

Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level

Getting to Know Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

Eau Claire County, Wisconsin is in the west central region of the state, with a population just under 100,000 and covering 648 square miles, eight of those square miles covered by water. County government is overseen by the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors, a 29 member body with a chair and a co-chair. The median household income reported by the US Census in 2011 was \$45,846; over 92% of county residents over the age of 25 are high school graduates, and just over 30% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Employment grew slightly between 2000 and 2009, despite a decline in employment statewide during that same period.

The Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance and its Statistical Analysis Center report that for 2010, the reported violent crime rate for Eau Claire County was 172 per 100,000 population, in contrast with the state-wide rate of 250. Similarly, the reported rate of property crime was 2,370 per 100,000 population, while the state's rate for similar crimes was 2,514.

Throughout the past decade, demands and costs for Eau Claire County services have been increasing at the same time that revenues have been constrained, resulting in sizeable funding gaps during annual budget processes. As a result, in 2001, Eau Claire County established a performance management and performance budgeting process into their yearly budget cycle.

Three areas of focus have been established by county leaders to support this effort: funding and budget analysis, including the need for cost benefit analysis, increasing the use of technology across the system, and establishment of evidence-based decisionmaking practices.

JRI Phase I in Eau Claire County

In the fall of 2011, Eau Claire County submitted a letter of interest to participate in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the local level. The Eau Claire Criminal Justice Collaboration Council (CJCC) submitted the letter, noting that they had been established in 2006 by the county board resolution to "enhance public safety through system and community collaboration." Their membership includes three members of the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors, three Circuit Court Judges, the District Attorney, representatives of the Department of Corrections, the Sheriff's Department and the Eau Claire Jail, the Public Defender's office, Probation and Parole, Health and Human Services, and others. They also pointed out that the County's commitment to the use of good information and analysis was consistent with the JRI model, positioning it to undertake the work of Phase I.

On site JRI work began in March 2012 and quickly focused upon gathering the data from the appropriate agencies in order to paint a picture of current population and cost drivers. At that time, the county was anticipating the opening of new jail capacity in the summer of 2012 and was interested in a strategy to

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utilize that capacity in the most cost-effective way possible. As the data was being assembled and analyzed, the policy team worked with the CEPP site coordinator and ARS staff, expert in quantitative analysis and simulation modeling who were partners of CEPP in the JRI work. The first objective was a strategy for developing a clear understanding of the drivers of cost and population so that the policy team could anticipate the impact of any changes they might make. Data presentations began to be made to the policy team in May 2012, and proceeded through a number of iterations, shaped by questions of the policy team.

The JRI effort looked not only at jail populations, but also at the probation population, and at the population then being diverted from prosecution. It also focused on law enforcement activity, making efforts to obtain a risk profile of those who come into contact with the police so that possible changes in cite and release practices might be within the scope of the team's analysis.

Some of the key findings from the baseline analysis included:

- In 2012, low or moderate risk pretrial defendants accounted for 40% of jail bookings, and \$456,000 was spent to house this population, accounting for one-third of annual jail bed day costs. Pre-trial stays for this population averaged 9.4 days.

In 2012, the data also indicated that OWI (operating while intoxicated) offenders accounted for 23% of all secure jail bookings and consumed 19% of the annual jail bed day costing the County \$1.1 million.

- Despite the newly opened jail capacity, projections of future population—based upon the rate of growth between 2012 and 2013 (10.8%)—indicated that the jail would exceed its rated capacity (258 bed) in less than five years.

Further analysis was undertaken, and a model developed that was used to simulate changes that the policy team wanted to consider—changes that would seek to reduce costs, and improve outcomes. Given their work on performance measurement and cost analysis, the team was well-positioned to make informed changes, document the impacts, and reinvest those resources.

Given the impact of the pretrial population, Eau Claire explored the potential impact of a pretrial program—something that Eau Claire County had not had up until that point in time. The strategy was to design and implement a pretrial program that would include pretrial release assessment, supervision and services that would allow the County to monitor pretrial defendants safely in the community and target only those types of pretrial defendants previously detained in the jail for longer than 24 hours. Their analysis indicated that if the County could achieve a 5% annual decrease in the secure jail population, it could return to 2012 population levels by 2015.

