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Mr. Speice

Independent Study and Mentorship

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### Final Product Set-Up and Completion Summary

#### **Materials:**

This project did not require an extensive list of materials since a majority of it was research. Various databases and websites were used to find credible information on the issues of mental health and its relation to the prison system. Other than research sources, canva was used to create a visually appealing presentation of the information in both a condensed brochure format and in a formal case study document.

#### **Objective and Purpose:**

After observing the testimony of Kenneth Midgley, the defendant with schizophrenia in a murder case my mentor was working on, the impact of severe mental illnesses were shown. This issue was not previously explained or understood to the fullest extent so the decision was made to focus on researching various mental illnesses and their effects on individuals. Ms. Petty is on the mental health wheel at Collin County so the goal with this project was to encourage more attorneys to join this wheel and help individuals with mental illness. There are currently not enough attorneys experienced in these types of cases in Collin County to effectively defend clients, especially those who are court appointed, because of the lack of public awareness on this issue. To address this, my final product is not geared specifically to attorneys and can also provide basic information to general readers who are interested in the topic.

**Description of Process:**

The process for this product is relatively simple and was completely focused on research and writing. After meeting with Ms. Petty to discuss her experiences on the mental health wheel, the most common types of mental illness she has encountered on the mental health wheel were researched, including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Once the symptoms and their effects on individuals was researched, I moved onto funding for the various types of treatment or awareness programs compared to that of prisons. This allowed for a comparison in funding but also show how underfunded both systems are especially in Texas. Furthermore, once this was understood, a section was added to explain how an attorney would work through a case involving mental illness compared to a regular case to highlight the similarities and differences. An additional mentor visit was scheduled with Ms. Petty so she could walk me through this process and explain her experiences on various cases to help further my understanding on this complex process, especially in regards to the various evaluations defendants with mental illness must undergo. This also included a discussion over the common issues attorneys working on cases involving mental illness face. Ms. Petty explained these issues from her experience and also highlighted some issues her colleagues have faced over the years. This allowed me to begin researching the solutions in place to help defendent with mental illness, including various diversion programs that counties nearby use to help first-time and non-violent offenders avoid prison time.

Once this research was complete, the rest of the time spent on the final product was put towards writing the case study using the information I learned in research and then creating a brochure with condensed information on the topic for attorneys to access. The writing took much

more time than expected but allowed me to better process the information as I wrote each portion, working a little bit each day to ensure all topics were covered. Once this was complete, it was transferred to canva where it was formatted to match the brochure. While this may seem to be the easiest portion of the project, it was the most challenging for me because of how tedious it was. Design is not one of my strengths so this pushed me out of my comfort zone more than I had expected and allowed me to greatly improve these skills.

**Utilization of Higher-Level Thinking Skills:**

This was a very challenging and time consuming project due to the complexity of the prison system and how it differs in each state and county. Because of this, much of the research had to be very general while still including specific examples of successful solutions towards the issue, such as the Mental Health Diversion Court Program in Tarrant County. Furthermore, by using my research to formulate my own possible solution to the issue, my analytical skills were pushed to find a way to help individuals with mental illness without mimicking programs already in place. After evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of each type of program in place, I was able to craft my own solution to help individuals who cannot avoid prison sentences. Since it is extremely difficult for these individuals to receive treatment or insurance after their release, their mental illness often gets worse which significantly contributes to the high recidivism rates for people with mental illness.

Throughout the research and writing process, my problem solving skills were also tested as the project needed to be shifted to better portray the research. Initially the plan was to have a case study on mental illness and a separate proposal to discuss funding for mental health facilities and treatment programs. However, after completing this research and discussing the

issue with my mentor, it became clear that such a format would include too much redundant information, leading to a change in my project. After making this unexpected adjustment, I was better able to include all of my research in an organized manner and in a single paper to make the writing more coherent.

### **Conclusions and Application:**

After completing the research and writing portions of the case study, the brochure was made to condense the information and turn it into a format that is more accessible for attorneys and the general public. This allows those who read it to see how big of an impact mental illness and the different types have on an individual and understand the severity of the issue. Furthermore, it allows the attorneys who read it, especially in Collin County, Denton County, and Tarrant County to see what they can do to get more involved in the mental health courts nearby. With information on common issues attorneys face and the possible solutions in place for clients with mental illness, the hope is that by spreading my research more attorneys will take cases involving mental illness and be better prepared to defend such individuals.

Additionally, this profound information on the severity of mental illness in the United States and seeing how many people it affects was shocking. With this information the hope is to become more active in the community and raise awareness for mental illness. Ms. Petty is already working to implement new programs to help defendants with mental illness at her new position as City Municipal Judge in McKinney so the hope is to continue working with her when possible to become better informed on the issue. Furthermore, I also plan to continue contacting various courthouses to discuss providing the brochure to attorneys to help further spread awareness about the programs available and how they can provide stronger legal aid to those

affected. Finally, after completing so much research on the topic and finding a passion in helping those affected by mental illness, I hope to increase my participation in the community through various volunteer programs and help spread awareness to the general population. This would allow me to continue my research and further my understanding on the impact of mental illness in the legal system.