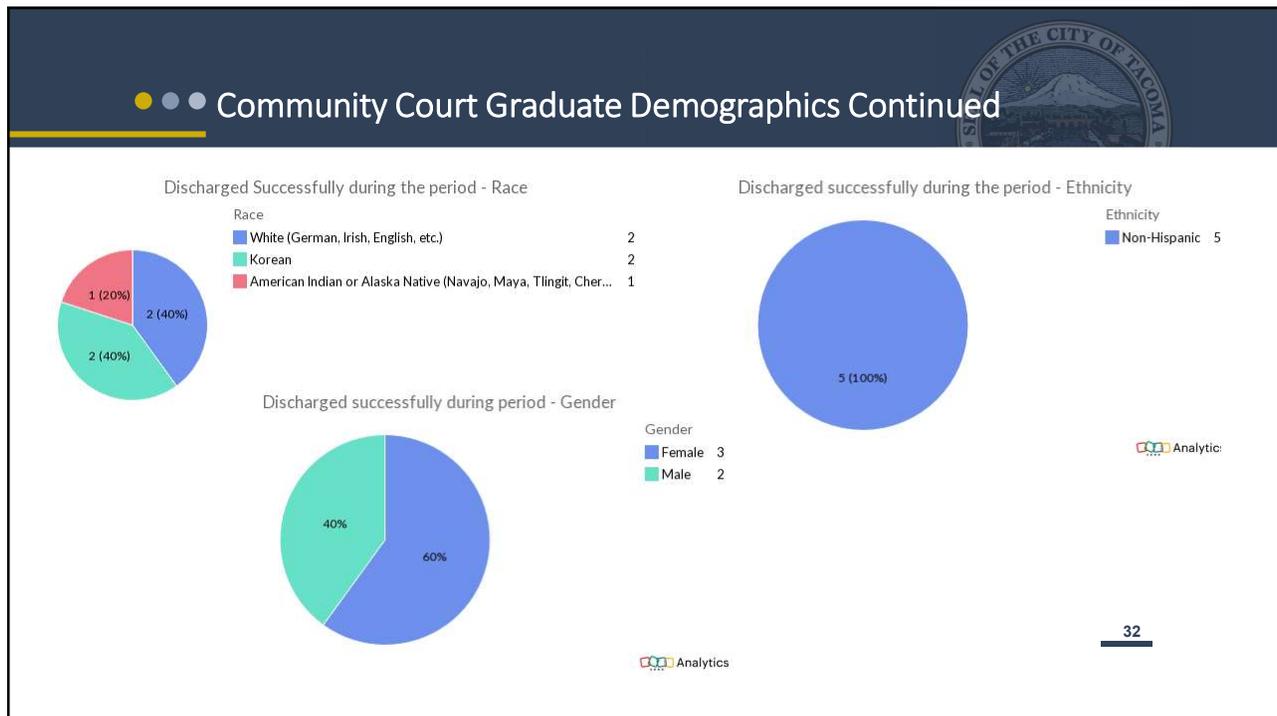
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## Opportunities to Support Therapeutic Courts



- Spread the word
- Share opportunities for collaboration with other city programs
- City funding may be needed for future grant matching opportunities
- Come visit!

**Mental Health Court:** Wednesdays 10:30 in Courtroom 234

**Community Court:** Thursdays 1:30pm at

The Center for Dialog and Resolution

717 Tacoma Avenue South

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## Questions?



For any future questions/concerns, please contact:

Therapeutic Court Coordinator: (253) 591-5229

[TMTC@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:TMTC@cityoftacoma.org)

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