

Woodland man graduates Mental Health Court



From left, deputy DA Chris Bulkeley; Kristi Abbott of the county Health and Human Services Agency; Judge Janet Gaard; Max Land; deputy public defender Bret Bandle; and Steven Svetich of the Yolo Probation department celebrate Land's graduation from Mental Health Court. Courtesy photo

By Special to The Enterprise

Yolo County's Mental Health Court added another success to its ledger on April 23, when Max Land, a 23-year-old Woodland resident, graduated from the program in Department Six of the Yolo County Superior Court.

MHC is an 18-month-minimum, court-based treatment and monitoring system for adult offenders with serious mental illness. MCH is designed to increase the treatment engagement of the participants while reducing both arrests and jail time both during and after their involvement and participation in the program. The program is a collaborative effort between the Yolo County Superior Court, Probation, Health and Human Services Agency, the public defender and the district attorney.

Land is the first MHC participant to graduate after entering the program with a deferred entry of judgment (DEJ) instead of after being placed on probation with a criminal conviction. By the terms of this DEJ agreement, all charges were dismissed upon his successful completion of MHC. This new process allows a young man with no prior criminal history to participate in MHC and graduate with no criminal convictions, which often can be an impediment to future educational opportunities, employment and housing.

Yolo County Supervisor Jim Provenza, who was on hand for the graduation ceremony, said, "I was very impressed to observe how the district attorney, public defender, probation and the Health and Human Services Agency work together with the court to change the lives of

offenders who suffer from mental illness.” Provenza participated in the MHC staffing process before court proceedings to better understand one way the county was addressing mentally ill individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

Land’s mother, Terry Land, and stepfather Peter Nunes, joined him for the graduation ceremony. Terry Land regularly attended Mental Health Court hearings from Oct. 11, 2016, when Max entered the program, through his graduation 18 months later. Terry Land spoke at the graduation ceremony and expressed her appreciation for the MHC program. “I want to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation for the investment and commitment that you all have made in the Mental Health Court Program. My son Max Land is graduating today, and I can honestly say that is because of the program and dedication of the team that Max is a part of the family again and has a promising future ahead of him. You have made a life-changing impact for Max and our entire extended family.”

Janet Gaard, the judge assigned to Mental Health Court, presided over Monday’s proceedings and congratulated Land, telling him she hopes he comes to future MHC court dates and graduations to support those still in the program as has been the case with past graduates.

District attorney Jeff Reisig commended Land for his hard work during the 18 months he was in the program. “Two years ago, we saw the value of offering DEJs to young men and women with no prior criminal involvement that allows them to successfully complete the MHC program and re-enter society with no criminal convictions,” Reisig said. “Now individuals such as Mr. Land can participate in Mental Health Court’s collaborative process resulting in increased treatment engagement for participants who gain valuable insight into their mental health along with the ability to better manage it. This program continues to be a successful way to address those suffering from mental illness who find themselves in the criminal justice system.”