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To address the OWI population issue, the plan was to develop a treatment program, to be housed in the less-costly, non-secure Huber facility in the County that would provide services for 3 -7 days. The targeted OWI population was intended to be largely moderate risk with a second or subsequent OWI conviction.

While chronic (frequent) jail users significantly impact jail population and costs, through Phase I analyses, Eau Claire learned that this group of offenders overlapped with both the pretrial and OWI populations targeted for Phase II efforts. While not targeted specifically for this JRI effort, Eau Claire anticipated working closely with the Department of Human Services to address their needs.

JRI Phase II in Eau Claire County

In March 2014, Eau Claire submitted a Letter of Interest to participate in Phase II of the JRI Initiative, and upon receiving approval from BJA to move forward, they developed and submitted their Phase II application in July 2014. Based on the significant analysis and strategic agreements among the JRI leadership team, two major initiatives were proposed with potential for significant impact on population and cost drivers. A request for JRI funding was submitted in order to accomplish two significant aspects of Eau Claire County's Phase II JRI strategy. These included: Establishing a pretrial program. Eau Claire County did not have a pretrial program prior to this time, rather releasing defendants on a judge's signature, or holding them in custody. The goal was the design and implementation of a pretrial program that would include a more robust pretrial release assessment, and

supervision and services that would allow the County to monitor pretrial defendants safely in the community. The target population for this effort was to be pretrial defendants who previously would have been detained for more than 24 hours pretrial.

- Establishing a program for OWI (Operating While Intoxicated) offenders that provides offenders with more upfront assessment and treatment/programming as an alternative to incarceration. The program is designed to provide participants with a more comprehensive disposition inclusive of programming, random testing, and incarceration. The program targets individuals facing misdemeanor OWI charges and provides early access to interventions.

Eau Claire County also requested authorization from BJA to expand its target population to a significant population they identified during Phase II, a population involved with methamphetamine abuse. The original OWI population identified in the effort was found to have a high rate of their own health insurance, which allowed for assessment and treatment, not utilizing county or JRI funds. The JRI team is now utilizing assessment and treatment resources available through JRI funding to support its deferred prosecution program, fully supported by the district attorney, to provide assessment and treatment to this population. It is contracting with service providers in the community for assessment, case management, and services for this population. In addition, it is establishing a program to address offender needs and reduce offender recidivism at the

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Huber Facility.

Eau Claire County has made significant progress in reducing jail bed days and re-offense rates for OWI offenders. In 2011, 29.3% of all jail bed days consumed in Eau Claire County were for OWI offenders. In the first 18 months of the program's existence, 65 individuals have successfully completed the program, saving Eau Claire County 5,747 jail bed days. In 2016, OWI offenders accounted for only 14.8% of jail bed days. The program has seen a graduation rate of 83.3% and has successfully connected individuals with services much quicker than in the past. This has occurred during a period when the county has been increasing jail expenditures and total jail bed days have increased. Given the reduction of OWI offenders in Secure, it is estimated that the JRI goal of \$100,000 in cost avoidance is well within reach. The most important commitment made by the County during this process has been devoting resources to funding their own data analyst. That analytical capacity will ensure the on-going monitoring of JRI and other initiatives and continued performance measurement of progress towards reinvestment goals.

Eau Claire County has clearly embraced the JRI approach—building a collaborative leadership partnership, engaging in a careful analysis of population and costs, and identifying changes that could be made to decrease those populations/costs, while still enhancing community safety. The Count has taken the important step of implementation of changes to their policies and practices, to reduce jail bed time and repeat OWI incidences. They have also embraced many of the lessons emerging from sound empirical research on risk reduction—recognizing that incarceration time is costly, yet—with low risk and medium risk individuals—ineffective at changing behavior and addressing the underlying problems driving certain behavior. The leadership has further institutionalized this data-driven approach by committing resources to a data analyst position, to allow them to continue this measured approach to their criminal justice system.

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