

# Smarter Solutions for Crime Reduction: The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority Strategic Planning Initiative

## SMARTER SOLUTION SNAPSHOT: McLEAN COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL

In June 2007, Chief Judge Elizabeth A. Robb partnered with the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts, McLean County Circuit Court, Court Services Department, Catholic Charities and the Illinois Wesleyan University Political Science Department to sponsor a Seminar entitled “Evidence-Based Practices—What Works in Reducing Offender Recidivism.” The audience included an intentionally broad cross section of professionals, including: attorneys, counselors, court services officers, DCFS caseworkers, domestic violence treatment providers, judges, social workers, state’s attorneys, psychologists, public defenders and others involved with the criminal justice system. The purpose for offering this seminar was to enhance the professionals’ understanding of the need to embrace evidence based practices in order to better sentence, treat and supervise offender populations. The expectation was that professionals and agencies who work within the criminal justice system would become more effective by conducting a risk and needs assessment, providing cognitive-behavioral programming, and assertive case management to offenders.

After attending this seminar, Chief Judge Robb invited judges, state’s attorney and public defenders, court services officers, and treatment providers and educators from our two local universities to attend an “Evidence-Based Practices Collaboration” meeting. At the initial meetings, judges expressed a desire to ensure that treatment providers adopted programs to treat offenders which research proved were effective in reducing recidivism and changing behavior. Chief Judge Robb established four areas of focus: domestic violence, substance abuse/DUI, sex offender, and mental health. A judge chaired each subcommittee. Each subcommittee conducted personal interviews of the treatment providers to determine the type of treatment modalities being used and whether the provider adhered to best practices. The following questions were asked of each provider:

- What programs/services are being offered for the offender and what is the availability of each of these services?
- Has there been research or evaluation which supports the curriculum of each program offered?
- How does each program or service contribute to reducing recidivism in the offender group?
- What statistical information is available regarding the programs and the offender group?

A summary of responses was prepared for the larger group to review and each of the treatment providers was invited to attend the large group meeting to discuss the results of the survey and to propose a systematized method of communication between services providers, court services and the court was also established.

## **1. How did you know you had a problem?**

In 2007, McLean County was experiencing serious jail overcrowding, and expended \$750,000 in 2008 in out of county housing. There also were significant criticisms, which included a lack of a formal planning process and poor handling of data. A Jail Population Management Task Force brought all of the major stakeholders in the criminal justice system together to examine these issues.

## **2. What was the problem you needed to address?**

The high costs of county jail detainees and lack of communication between different components of the county justice system.

## **3. Who was the leader in addressing the problem? Has that changed through the life of the strategy?**

Leaders in addressing the inadequacies of the criminal justice system included the judges, state's attorney, public defender, sheriff, and court services director. Additionally, the county administrator(s) were supportive and found the financial means to pay for the consulting services to analyze the data.

## **4. How did you determine your strategy (policy, program, or practice) for addressing the problem?**

Along with the evidence-based strategy meetings described above, Sheriff Mike Emery invited the National Institute for Corrections (NIC) to conduct an assessment of the justice system in McLean County. The NIC consultants conducted a site visit and interviewed all of the key stakeholders. A lengthy report was presented to the task force, which noted, among other things, that those interviewed were *"genuinely interested in improving the administration of justice, and that all 12 judges participated in the interview process, local officials acknowledge a need for a systems approach to dealing with jail crowding, and the integrated justice information system is impressive, and serves all of the justice agencies in the county. There is much pride in the community as well as community interest in justice operations as evidenced by participation by League of Women Voters and Alternatives to Jail committee members; and that inviting the consultants is a sign of trust, open and good government."*

## **5. What are the core components of your strategy that make it effective?**

The primary mission is to examine policies and procedures of the criminal justice system, identify model practices, identify deficiencies and formulate policies, plans and programs based on well-established research and statistical methodologies designed to promote change when opportunity presents itself.

The most important core components of the strategy includes collaboration, including the involvement of the key participants in the system and setting goals and meeting dates for all to return to review the work of the subcommittees. There is also a commitment to collecting and

analyzing data from our Integrated Justice Information System to assure that change is implemented successfully. Additionally, McLean County Circuit Court has tapped into resources from two universities who are partnering with us to perform this analysis, assist in research and grant writing and supplying student resources (primarily through internships).

