

## **INSPIRED TO SERVE: MENTAL HEALTH AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM**

### **Section 2: Lessons, Inspiration, & Motivation**

When asked about her motivations for working with mentally ill populations, attorney Holly Giezl spoke of haunting stories of system failure and addiction that impacted her practice. She shared one story of a man in his late 30s to early 40s who was adopted from parents struggling with severe drug and alcohol addiction. Moderately intellectually disabled, his adoptive parents put him on a bus to Tucson, Arizona, at the age of 17, effectively ending the relationship. He began abusing drugs on the street, finding himself in and out of hospitals and care facilities, experiencing a great deal of hardship along the way. He assaulted a nurse, got stabbed by another patient while sleeping, and eventually died because the hospital failed to treat pneumonia.

“The institution utterly failed somebody,” Holly reflected, “He never had a chance, and when he did have a chance, the state hospital leveled him off instead of helping him ascend.”

Her next story was of an older man in his late 40s who, after being released from prison, moved to Arizona to live with his mother and stepfather. The mother eventually called the police for help, because her son was chasing her husband around with a knife. The chase escalated and moved outside, where concerned neighbors joined in with a Pitbull and a gun. The man was shot 7 times by law enforcement but survived and was charged with aggravated assault. After being released from jail, he was admitted to a mental health clinic. He was in and out of housing before eventually being found deceased in a park, having overdosed on ketamine.

“Death is the worst case scenario,” Holly insists, referring to the men in these stories as victims of the carousel of failure.

They enter a facility, leave to feed their addiction, get denied services for breaking the rules, and continue to hop back and forth to different facilities without getting better. Often, they’re prescribed a multitude of medications that don’t mix well or improve their mental state. These ineffective medications, coupled with housing and service instability, force them to go around and around until inevitably, they hurt themselves or others, or they die

Having described death as the worst case scenario, Holly reflects on a haunting experience that shaped her philosophy as an attorney. It began when her client, accused of murdering two women, faced the death penalty. This client decided not to fight the charge, opting instead to

plead guilty and accept the verdict that would result in his execution. His favor of acceptance and the refusal to fight the charge taught Holly the importance of advocating and representing her client's desires, especially when they are deemed competent to make their own legal decisions. Sometimes, this can be the opposite of what you believe is best, but upholding and advocating for the client's desires is a major part of the job. It's their life and their decision, not the attorney's.

Another learning lesson arose in 2006 when Holly faced a license suspension. Almost twenty years later, she's explained that much like many of her clients, she's learned from her mistakes and accepted their occurrence.

"We all have days where we don't perform at the level we can, but eventually a period needs to be put on the sentence," she advises, "learn from it and move on."

Additionally, Holly quotes on the ACMI website, "I pride myself on not judging people based on their mistakes, and on having client-focused representations. Attorneys are licensed as attorneys and counselors at law. I take both parts seriously." She emphasizes the importance of highlighting an individual's strengths, as often, they outweigh any weaknesses.

This enables her to represent clients with a supportive, non-judgmental approach.