

Puahala graduates Jail Diversion Program

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Deputy Public Defender Ann Datta, left, Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Kori Weinberger, Judge Margaret Masunaga, Maie Puahala, Gail Werner Case Manager Natasha Thomas and Dr. Hawken Shields celebrate Puahala's graduation from the Jail Diversion Program Wednesday. Courtesy Photo.

Marie Puahala, the newest graduate of the Jail Diversion Program, was honored Wednesday with lei, a gift card and certificate of completion in Kona District Court Judge Margaret Masunaga's courtroom.

The program helps participants involved in nonviolent crimes avoid jail by voluntarily enrolling in community-based behavioral health services and programs.

It is a collaboration of different agencies and the judiciary to guide participants through the initiative that includes the Public Defender, Prosecuting Attorney, Pretrial Services, West Hawaii Community Mental Health Center case manager and Department of Health that work with Masunaga to keep participants out of jail and on the path to a new life.

Typical cases eligible for the program include charges of failure to appear, contempt of court, remaining in a park after closing hours, criminal trespassing, shoplifting, criminal property damage and driving without a license, all of which are petty misdemeanors.