



Hoarding

Program Handbook

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Those who hoard usually experience embarrassment about their possessions and feel uncomfortable when others see they have clutter, often at the expense of livable space, feel sad or ashamed after acquiring.



Welcome

You have taken an important step to improve the quality of your life. We are pleased that you chose us to assist you in planning the services that will focus on your unique needs.

Our Mission

Our team empowers everyone with whom we come into contact to engage in a process of healing, growth and change that benefits themselves, their environment, families, coworkers and community.

Our Vision

Our team members devote their best collective and individual efforts toward improving, expanding, and strengthening the quality, efficacy, and sustainability of everything we do in building for the future.

Our Story

The Central Ohio Hoarding Collaborative was the product of a partnership between key mental health and safety stakeholders in Central Ohio. These strategic partners chose to address the realities of Compulsive Hoarding head-on through collaborative, compassionate, and genuine dialogue that ultimately resulted in this program that seeks to address the mental health needs of the individual as well as the safety concerns of the community. The COHC continues to work toward a greater global understanding of the hoarding compulsion as well as ways our community can support those facing these decisions.

We look forward to working with you.

What is Hoarding?

A disorder characterized by the acquisition of and failure to discard, a large volume of possessions resulting in substantial clutter that impairs use of the living areas of the home

Clinical Definition

Persistent difficulty discarding with possessions, regardless of actual value; distress associated with discarding; the accumulation compromises intended uses; where not attributed to other medication condition or mental disorder.

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 2013)

Environmental Expression

The collection of items that block access to exits, windows, and hallways or interfere with the proper ventilation, or could result in fire or pest infestations. Excessive hoarding presents a danger to first-responders and emergency workers.

Clutter isn't just the stuff in your closet. It's anything that gets between you and the life you want to be living.

Peter Walsh



Why the Environmental Court?

Upon taking the bench, Judge Dan Hawkins was uncertain about the realities of hoarding. While television and media had presented a seemingly comical and illogical world for those accumulating trinkets and toys, it was his personal experience overseeing an on-site hearing at the home of three hoarders that inspired him to seek a solution to address the cyclical nature of hoarding responses. Walking through the home and listening to the elderly owners explain their items and seeing first-hand the effort employed to accumulate and maintain a lifetime of memories, coupled with the effect on the neighboring community, made Judge Hawkins realize that this issue required a more lasting solution.

Judge Hawkins made contact with the Alcohol Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County (ADAMH) to see what services were in place to assist individuals suffering with this condition. It was quickly acknowledged that no specific treatment mechanism was in place, but a collaborative effort was instituted to develop a plan for Franklin County residents faced with these issues. While the process to identify and prepare a treatment protocol included a national search of literature and behavioral treatment program, the resulting Hoarding Response Program presents a unique solution that is the first Court-based hoarding treatment plan of its kind in the nation.

Throughout this process the Court and its partners have modified the structure and understandings of the program as necessary to create a successful tool for all our participants. The hoarding team engaged the assistance of an independent firm to oversee and evaluate the successes of our clients, and confirm whether this program can be a model for other communities and individuals facing the realities of compulsive hoarding.



Our Commitment to You

These key principles provide the foundational guidance for delivering behavioral health services to the individuals, families, and communities who have chosen this program:

Safety:

Our first and greatest priority is ensuring that all people are provided the tools and resources to live in a safe and sustainable environment. Whether you live in an apartment, a stand-alone house, or a retirement facility - everyone deserves the privilege of being safe in his or her home. We appreciate and respect the personal expression of an individual's personality through their living space, and we recognize the role that housing and safety standards play in maintaining a safe dwelling.

Excellence:

Our commitment is to provide the highest quality service to the people and communities we serve. We value and reward successes and are committed to continual improvement in all we do. We have the willingness to succeed and we have the mean to create and foster success for ourselves, our coworkers and those we serve.

Dedication:

Our team is committed to doing what it takes to get the job done ethically and efficiently. We are committed to hard work. We are passionate about what we do. We are compassionate with our coworkers and everyone we serve.

Growth:

We are committed to learning and continuous improvement. We recognized that growth is a dynamic process, not an event. We recognize that the key to success is meeting our goals and building the resources we need to fulfill our mission.

Ethical Behavior:

We value and expect integrity in every aspect of our work and will accept nothing less.

Confidentiality:

Treatment staff will not discuss or send out information about clients unless a signed release of information form is on file.

Expectations for Participants

Releases

A release of information will be required to exchange information amongst the agents and officers of the Central Ohio Hoarding Collaborative. This exchange will allow the program architects to evaluate and recommend changes to the overall program structure. These discussions may include attendance, progress, participation, prognoses, assessment and recommended treatment. If a client revokes any required release of information it will result in immediate termination from the Hoarding Assistance Program.

No Illegal or Mood Altering Chemicals

Individuals will abstain from using or ingesting mood altering chemicals; including illegal drugs, unauthorized medications, as well as legal substances such as K2, bath salts, etc.).

Doctor Prescribed Medication

All prescribed medications must be reported to the treatment provider and the Hoarding Assistance Program coordinator. If requested clients will provide verification of any prescriptions or otherwise sign appropriate releases of information forms.

Follow Recommendations of Treatment Provider

Failure to follow the recommendation of the treatment provider or abatement staff will result in appropriate program sanction and/or removal from the program.

Attendance/Tardiness

If a client is running late or unable to attend a treatment session, appointment, or court hearing, they must contact the staff member – unexcused absences will result in program sanctions and/or removal.

Client Conduct

Clients will present themselves in an appropriate manner and dress code when reporting to meetings, or in conversation with program or treatment staff.

