

What is DV Court?



The Conasauga Circuit Domestic Violence Court began taking shape in 2014 under the leadership of Chief Superior Court Judge Cindy Morris. The concept was to model a specialized domestic violence court after the Accountability Court programs already established across Georgia. In 2021, the Conasauga Circuit Domestic Violence Court officially began operating as an Accountability Court serving Whitfield County and Murray County. The program was created to increase accountability and supervision of domestic violence offenders who have entered the criminal justice system and currently operates as a pilot program for the state.

The Conasauga Domestic Violence Court offers an alternative to incarceration while focusing on behavioral and attitudinal change among offenders and prioritizing victim safety. Participants in the program must complete mental health and substance abuse assessments to determine whether individual therapy or intensive case management services are needed. All participants are also required to enroll in a certified Family Violence Intervention Program.

In addition to treatment requirements, participants meet regularly with case managers to establish and maintain short-term goals such as reinstating a driver's license, securing employment, and obtaining stable housing. The program also provides guidance and resources designed to help participants develop life skills and long-term stability.

Participants must comply with all program rules, probation requirements, and court orders. Domestic Violence Court staff closely monitor participants' behavior in the community, at work, and within the Accountability Court facility. Regular court appearances are required, and

participants are monitored for sobriety while maintaining employment and stable housing. Noncompliance may result in sanctions.

Participants also attend treatment groups as part of their recovery process. These groups include Moral Reconation Therapy, Seeking Safety, Matrix, Life Skills, Criminal and Addictive Thinking, and Anger Management. The programs are designed to help participants understand the root causes of their behaviors, challenge past assumptions, and develop healthier patterns of thinking. Treatment groups also address recovery from substance use and the effects of trauma.

A key component of the Conasauga Domestic Violence Court is identifying and addressing the underlying issues participants face in order to prevent future criminal behavior. Program data shows that 86 percent of participants have struggled with substance use issues, while 51 percent have experienced mental health challenges. Additionally, 58 percent report childhood trauma, 52 percent have been victims of domestic violence themselves, and 49 percent witnessed domestic violence in their homes growing up.

Research on Accountability Courts shows reductions in recidivism, fewer relapses, and improvements in life skills among participants. By helping participants stabilize and improve their lives, the program aims to create safer outcomes for victims and the broader community. Since its official launch in 2021, 34 participants have successfully completed the Conasauga Domestic Violence Court Program.

The Conasauga Domestic Violence Court team includes the Chief Superior Court Judge, a court coordinator, treatment providers, a public defender, an assistant district attorney, a Family Violence Intervention Program representative, a victim advocate, misdemeanor and felony probation officers, a local law enforcement representative, and a surveillance officer. Each member plays a role in holding participants accountable while ensuring victim safety.

The goals of the Conasauga Domestic Violence Court are:

A Just Result

Safety for the Victim

Offender Accountability

Elimination of Recidivism

For more information about the Conasauga Domestic Violence Court Program or to learn more about its services, please contact Court Coordinator **Amanda Barnett** at **706-281-4815** or by email at **abarnett@whitfieldcountyga.com**.