Many of the CJCC participants collaborated to develop a very successful drug court, which began operations in 2006. Immediately following the opening of the drug court, the chief judge convened a Mental Health Court Initiative which has been meeting on a quarterly basis for four years. The CJCC has provided a more formalized structure for its members to work collaboratively in the future.

## **6. Who are the key partners?**

The key partners – or steering team – include the chief judge, state’s attorney, public defender, sheriff, the chiefs of police of the two major municipalities, court services director and the support of the county administrator. Without the participation of these individuals and their offices, this undertaking would not be successful.

There are 19 permanent members of the broader CJCC, including the chief judge, presiding judge of the criminal division, sheriff, state’s attorney, public defender, clerk of the court, director of court services, chiefs of police of Bloomington, Normal, and Illinois State University Police Department, director of public health, director of chamber of commerce, a representative from Illinois State University Criminal Justice Science Department, a League of Women Voters representative, a representative from social services, and a public member. Ex officio members include the county administrator, trial court administrator and council members from Bloomington and Normal.

## **7. How much did it cost?**

Aside from the consulting contract with the Stevenson Center (the consultant is paid \$75 per hour for no more than 30 hours per month) there are no additional costs associated with this collaboration, other than the allocation of existing staff to take on additional duties.

## **8. What type of reorganization of existing resources did you undertake?**

The former Jail Population Management Task Force was converted into a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, which included the entire justice system, the executive, legislative and judicial branches of county government, including the municipalities. As a result, in July 2009, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council was created by resolution of the circuit court, the county of McLean, City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, and Illinois State University.

## **9. How did you garner public support for your strategy?**

Care has been taken to involve a committed group of citizens who have monitored and criticized the criminal justice system for many years. The membership of the CJCC includes a League of Women Voter representative, as the league has taken a very active role in promoting changes in

the McLean County criminal justice system. Including a public member as a voting member was also calculated to ensure credibility with the public. Including city council members from both municipalities and a social services representative broadened opportunities to collaborate and share information. Recently, the Executive Committee committed to developing a website for the CJCC, which will include minutes of all subcommittees and the CJCC meetings and will be linked to the McLean County Circuit Court website, and other county and municipal government websites.

**10. In retrospect, what would you have done differently to plan for, develop, and implement your strategy?**

In retrospect, the CJCC should have been established well in advance of the jail overcrowding crisis. If it had, we probably could have avoided spending so much on out of county inmate housing. But sometimes it takes a crisis to force change. In the past 18 months we have significantly reduced the costs to house inmates out of the county from \$750,000 in 2008 to an anticipated \$30,000 for 2010. Some of the savings has been used toward the consulting expenses paid to the Stevenson Center. The CJCC has been formed to do more than respond to a jail overcrowding problem. More importantly, the collaboration with additional agencies and individuals focuses on improving all aspects of the criminal justice system by mining the data we collect and striving to utilize proven successful programs.

**11. How do you know your strategy is working?**

It is still very early, but it appears that the key partners to the CJCC are committed to furthering the mission and have assigned the appropriate staff resources to do the work. There are no “turf” issues. We recognize during these very lean times in Illinois that we need to share resources and funding opportunities to adequately serve the public. McLean County recently began operating a mental health court, called Recovery Court, and is exploring how to expand services to veterans. McLean County has partnered with a local treatment provider in applying for a grant, and it is anticipated that members of the collaboration will continue to jointly seek federal and state funding, citing the strong collaboration within the system as a significant benefit in support of these grants.

McLean County has contracted with the Illinois State University’s Stevenson Center for Community and Economic Development to provide research and analytical services to the CJCC, which primarily consists of extracting data from the County’s electronic justice information system to assist the CJCC in developing standardized reports to support management and/or policy decisions related to the justice system.

The right people were at the table planning for the CJCC and they continue to attend our quarterly meetings, which is a good indication that the strategy is working. In addition more agencies have approached the criminal justice system asking to partner with the CJCC, which suggests to us that the CJCC is viewed as a positive force for change in McLean County.

*For more information about the McLean County model, contact:*

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