

Sample Participant **Cover Letter** for Mailed Questionnaire

Respondent
Address

Dear Respondent,

I am a student [faculty/staff member] at Lakeland University, and I am conducting a study examining mental health court participants' perceptions of the mental health court experience. Mental health courts are new and innovative, and there is little research that has examined court participants' perceptions of the experience. The results of this study will hopefully improve the operations of mental health courts. It is my understanding that you are currently, or have participated in a Mental Health Court.

I am interested in your experiences in the mental health court, so I have enclosed a questionnaire which asks you to respond to a series of statements and questions. The items in the questionnaire focus on your decision to enter the mental health court and how you thought you were treated by the judge while participating in the court program. Items also ask you to report how often you were compliant in taking prescribed medications, attending treatment sessions and meeting with the judge for court appearances and other program requirements. Finally, the questionnaire includes statements evaluating how helpful you think the court has been across a number of mental health, social service and quality of life areas.

I want to stress that your participation in this study is voluntary and all efforts to protect your identity and keep the information confidential will be taken.

I have enclosed a consent form for your review. Please read the form and feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study. If you choose to participate, please sign, initial and date the consent information form and return it along with the completed questionnaire in the self-addressed envelope. I look forward to learning about your experiences in the mental health court. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Name
Lakeland University
W3718 South Dr.
Plymouth, WI, 53073
Phone Number(s)

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Lakeland University. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the IRB Chairperson. Contact information for the chairperson can be found at <https://lakeland.edu/institutional-board-review>

[Sample **Informed Consent Form**]

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the proposed procedures. It describes the procedures, benefits, risks and discomforts of the study. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Purpose of study: Mental health courts are a fairly new development. There is growing evidence that mental health courts do a better job than traditional courts in helping persons with mental disorders. However, there remains a need to understand how and why mental health courts work. This study will examine mental health court participants' perceptions of the mental health court experience. The study will focus on participants' decisions to enter a mental health court and how they felt they were treated by the judge as well as self-reported program compliance and satisfaction with the court and services provided.

Procedures involved in the study: The researcher will attempt to contact participants for a phone interview and asked to respond to statements using options provided by the phone interviewer. For example, some items ask about the percentage of time (0=100%) participants engaged in treatment and program requirement behaviors while other items ask the extent to which participants agree with a statement (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The phone interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes. As a secondary procedure, participants will receive a notification letter, the consent form and a copy of the questionnaire to complete and return in a self-addressed envelope [In the event that phone numbers have been disconnected, the information provided to the researcher is incorrect, the researcher has been unable to reach participants via phone, or contacted participants would prefer to complete a paper-pencil survey].

Confidentiality of Research Records:

- Only the researcher has access to contact information and responses
- Your personal identifying information will only be used to contact you. Your responses will be recorded on a form that contains a code number created by the researcher.
- After interviewing you or if you decline to participate, the researcher will take a black marker and cross through your name and information. At the end of the study, the contact sheet will be shredded, leaving no possible way to match code numbers/responses with your name.
- Your personal/individual responses will not be given to the judge or court personnel
- During the study, all data will be kept in a locked, secure, filing cabinet
- By using code numbers, in the event that the results were subpoenaed, your individual responses could not be singled out

Potential Risks and Discomforts:

- No physical, social or economic risks are posed to participants.
- *Participating in the study will not affect your current legal status, services provided or status in the program.* For participants in the study who are currently enrolled in the mental health court, your participation in this study will in no way alter the level or type of services you are receiving from the court or change your legal status in the court. For example, reporting medication noncompliance to the researcher will not result in a program violation. The information that participants provide will remain confidential and the researcher is under no legal obligation to report program non-compliances, such as usage of alcohol or drugs, medication noncompliance and treatment non-attendance to the judge or other court personnel. If you have already completed the mental health court program or were terminated from the program, your results are also confidential and will in no affect the previous outcome/disposal of your case.
- *Breaking confidentiality and mandatory reporting.* If a participant provides detailed information about crimes committed that are unknown to the court (a crime that you were not caught, charged or convicted of) the researcher will be legally obligated to report the crime to the court or appropriate authorities. Similarly, if participants discuss plans to harm themselves or others during the phone interview, and the interviewer perceives the threat to be real and imminent (going to happen soon), the researcher is obligated to report the threats to the appropriate authorities. To reduce the likelihood of this risk, the researcher will instruct the participant to refrain from providing information about specific criminal behaviors and to only respond using the response options for questions provided in the phone interview.

Potential Benefits: By participating in this study, you will get an opportunity to provide information about how you felt you were treated in the mental health court; identify positive and negative aspects of mental health courts; and potentially improve the services provided to mental health court clients. This is a participant's chance to give the research community and the mental health court important feedback on the operations of the court. The research community often overlooks client perceptions and experiences in the criminal justice system and in new programs. Your responses are highly valued and could possibly explain what makes mental health courts different from standard courts and why mental health courts are effective or ineffective in helping persons with mental disorders.

Voluntariness & Withdrawal from Study:

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will not affect your current legal situation or result in adverse reactions from the mental health court. Neither the judge nor court personnel will know who has or has not participated in the study. If you choose to participate in the phone interview, you may end the interview at any time.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.”

Respondent's Signature

Date