

3/23/16: Diversion Methods

Presenters:

- Officer Joe Smarro, San Antonio Police Department, Joseph.Smarro@sanantonio.gov
- Leon Evans, CEO, Center for Health Care Services, San Antonio, L_Evans@chcsbc.org
- Gilbert Gonzales, Director, Mental Health Department, Bexar County, grgonzales@bexar.org
- Judge Steven Leifman, Associate Administrative Judge, Miami-Dade County Court, sleifman@jud11.flcourts.org

San Antonio's Presentation

Key Takeaway: Have a facility that is willing to do the wrap-around work when CIT trained officers divert people by allowing them to provide treatment instead of incarceration for those with mental illness and substance abuse. In 2002, San Antonio was suffering from prison overcrowding conditions, but after implementing a series of diversion programs, they had 1,000+ empty beds and experienced a significant budgetary savings by not criminalizing mental illness.

The San Antonio Police Department is actively working to develop diversion efforts on the ground. San Antonio Police Department stressed that prior to 2003 no CIT training of the Officers had been conducted and noted trends in the mentally ill population ending up in jail. After significant diversion efforts, they developed a mobile crisis unit and reduced the number of those with mental illness being sent to the ER and sent to jail by 2008.

San Antonio noted that it is helpful to have facilities geographically located so that this sort of “on-the-street” diversion can happen easily to divert those on the street level rather than through specialty courts. San Antonio also acknowledged that law enforcement and mental health agencies don't have much in common, but that they worked to get to know each other and get to know each other's needs by meeting regularly to facilitate constructive dialogue. They also meet regularly to look at the data to decide what works and what doesn't and what needs to be added. San Antonio Police also implemented a 100% mental health screening process to help divert those who committed mental illness-based minor infractions to medical facilities.

Miami-Dade County's Presentation

Key Takeaway: Miami trained all of their Police Officers and the 911 call center in diversion practices. They also implemented a post-arrest diversion programs for people who have serious mental illnesses by diverting them within 3 days to a crisis stabilization unit. These changes in policy caused recidivism to reduce drastically from 60% to 20%.

Miami, FL acknowledged that they have the highest prevalence of serious mental illness in the U.S. for a metropolitan city, but that this could be correlated with being 49th per capita in mental health funding while being the 8th most populous metro area, and is exacerbated by a fragmented

mental health service. In 2000, they realized their system was dysfunctional and actually contributed to people ending up in the criminal justice system rather than receiving much needed treatment. Thus, as a community, they called a summit and required stakeholders to come to a meeting for two days to map out how their mental health and criminal justice systems were not working and to develop a plan to restructure them. In implementing their current diversion practices, Miami reduced the amount of people entering the criminal justice system by training all 4,600 officers, agencies, and the 911 call center, and implementing a post-arrest diversion program for people who have serious mental illnesses.

Miami noted that State Universities have the capacity to analyze criminal justice records to identify super-utilizers and that they are working to identify youth in elementary and high school who show signs of mental illness and provide them with wrap-around services at a young age – working upstream.

Miami, FL shared that the 4 key questions that officers can ask to identify people suitable for diversion are:

- Have you ever been to a mental health professional?
- Have you ever taken medications /prescribed medications for mental illness?
- Have you ever thought of killing yourself?
- Are you currently feeling like killing yourself now?

If any of those questions are checked off, they move to a deeper level of screening.