



**Summit County
Domestic Relations Court**
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

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Op-Ed – For Immediate Distribution

National Recovery Month: A Court without a Crime

Summit County Domestic Relations Family Recovery Court offers a unique operation.

Administrative Judge Katarina Cook

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September is National Recovery Month. Most of what you'll read this month celebrates people who got clean and the treatment courts that helped them get there. There are more than 4,000 treatment courts in this country¹, and roughly half serve adults in the criminal system doing extraordinary work. But their story starts with an arrest, and I want to tell you about the court that doesn't.

¹ Office of Justice Programs, Treatment Courts – Special Feature <https://www.ojp.gov/feature/treatment-courts/overview>, 04/11/2024



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Summit County's Family Recovery Court Program is offered by the Domestic Relations Court. There's no prosecutor or criminal charge. The case that brings a parent to us is a private dispute between parents or legal custodians— a divorce, a custody case, a parentage action. Nothing had to happen that gives the state a legal reason to act. The importance of this is that our program works in the window before the state gets involved with the family-either in a criminal matter or an administrative action. It is unique in this way because it can spare the parties costly legal battles and provide actual care for the family dealing with a chemical dependency or a mental health crisis.

Here's what happens in that window. Participation is voluntary; nobody gets ordered by the court. A parent gets an assessment and appears before myself or Magistrate Heimbaugh every two weeks in Phase I until the assessment is provided to the Court. Phase II- the parties attend monthly court sessions and move to Phase III- only appearing every 60 days while the Court monitors compliance with treatment, and once stability is proven. At each stage, parenting time gets reviewed and adjusted providing an opportunity to build and grow the relationship with the Child. In a criminal treatment court, what you earn back is your freedom. Here, what you earn back is Tuesday nights, bedtimes, and the pickup line at school.

We talk a lot about adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The negative experiences of childhood trauma can affect a child's growth including physical, mental, and emotional health for years to come. According to the Cleveland Clinic ACEs can lead to a decrease in life expectancy. That being said, it's worth being honest about what's already on the board. A parent's substance use is an ACE. A parent's mental illness is an ACE. The separation itself is an ACE². By the time a case

² Cleveland Clinic, Childhood Trauma & Aces - <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24875-adverse-childhood-experiences-ace>, 07/16/2025



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is filed at our Court, the score isn't zero, and I can't make it zero. My only task is to deal with the issues presented in the best interest of the children.

So this September, I'm asking the family law bar in Summit County for two things. First, make a referral to the Family Recovery Court Program- you can do this by connecting with me or my Bailiff at (330) 643-2357. If you have a client whose drinking or depression is going to surface in this case, recognize that it's better for their children if they come forward voluntarily-rather than to have it be a reason to have their parenting time limited in litigation. And if you represent the other parent- understand that this program offers real time resolution to parenting time issues with the added bonus of being notified if there are any positive drug screens or non-compliance with treatment- all while moving the parenting time schedule along in the safest way possible being continually monitored by the FRC's Program Manager. It truly is a win-win program for all parties involved.