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Kane County Family Division Staff Offers Pour Painting Activity to Specialty Court Participants

November 15, 2024 – Kane County, Illinois – What began as a wall decorating project for the recently renovated Kane County Court’s Family Order of Protection Division became a collaborative effort benefitting staff and over 40 specialty court participants of the 16th Judicial Circuit.

Family Order of Protection Division Coordinator Elizabeth Williamson says that after their department was renovated to be more purposeful to individuals seeking orders of protection, they still needed to think about what type of artwork they would hang on their walls to connote a safe and welcoming space. Knowing that artwork can be expensive, and tastes vary, the staff decided they needed an abstract theme. Williamson said, "A few years ago, during COVID, my neighbor did pour paintings, and I thought they were interesting. Our staff is creative in their own ways, and all love color and patterns. We agreed that we would like to create our artwork together and do pour paintings."

Williamson also speculated if their department's art project could be multi-beneficial by including specialty court participants in its creation. Currently, participants in the four specialty courts of Kane County—DUI Problem-Solving Court, Drug Rehabilitation Court, Treatment Alternative Court, and Veterans Court—have been provided with group opportunities such as book clubs, art shows, and movie discussions. Williamson wondered if offering specialty court participants an opportunity to assist in pour paintings could also help them have a "stake in moving forward in their treatment plan."

Williamson proposed her idea to the Presiding Judge of the DUI Problem-Solving Court, Rene Cruz, and Judge Christine Downs of the Drug Rehabilitation Court and Treatment Alternative (Mental Health) Court. A series of collaborative events was developed to create artwork for the building while participants created artwork they could keep. The staff used purple to represent standing against domestic violence, teal to support survivors of sexual assault, and blue to represent standing against child abuse in the colors they chose for their artwork. Specialty court participants could choose colors that were meaningful to them for their canvases.

Williamson said her staff, Mikaela Thorne and Cassandra Gasca, then worked in the Kane County Judicial Center jury lounge, individually with three of the four specialty courts. She said that, at first, the tension was palpable with each group. "Some participants worried they would be

judged for lack of talent," but Williamson explained, "In pour painting, no brushes or tools are involved. She continued, "Participants simply picked their colors, and then we demonstrated how to pour the paint. A few seconds later, as their masterpieces began to emerge, the tension in the room evaporated. Everyone was excited about their creations; every single one was a masterpiece."

Feedback was positive from project participants and their families, and many had brought their partners and children to the activity. Judge Cruz shared, "One of the participants and his wife enjoyed it so much that they're doing painting on their date nights." Treatment Alternative Court Program Coordinator Julissa Gonzalez said she heard from several participants who really enjoyed the activity and that "It was nice to hear their interpretations of what their pieces reminded them of." Williamson said the pour project was exciting for a few reasons, "It was nice to see families enjoying time together and being supportive, and they all seemed to enjoy the opportunity to be creative."



Kane County Family Law Division staff display their pour painting artwork.
(L-R) Cassandra Gaskas, Elizabeth Williamson, and Mikaela Thorne

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