

11/30/16: Yavapai County, Implementing a Diversion Program

Presenter:

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Relevant Attachments:

- Yavapai County presentation

Key Takeaway: *Yavapai County reached out to the local mental health organization and formed a broader coalition of community stakeholders. Bringing together community stakeholders was a vital component to breaking down the “silo mentality” and to truly begin understanding what needed to be done.*

Yavapai County, Arizona had a significant amount of inmates that were dealing with mental illnesses. 40% of the jail population was on mental-disorder based prescription medication but only 20% of those prescribed were taking them regularly. In the past, those with mental-illness based minor infractions were locked up rather than being given the treatment that they needed. The Sheriff’s office began identifying and tracking high-risk individuals, discovering a cycle of release and reprocessing that led to a gradual increase in the level of crimes committed with each subsequent rebooking. The Sheriff’s office also noticed that the majority of repeat offenders were dealing with either untreated or undertreated mental illness disorders. These insights were instrumental in developing an effective diversion program.

Yavapai County looked to the Stepping Up Initiative as the foundational model for their own countywide program. This program became a huge source of support and became a roadmap for the community. Next, they reached out to the local mental health organization and formed a broader coalition of community stakeholders. Bringing together community stakeholders was a vital component to breaking down the “silo mentality” and to truly begin understanding was needed to be done.

From the start, one of the thing that the Sheriff’s office could control was pre-arrest diversion by diverting those with minor mental-illness based infractions to treatment facilities rather than incarceration. They augmented this approach with a vamped up mental illness treatment program within the county jail that worked to stabilize the inmate/patient too. The Sheriff’s office reached out to the local public defender’s office to implement a post-arrest diversion program in which the public defenders assessed every booking at Yavapai County and made referrals for treatment. Then the Sheriff’s office coordinated a release to mental health providers to provide wraparound services such as housing and treatment by enrolling inmates in Medicaid before release. Prior to this, inmates would be released without that safety net and would go without medical insurance and medical and mental treatment, leading to a higher probability of recidivism. Next the Sheriff’s office shared concerns with all the major CJ stakeholders, explaining what was happening and why we needed community involvement and treatment and how the current approach was a waste of life and money. The Sheriff’s office stressed that it was more cost-effective to provide vitally needed mental treatment rather than having the county pay for a cycle of repeat offending and reprocessing through the CJ system. The result was that community

health treatment providers began providing mobile mental health services at the jail. They secured significant funding for housing, treatment, and volunteers to come to the jail as case managers to help with people in need of diversion. As a result, the Sheriff's office observed a noticeable decrease in jail population for mental-illness based minor infractions and a reduced recidivism rate for this cohort.

Q. Has your jurisdiction seen a decrease in jail pop?

A. We have seen a decrease in misdemeanor population. Felony population is more difficult to divert.

Q. What role did the Public Defender play?

A. We work with Public Defender to get people out of jail. Public Defenders with the ability to have privileged conversations and intimate knowledge of the situation are better equipped to determine the need and likelihood of a successful diversion candidate.

Q. How many referrals for diversion does the Public Defender submit per week?

A. The Public Defender refers about 10 a week. The recidivism rate of diverted individuals is 15%.

Q. What role did the Press play?

A. We approached the press from the perspective that they could be a key player in helping the community understand what was happening with respect to high-utilizers and how they could give lift to the issue and frame the conversation. They became a key component of the success of our diversion program.