

Court: Graduate says he'd be in prison or dead

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 Sen. Brian Boquist, the keynote speaker for Friday's graduation, said Polk County's program is an example of progress.
 He said recent statistics indicate 48 percent of Americans will experience mental health care issues.
 "Finally, for once, in this country we are starting to realize half the population has this issue and that is not something to be hidden in the state mental hospital. It's not something, when I was a kid and your parents had a mental health problem, like my mother did, that your family was stigmatized," Boquist said. "That's gone. What we are now starting to realize is that there is a lot more work to do."
 Polk County is making strides.



Robin Rogers, left, talks with her son, Kelly Fields, center, and Anthony Brown at their graduation from Friday Court at the Polk County Courthouse on Friday.

In addition to Friday Court, the Polk County Jail now has a mental health counselor on staff and two mobile crisis response teams that pair counselors with law enforcement to respond to calls.
 Boquist said state law-

makers are working on legislation to make access to mental health care easier. He told the program's eight other participants — who attended Friday to support Fields and Brown — to see this chance as a path forward.
 "Even though it's the first day of a bright future for two of you, there's still a lot of work to do," Boquist said.
 Brown, 32, said he is well aware of that, but said the program gave him confidence.
 Brown has severe agoraphobia. Cindy Thomas, the program's therapist, said that at first, Brown couldn't leave the house without earphones and would stare at the ground.
 His defense attorney, Tim Park, had his doubts about whether Brown would suc-

ceed.
 "When we resolved (his case) — I haven't told you this before — but I was really scared that you weren't going to make it," Park said. "I've got to tell you, I have never been happier to be wrong."
 Brown said he will take his future one day at a time. He's working and shopping on his own and spends time with his children.
 "It gave me back my life," Brown said. "It showed me how to set realistic goals and achieve them. It taught me how to build a foundation for my life."
 Without Friday Court, he said that wouldn't have been possible.
 "I would either be dead or in prison," he said. "Those were the only two options for me. It saved my life."

Safety: Sheriff says report bullies, admit mistakes

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 She said teachers and staff talk to students about being careful about who they interact with online, but not in the comprehensive way Garton did.
 "It was good to have the sheriff come in with the perspective of working in the police department," she said.
 The sheriff's department is asking businesses in the county to help support the program through donating money to buy materials for each presentation topic from the National Child Safety Council.
 On May 31, Garton handed out bracelets that read,

"I'm not a bully," for every question students asked or answer they gave.
 He also left teachers and staff with information about online safety and where kids can report concerns — and a bracelet for students who didn't get one during his visit.
 With a year's experience to draw from, Garton said he can use the donations wisely, ordering only the needed materials.
 "You have to order it before the start of the school year," Garton said. "At least we know what is the best, so we can be more precise, just get the ones we actually need instead of the broad

spectrum of stuff."
 Garton concluded his time with students by talking about two common online activities.
 The first is taking selfies or photos with family and friends and posting them online. He described a training exercise in which he was given a photo of someone he didn't know from Facebook. Because GPS was enabled, it was easy to find the location that the photo was taken.
 "I was able to figure out where they lived because I had the picture," he said. "They didn't show house numbers, or the house ad-

dress in the background. I think about that stuff when you take pictures. That's why it's important to turn off your GPS when you take pictures."
 His last topic, cyberbullying, could affect as many as 90 percent of children in some form at some point, he said.
 Garton said children should report any instance of cyberbullying, no matter how minor.
 "The reason is that every case that we work, that teachers experience, that we experience — every case starts with something small," he said.

He said that's not just true of cyberbullying, but all interactions online.
 Garton told students that they should tell a trusted adult if they are worried about something or afraid they've put themselves in

danger.
 "If you make a mistake — and everyone mistakes, right — you've just got to own up to it," he said. "Tell your teacher."
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