



# Midland County's First MiHOPE Graduate

On December 19, 2017, the Midland County Swift and Sure Sanctions Probation Program held a special hearing to celebrate the first probationer to be successfully discharged from the program. Known locally as MiHOPE (Midland County Honest Opportunity Probation with Enforcement), the program requires probationers to remain violation free for two years in order to be successfully discharged.

MiHOPE, Midland began in December of 2015 with five probationers and has since grown to over 40 probationers. In addition to the statewide requirements for eligibility into Swift and Sure programs, MiHOPE is run as a prison diversion program meaning that all of the MiHOPE probationers have sentencing guidelines scored by the Department of Corrections that make them eligible for commitment to prison if they should be unsatisfactorily discharged from this program.

The successful probationer, Cody Chase, and the MiHOPE therapist, Norman Blohm, spoke at the hearing and shared that the keys to success were changing his peer group, the certainty of frequent drug testing and jail for every violation, and most importantly, his individual decision to change his own life. Having never successfully completed a probation before, the combination of consistent monitoring and enforcement and the possibility of a prison sentence were powerful external motivators for Cody. The most important motivation was, not surprisingly, internal. "I like my freedom, it's more valuable, and why would you want to chance that," he stated. Changing his environment was his biggest issue. He married and got rid of all of his old friends who liked to drink and use drugs. In-

Instead, he surrounded himself with family and found new friends. He said being with them was more enjoyable than sitting in jail. Staying drug and alcohol free helped his confidence when he applied for new jobs, because he knew he could pass any drug test. Norman Blohm, the therapist for MiHOPE probationers, spoke about the change he observed, “Cody saw a future for himself and he knew that in order to get the future he wanted he was going to have to complete this program. He knew that it was going to take effort from him in order to do it. He took that challenge head on and never put himself in a position where he would have to make excuses for his actions.”

In his feedback of the program, Cody shared that the weekly required outpatient group counseling helped him discuss issues that he was struggling with, and the individual counseling helped because it gave him an opportunity to discuss things that he didn't want to share in a group setting. Cody also suggested that the mandatory counseling sessions take place once per week rather than twice, per week as he found it difficult to manage a job and attend to his other commitments in the program. Knowing that he would be successfully discharged if he went two years without a violation was also a motivating factor because he could see that there was ‘a light at the end of the tunnel’ instead of endless probation.

Midland County anticipates more successful discharges in 2018.