

Behind the scenes of the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health (JCMH) is a small staff known for excellent work. Each staff member has a passion for the intersection of mental health and criminal justice; here's a look at their lives outside of work.

Kristi Taylor took the lead in organizing the formation of a new judicial commission focused on mental health and assumed the role of Executive Director in 2018.

"I started my career in commercial real estate law," said Taylor. "It just wasn't as interesting to me if it didn't have a story behind it and a real-life effect on people that I could see."

Each staff member has their own story about why they are driven to help people, especially people with mental illness or intellectual and developmental disabilities. But for Taylor, it hits closer to home than others.

"I think having a child with a life-threatening disability changed me more than I could have expected," said Taylor. "I was already an advocate for children in the foster care system before my first child was born. I already had that drive, but then having the experience in our family just really brought it to the forefront of my priorities. When you're just reading about somebody else's experience, it's one thing, but to go through it brings new awareness."



*Kristi Taylor practicing yoga in the mountains.*

In addition, Taylor shared that she enjoys yoga as a practice to help alleviate the stress from life and work. "I started yoga during my first job at a big law firm when I was 25 to help manage the stress," said Taylor. "It has been something that I could do throughout my whole career. I think yoga teaches a lot about self-awareness and compassion. Your outlook on life becomes less competitive and more collaborative."

Dealing with the stressors of systemic problems can be challenging, but there are effective strategies that can help. For Staff Attorney Kama Harris, that can mean simply picking up a book and reading.

"I like to listen to audiobooks and that's been a helpful distraction from stressors," said Harris. "We tackle many difficult topics in this line of work, so it is nice to be able to escape to a different world for a little while each day."

Reading is not Harris's only interest. She also enjoys scuba diving. Harris and her husband are both certified divers and like to scuba dive with sharks when on vacation.

"I've always had a fascination with marine life, and I wanted to be a marine biologist. It's a whole different world that you can explore that no one on land gets to see," Harris said.



*Kama Harris and her husband, Sean, scuba diving with sharks.*

Exploring new places can be incredibly rewarding. Whether it's venturing through a foreign country in the deep sea or simply discovering a new town nearby, traveling can be a truly refreshing and enriching experience. This is a belief strongly held by Staff Attorney Molly Davis.



*Molly Davis at the summit of Guadalupe Peak in the Guadalupe Mountains National Park.*

"I want to visit all 63 of the National Parks," said Davis. "I'm up to 24 so far! I find it very restorative to spend time in nature. Our country is so big, and we have set aside so many beautiful, unusual, and special places. I love exploring each new park and getting to see all of the cool things they have to offer."

Communications Manager Rose McBride had a different path to the JCMH than other staffers. She did not have a job related to the law; she worked in the news industry. "I was a reporter and anchor for a TV station," said McBride. "First in Wisconsin and then in Kentucky. I'm super happy that I tried it out. I have had so many so many unique experiences. It just gave me the skills I needed to be able to do this job well."



*Rose McBride reporting from the Kentucky Derby in Louisville.*

The overwhelming success of the JCMH led the agency to hire another staff attorney in 2023, Andy Perkins. In addition to being a lawyer, Perkins also works as a soccer referee.

"I started doing that when I was young," Perkins said. "That was my first job. I think there are times that it becomes easier to see how people respond in stressful situations from doing that."

The JCMH Finance Manager, Patrick Passmore, enjoys following Aggie sports and spending time on the lake with friends on his pontoon boat. All hobbies are a distant second, however, to his busy life with his one-year-old son and wife, Christina.

Willette Sedwick, better known as Gee-Gee, works with Patrick in the finance section. She also spends most of her time with her family. "With a recent high school grad, middle schooler, and first grader, there's always something fun happening," added Sedwick.

Each staff member of the JCMH has their own unique story on who they are and how they got there. This is just a tiny part of it.