Changing lives: social worker Clement retires

bgdailynews.com/2025/07/29/news_clement072925

Justin Story July 29, 2025

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A retirement reception is held for Kita Clement, a longtime social worker at the Department of Public Advocacy, at the Warren County Justice Center on Friday, July 25, 2025. GRACE MCDOWELL / BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS

For hundreds of people who have found themselves under prosecution in the criminal justice system, Kita Clement has offered a lifeline.

A social worker and alternative sentencing specialist for the Department of Public Advocacy, Clement has spent years working with indigent clients represented by court-appointed attorneys to craft a plan of action that can enable clients to seek treatment for drug addiction or mental illness while avoiding prison.

Clement has announced her retirement from the DPA Bowling Green field office, and a reception was held for her Friday at the Warren County Justice Center to celebrate her career.

“The most gratifying aspect of my work is just seeing lives changed,” Clement said. “Nothing is more rewarding than when I’m out in the community and somebody comes up to me and says ‘thank you for your help.’”

The state’s alternative sentencing worker program was developed in 2006 by the DPA, allowing clients with substance abuse or mental health disorders to be referred to a social worker, who develops a plan with them to address those underlying issues and identify employment and housing options after their cases are resolved.

Those plans are developed as an alternative to incarceration and are presented to the judge presiding over a defendant’s case for their consideration.

DPA staff estimated that Clement works with around 170 clients in a given year.

“In terms of describing Kita, I can think of no better word than ‘saint,’ “ said Alyson McDavitt, directing attorney for the DPA’s Bowling Green office. “She has worked so hard for so long for these clients, her retirement is well deserved but our office will never be the same without her.”

A throng of attorneys, judges and other courthouse workers offered well-wishes to Clement on Friday, and cookies with retirement-themed messages and other snacks were served at the reception in the fourth-floor rotunda of the justice center.

Clement joined DPA soon after the alternative sentencing worker program was launched.

She previously worked in family resource and youth services centers in the Bowling Green and Warren County school systems and had earned a degree in business from Western Kentucky University.

Clement said that work fostered an interest in social services, so she returned to WKU and earned bachelors and masters degrees in social work, interned for DPA and was then hired full-time there.

“I’ve always been in the human services field, helping disadvantaged youth and adults, that’s my background,” Clement said.

The alternative sentencing worker program blossomed from a pilot program employing four social workers to now more than 53 social workers across all of DPA’s branch offices in the state, including the Louisville and post-trial offices.

The program is hailed by those who see clients express a willingness to begin a treatment process and a motivation to access community resources and change their behavior.

Advocates for the alternative sentencing worker program also point to the savings to the state when a client is allowed to enter treatment.

In the 2024 fiscal year, the average cost to house an inmate for a year was $31,391.15, according to the Kentucky Department of Corrections.

“If Kita is able to get somebody treatment, the state can save that money and spend it on education or something else better suited for society,” DPA attorney Eric Clark said.

Part of the process of working with a client in an alternative sentencing program is a follow-up interview conducted 12 months after a criminal case is closed, but Clement said it’s not uncommon for her to encounter a former client in the community years after the fact and hear a good word from them.

Adam Hammons, a therapist at JourneyPure addiction treatment clinic, previously worked alongside Clement in DPA and continues to see clients who have been referred to the clinic by her.

“Kita is just so genuine, she would meet with clients one by one at the jail and stand by them before the judge,” Hammons said. “The system has progressed a little bit and it’s because of people like Kita working with judges, working with the commonwealth to advocate and change peoples’ minds that addiction is a sickness, mental illness is a disease and it’s not something we need to criminalize and punish people for. I cannot think of a more compassionate form of empathy than to stand by someone in their worst moment.”

Clement said she hopes to work again, but for the moment she will enjoy spending more time with her four grandchildren.

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