

# Upcoming Symposium Will Promote Trauma-Informed Courts and Community

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
March 11 2024 4:03 PM



MARION - On March 21, 2024, the free event “A Trauma-Informed Courts and Community Symposium: Creating a Culture of Belonging” will invite professionals from across southern Illinois to learn more about trauma and mental health.

From 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Marion Cultural and Civic Center, attendees will hear from judges, counselors and keynote speaker Gaelin Elmore, a former NFL player and advocate for children in the foster care system. The event is made possible by Illinois First Judicial Circuit Chief Judge William J. Thurston, the Access to Justice Improvement Grant, Williamson County Presiding Judge Stephen R. Green, and Centerstone.

“We’re really excited,” said Brenda Sprague, who worked with Thurston to organize the symposium. “When we talk about trauma in the courts, we look at what does a patron bring into the courthouse with them? And then what are they reliving each time they step into the courthouse?”

Sprague pointed out that by asking these questions and taking a trauma-informed approach, it allows the courts to work with community organizations to create “a better community at large.” She also hopes the symposium will expand partnerships in and out of the courthouse.

While the event is aimed toward professionals, it is open to anyone. Many attendees can earn continuing education credits, including attorneys, teachers, domestic violence professionals, counselors and social workers. Details about the continuing education credits can be found [here](#).

In addition to Elmore’s keynote speech called “Creating a Culture of Belonging,” the symposium will offer several presentations. “Transcending Adversity Through Resilience,” “Centerstone’s Building Compassionate Communities,” “Trauma in the Courts: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” and “Strengthening Communities, Breaking Barriers” are four of the main presentations.

Sprague is especially looking forward to “Bringing Comfort to the Courtroom: How Court Therapy Dogs Create Calm in Juvenile, Drug and Veterans’ Court,” which will showcase the therapy dog program in the Williamson County Courthouse.

Presenters include Hon. William J. Thurston, Chief Judge; Hon. Jeffrey A. Goffinet, Associate Judge; Hon. Carey C. Gill, At-Large Judge; Amanda Byassee Gott, At-Large Judge; David “Doc” Mills, Ed.D, Centerstone’s Building Compassionate Communities; Ginger Meyer, Clinical Director for Children’s Medical and Mental Health Resource Network; Julian Valdes, IL JusticeCorps Fellow; Cynthia York, Office of the Chief Judge and Court Therapy Dog Pilot Program Coordinator; Steve and Cindy Miller, Certified Therapy Dog Handlers, with Baker, Certified Therapy Dog.

For more information about the event, including how to register, click [here](https://centerstone.org/Event) or visit [Centerstone.org/Event](https://centerstone.org/Event). Over 300 people have already registered for the symposium and registration will close at 5 p.m. on Thursday, March 14, 2024.

“We work with bringing together the professionals in the community so that they notice trauma and they understand trauma, then when we work together, we can have a better community at large with the way we’re working with those inside the courthouse and work in partnership with those outside the courthouse,” Sprague added. “We can bring a better community situation and understand trauma together.”

*First Judicial Circuit Chief Judge William J. Thurston, Access to Justice Improvement Grant,  
Williamson County Presiding Judge Stephen R. Green, and Centerstone presents*

A Trauma-Informed Courts and Community Symposium:

# Creating a Culture of Belonging

**March 21 | 8 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.**

Marion Cultural and Civic Center  
800 Tower Square Plaza, Marion, IL



**Gaelin Elmore**  
Keynote Speaker

Free | Numerous presentations | Various continuing education credits