

A Brief Overview of Promising Jail Diversion Programs in Florida

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and

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Hillsborough County Jail Diversion Program

Overview

Hillsborough County has an extensive jail diversion program for people with mental illnesses and/or co-occurring substance use disorders. The initiative has been expanded in recent years largely through funding from two federal grants. One of these programs intervenes post booking and the other is targeted to individuals re-entering the community from jail or prison.

The key element of the Hillsborough County Targeted Capacity Expansion Jail Diversion Program is Forensic Intensive Case Management (FICM) provided by a multidisciplinary team. Based on the Assertive Community Treatment model, the FICM team steps in after booking, providing direct services to participants and serving as a liaison to other community-based service providers. To be admitted to the program, individuals must be at least 18 years old and have two or more misdemeanor offenses in the past 12 months, a diagnosis of probable serious and persistent mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorder, and reside in Hillsborough County. The program builds on and expands the county's pre-existing jail diversion activities, which have been in place since 2000.

In addition to providing individual and group therapy, the FICM team's clinical case managers serve as community advocates in identifying and networking with landlords, employers, and service providers. A part-time psychiatrist prescribes and monitors medication compliance. A peer specialist provides therapy and life skills training. Wraparound services include transportation, housing assistance, and help in applying for disability payments. The team has a maximum caseload of 30 clients; each can be served for up to a year.

To assure continued communication and coordination, an advisory committee meets

bimonthly and includes representatives of county government, participating provider agencies, the Department of Children and Families, the Florida Mental Health Institute, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, and area's Public Defender's Office. On alternate months, a jail diversion strategic planning comprised of staff of the various participating agencies meet.

The program plans to develop mechanisms for early identification/screening using the sequential intercept model and to create diversion pathways other than to emergency services.

Outcomes

A preliminary assessment of the program¹ was done during the period from April 2007 and July 2008, involving 20 of the 39 people who had participated in the program during that time. This early evaluation looked at participants' outcomes based on re-arrest rates, alcohol and substance use, housing status and ability to obtain employment.

These preliminary findings indicate that the program had been successful in reducing criminal recidivism and mental illness and substance use symptoms as shown by the following:

- Although all of the participants had been arrested at least twice in the year prior to their admission, 80% were not arrested while enrolled in the program.
- Additionally, all of the participants reported at admission that they had used alcohol or drugs at some point during their life or in the past 30 days, but 90% reported they did not use alcohol or drugs while enrolled in the program

A more in-depth evaluation of an estimated 80 participants over a three-year period will be done by the Department of Mental Health Law and Policy at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute.

Re-entering the community

Another diversion program operated by Hillsborough County is Looking Ahead, a post-release program which offers a range of

services to people who are re-entering the community from jail or prison. This umbrella project has a second FICM team as its cornerstone. The program is voluntary and offers varying levels of services and assistance, depending on individual needs. Its focus is ex-offenders with mental illnesses or substance use disorders who have been court-ordered to criminal registration after their release from prison. The goal is to increase linkages to community supports and services and create rapid access to services.

This program began in November 2007. On average, the program has screened nearly 3,000 people since its inception and sees about 100 per month. About half receive some sort of services at a cost of roughly \$820 per person, according to the county's Criminal Justice Liaison.² Services range from simple referral to Forensic Intensive Case Management. The average cost of services compares to the estimated \$2,800 cost of prosecuting someone who is re-arrested.

Funding

The pre-booking Forensic Intensive Case Management is financed by a grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), now in its third year. Funding for the various components of Looking Ahead includes a SAMHSA Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program grant awarded in 2006, a state Criminal Justice, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Reinvestment Act grant, Department of Children and Families funding and local support. In addition, some services are partly supported by Medicaid and Medicare.

Outcomes

No formal evaluation has been done of the post-discharge program, but the Hillsborough County Criminal Justice Liaison reports that no one receiving services has been rearrested since the program began. An evaluation of the program is planned in the future.

Footnotes

1. *The Evaluation of a Jail Diversion Program Utilizing Forensic Intensive Case Management*, an unpublished paper by Chelsea R. Heinz, the University of South Florida, July 2008.

2. *Jan MacLeod*, Criminal Justice Liaison, Hillsborough County