

# Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level

## Getting to Know Denver, Colorado

The City and County of Denver is the largest city and the capital of Colorado. Denver is a consolidated city and county. The 2011 estimated population was 619,968 which ranks Denver as the 23rd most populous U.S. city. The racial composition of Denver is 60% white, 31% Hispanic, 10% African American, 3% Asian, and 1% Native American. Each year Denver has approximately 35,000 individuals booked into the Denver jail with an average stay of 15 days per book-in.

Denver has been participating in the JRI initiative since April, 2011. Under the direction of the Justice Coordinating Committee (JCC), a Leadership Team for Justice Reinvestment was established as a subcommittees of the Denver Crime Prevention and Control Commission (CPCC). The CPCC's mission is to reduce crime and delinquency through an evidence-based, accountable, and efficient public safety strategy.

## JRI Phase I in Denver

The JCC and JRI teams worked together to determine the best population for reinvestment funding. Intensive work on aggregate data and data processes directed the team to explore an opportunity aimed at resolving challenges associated with the most frequent users of the justice system. Over a two year time span additional data was acquired from a variety of sources (e.g., hospitals, shelters, etc.) in order to understand the amount and length of system involvement for this population. Analysis revealed that the FEU population was costing the criminal justice system as well as city health agencies millions of dollars per year. During Phase I, a range of both system and community-based stakeholders—including judges,

attorneys, police officers, mental health providers, shelter providers, hospital authorities and many other critical agencies in Denver—partnered to further explore and strategically address this population.

## JRI Phase II in Denver

With the assistance from the JRI team, Denver created a specialty court program (Recovery Court) designed for the FEU population. The program began in April of 2014, and was created to address the specific issues of this population by providing structure, accountability, and helping them establish a support system. Prior to the program, an FEU offender would cycle in and out of jail, detox and emergency rooms without any follow-up treatment or services. Recovery Court is a partnership between the city and county of Denver's criminal justice system and treatment providers who supply wrap-around services, alcohol treatment and housing. Upon entering the program each FEU is assessed and a treatment plan is developed. The main focus of the program is to provide participants with appropriate treatment, supervision, and stability so they can acquire new awareness and become self-sufficient.

The court program follows evidence based protocols and implements therapeutic responses to participants' behaviors. Recovery Court takes place once a week, and requires each participant to appear in front of the judge with a weekly update. The Recovery Court team, which includes the city attorney, defense council, case managers, and treatment providers created a list of appropriate sanctions and/or incentives and offer suggestions to the judge to address weekly behaviors. Prior to court, the team agrees upon a suitable therapeutic response, which is implemented when the participants appears in front of the judge.

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The Recovery Court team also developed a set of stages for each participant to master while in the program. The stages were designed to create a gradual process toward becoming self-sufficient once the program ends.

At the end of April, 2015 the program had been in place for a year. The following are highlights from the one-year analysis.

As of May of 2016, six participants graduated from court oversight. Two others are slated for graduation by July, 2016.

Currently, the program is going through some revisions, including having the mental health court merged with the Recovery Court to create the Behavioral Health Court. This will allow for a focus on meeting the needs of higher needs vs. lower needs persons. This merger began in April 2016. Denver has also been able to better understand the staffing needs and what costs are, and are not eligible for Medicaid.

Understanding this information has allowed the team to have four case managers assigned to the program, freeing up funds to better help with supportive services and leverage funds for other housing resources. In addition, the program has revealed a need to use a different set of screening tools and criteria for enrollment. All clients are now receiving five screening tools to look at substance use, mental health, readiness to change, cognitive impairments and homelessness. In addition, Transitional Residential Treatment beds have been added to the court's services.

Because of housing costs, the County has had to limit the number of persons enrolled in the program. Since September, 2015 the court has only allowed six new clients into the program. While the number served is somewhat limited,

it has allowed the court to understand the best treatment match to address the clients' needs. Overall, 245 individual clients were reviewed for services.

Between April 2015 and April 2016:

- 133 eligible clients contacted
  - 42 Participants enrolled
    - 16 remain active
    - 26 revoked
  - 91 Not in program
    - 67 Denied
      - 4 Incompetent
      - 34 Various Reasons
      - 29 Full
    - 24 Refused

In addition, the methodology used to understand this high utilizing population has created a framework for Denver to examine other high volume populations, in particular, calls for Fire and Emergency services. That data analysis is currently under way.

#### ***Denver's Front-End User Population***

Denver's FEU population includes individuals with the highest number of court cases across five years. These individuals are ordinance level offenders with 57 days in jail on average per year, and excessively consuming resources from other agencies, such as shelters and hospitals. While their system involvement is legal in origin, their issues often stem from other sources (e.g., homelessness, addiction, trauma and/or mental health issues.) A preliminary review of the top 300 FEU offenders accumulated an estimated cost of over 11 million dollars across the Denver criminal justice system, detox, and emergency rooms.

The following table highlights jail data tracking the 40 active and 24 revoked participants one year prior compared to one year program participation (for participants enrolled for less than a year, equivalent time was used for comparison):

	<b>% Reduction in Arrests</b>	<b>% Reduction in Jail Days</b>	<b>% Reduction in Costs</b>
Active (n = 40)	71%	76%	75.7% decrease
Revoked (n = 24)	76%	56%	11.1% decrease

## Lessons Learned

- The data driven process highlighted the need to address this population from a cost standpoint.
- The analysis guided the approach which helped Denver implement a program that directly addressed the needs of the specific population.
- Building collaboration across agencies was one of the most important aspects of the program.
- Getting the right structure into place takes time. Even though there was extensive analysis and planning, there were gaps that surfaced once the program was implemented. For example, Denver learned quickly that case-management wrap-around services were not sufficient. Initially, participants were not getting adequate substance abuse treatment, so the team collaborated with a local provider to deliver treatment. Once a substance abuse provider was secured, the team realized that outpatient services did not meet the needs of some of the highly addicted participants. The next step was to collaborate with a health agency to obtain Transitional Residential Treatment beds to meet the needs of participants who required a higher level of care.
- The one-year analysis revealed that the program is unable to keep the Native American population engaged. During the first year, the court enrolled six Native Americans into the program, and all six were revoked. The team is currently meeting with local Native American representatives that can help to create a structure better suited for that population.
- Housing continues to be an issue in Denver. The team has secured transitional housing, but struggles with placing the participants in permanent housing. Their next step will be to develop creative options to increase the permanent housing supply.
- As participants move into the final phase of the program, they will undergo a qualitative interview. The team is hopeful that this information can shed light on the trajectory to help inform younger populations.
- The program has reduced the number of costly services and saved Denver millions over the first year. This money can be reinvested into the Denver community.