Phase I

Expected to last 90-120 days after referral

Overview

The Environmental Court & its Partners are committed with our clients to develop a safe living area with clear paths to and from exits and throughout the dwelling unit; clients are encouraged to discuss their motivation for acquiring and thereby reduce the acquisition of new items.

Abatement Strategy

This first phase of treatment includes the review of a Minimum Safety Checklist to assess fire hazards, egress lanes, and that makes sure that operable plumbing, electrical, and heating systems are in place.

The focus of the abatement plan will be on addressing any exterior property maintenance issues and outside expressions of hoarding that may effect overall public safety and welfare. During this more crucial stage of abatement the client meets with the abatement staff weekly to identify barriers to compliance.

Individuals participating in the Court's program will have regular 45-day interactions with the Judge to confirm adherence with the clients' objectives of the abatement plan.

Treatment Strategy

Throughout this first phase, the client is introduced to the clinical staff and is expected to consistently attend weekly treatment sessions. Treatment activities include reviewing the definition of compulsive hoarding and exploring the meaning of possessions. Clients will identify a 'coach' who can help develop motivation and provide accountability. A pivotal skill to be honed during this phase is reducing the acquisition of new items through exposure therapy activities and identifying alternative pleasurable activities.

Clients will be able to recognize progress and successes made while in the program – and the safety implication of these decisions/skills.

Phase II

Expected to last 9-12 months after transition

Overview

The Environmental Court & its Partners are committed with our clients to develop new lifestyle skills and organize their living areas; clients begin to develop organizing skills and make decisions about saving and discarding.

Abatement Strategy

This longest phase of treatment includes the use of home organization and visioning tools to determine a desired living space layout. A series of strategies and requirements for obtaining these long-term goals will be developed and thereafter abatement staff will work with the client to identify and address structural barriers to 'aging in place'. It is expected during this phase that staff will perform biweekly visits to gauge progress.

Individuals participating in the Court's program will have regular 45-day interactions with the Judge to confirm adherence with the clients' objectives of the abatement plan. The option for on-site hearing is permitted during this phase.

Treatment Strategy

During this phase, the client continues to develop organizing skills and begins to categorize items for storage and filing. Clients learn cognitive strategies for making decisions about saving and discarding and are introduced to group treatment and socialization opportunities. By the end of this phase treatment sessions reduce to bi-weekly as dictated by progress and begin transition to group treatment and independent therapy.

Clients will be able to recognize thinking errors that effect progress and successes – and regain confidence in their ability to maintain a safety and organized home.

Phase III

Expected to last 4-6 months after significant progress

Overview

The Environmental Court & its Partners are committed with our clients to maintaining a safe living area and preventing relapse – this period allows flexible engagement as deemed appropriate by the program staff.

Abatement Strategy

This final phase of treatment is characterized by the successful maintenance of the living space. Abatement staff will encourage safe and engaging activities for social networking while monitoring or consistent application of new life skills. Abatement staff will coordinate a tiered monthly series of inspections.

Individuals participating in the Court's program will have shift to 12-week interactions with the Judge, ending with a client-centered completion ceremony.

Treatment Strategy

Throughout this final phase, the client is introduced to the group treatment dynamic and treatment staff will discuss long-term care opportunities. Treatment interventions are possible as needed by the client but treatment sessions are further relaxed and staggered to complement abatement staff visits.

Clients will be able to shift engagement onto family/support networks, recognizing the progress and successes made while in the program – and demonstrate the ability to sort and discard items as needed to maintain a healthy and safe home.

Rewards & Incentives

The Hoarding Assistance Program wants to encourage its participants, to that end the program offers rewards and incentives which include:

- Phase Movement
- Acknowledgment from staff and the Judge
- Accelerated Graduation
- Waived Financial Sanctions/Program costs
- Modified Visit/Session schedules

What types of encouragement, rewards, or incentives are you interested in?

Sanctions & Violations

The Hoarding Assistance Program wants to encourage its participants, but when necessary there are consequences for delayed or resistant behavior, the program assigns these sanction as follows:

- Phase Regression/Restrictions
- Additional In-Home Assignments
- Written Assignments
- Oral Presentations to Peers/Staff
- Acknowledgment from staff and the Judge
- Increased Visit/Session schedules
- Termination from HAP program

For those participating in the Hoarding Assistance Program as part of a Court action, the Judge assigns the following additional sanctions as warranted:

- Community Service
- Jail Time
- Financial Sanctions/Program costs come due
- Increased Court Appearances
- Forced/Involuntary Cleanouts

Your Future

Now that you've graduated...

It's been likely 18 months of hard work and hopefully a meaningful transition to a new, safer, and more stable lifestyle.

You have met new friends with whom you can share the joys as well as the frustrations of de-cluttering – friends who value you for who you are, not what you can do for them.

You have found some sense of security in your own home and life.

Freedom from the prison of untreated mental illness requires steady, day-to-day effort – you've started to work with others who are on the same path.

Environmental Division of the Franklin County Municipal Court

The Environmental Division exercises exclusive jurisdiction to adjudicate health, housing, and safety code violations within Franklin County and as such is the principle venue for communities addressing compulsive hoarding



Acknowledgements:

The Environmental Court wishes to acknowledge the community activists, state and local officials, policymakers, legislators, attorneys, judges, mental health professionals, and residents of Franklin County whose tireless advocacy made the Hoarding Assistance Program a reality.

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- Adult Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County
- Southeast Mental Health, Inc.
- City of Columbus' Code Enforcement Division

Thanks to:

The Environmental Court would like to recognize and thank its staff, past and present, whose knowledge, expertise and passion have helped to fulfill the promise of the Court.

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