

Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level

Getting to Know

Mecklenburg County, NC

JRI Phase I

The Justice Reinvestment Initiative was instrumental in bringing together key justice system leaders to improve the local justice system. A team of dedicated stakeholders, through the Criminal Justice Advisory Group (CJAG), met consistently from mid-2011 through 2013 in order to examine data and explore alternatives to what they see as overutilization of the jail. To that end, the stakeholders engaged in an effort to understand the factors driving the jail population, as well as explore community-based options in lieu of jail. This thorough analysis of criminal justice data revealed three key findings around drivers of the local justice system population: low level offenses, mental illness and homelessness, and recidivism after stays in the local jail or state prisons.

JRI Phase II

Mecklenburg County was accepted into Phase II of the JRI project, and their proposed Phase II budget was approved by BJA in September of 2014. JRI funds were used primarily to support five strategies intended to address the three key findings as revealed in Phase I.

- Strategy 1: Targeted Neighborhood Reentry Pilot Program. Strategically focusing on neighborhoods where 75 percent of returning formerly incarcerated individuals were living, a newly launched re-entry pilot program was provided funds to provide transition services, employment supports, and numerous other types of services to support people with a criminal history. The program director helped form Re-entry Partners of Mecklenburg, a coalition of partners serving this priority population in order to form coordinated effort in service delivery.
- Strategy 2: Alternative Solutions to Manage Citizen Initiated Warrants. This effort involved a sub-award to the Center for Court Innovations and the University of North Carolina – Charlotte to conduct an external evaluation of the citizen-initiated warrant process.
- Strategy 3: Driver's License Restoration Clinic Pilot. This project began in September of 2014 with a goal of reducing arrests, jail stays, and court system use for driving while license revoked charges. This involved a partnership between Criminal Justice Services, the Public Defender's Office, the Charlotte School of Law, and the District Attorney's Office.

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- Strategy 4: Crisis Intervention Team Building. This effort sought to increase the capacity of the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) by creating training videos, laminated reference booklets/cards, and a web-based CIT database.
- Strategy 5: Increase Statistical Reporting Capacity. This project intended to reduce arrests for low level offenses by empowering stakeholders with simple, quick access to criminal justice data. The servers were purchased for the CJS Data Warehouse, which became functional during the summer of 2015.

As a result of the JRI analysis and coalition building process, policies have been developed/reworked, championed, and passed to address some of the drivers of the jail population identified in Phase I, including the Bail Policy for the Twenty-Sixth Judicial District and the Pretrial Services Eligibility Policy. The new bail policy instructed magistrates and judges to consider release of defendants charged with low-level offenses on non-financial terms. The County was also selected as a pilot site for the Arnold Foundation's pretrial tool (the Public Safety Assessment Court tool), which is showing promising results in accurately predicting risk of pretrial defendants. Additionally, the County took aggressive steps, independent of BJA funds, to address issues driving low level charges, including launching MeckFUSE, a supportive housing program for frequent system users;

creating a Citizens Warrant Court to address citizen-initiated complaints; launching a re-entry program for individuals returning to Mecklenburg County from state prisons; and obtaining an agreement from law enforcement agencies to provide training to their forces on the increased use of citations for low-level offenses.

Mecklenburg County identified the following four reinvestment priorities and has begun the process of establishing these resources in the community:

- Mental Health Crisis Center – Minimize the unnecessary incarceration of persons experiencing a mental health crisis by providing short-term, acute mental health services. A proposal containing a program and facility design along with cost-estimates has been created; funding conversations are forthcoming.
- Community Resource Center – Reduce recidivism by facilitating access to and coordinating the delivery of supportive services to offenders released from the jail. CJS Re-entry Services is exploring this possibility as part of the County's Master Redesign initiative, which is focused on re-locating resources inside the neighborhoods that most need the services.
- Re-entry Center – Improve the successful transition of people into the community after an incarceration by providing comprehensive and coordinated supportive services. A CJAG Subcommittee has been exploring options for such a center.

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- Law Enforcement Time – Advance the effectiveness of community policing efforts by increasing the time available to law enforcement. An analysis of arrest data over the past five years shows an increase in the use of citations along with a slight decrease in visual and warrant arrests.

These efforts were accomplished through the approval and involvement of CJAG members, as well as, inter-agency collaboration both within and outside the County. CJAG was the primary avenue through which collaboration, information sharing, and decision-making was done. As appropriate, different agencies took on specific tasks to address the overarching needs addressed by the JRI research.

Current Operations

The County has undergone several leadership transitions in the past year – including the hiring of a new County Manager, a new Sheriff, a new Police Chief for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, a new Chief of Information Officer, as well as the departure of the Director of Criminal Justice Services. Despite these changes, the coalition of stakeholders involved in JRI strategies and related projects have continued progress toward implementing effective programs and practices to reduce justice involvement of County residents. This speaks powerfully to the use of criminal justice coordinating councils as an effective way to manage a local justice system. The CJAG went through a “re-grouping” process with the assistance of an external consultant in order to identify and initiate new efforts as JRI-projects have been launched and are being maintained. The focus on new projects has continued to build

collaboration among the groups interfacing with the justice-involved population. The use of data has become standard and partners are replicating or updating many analyses done for the JRI project in order to inform current priorities and activities. The department of Criminal Justice Services (CJS) is working with the CJAG to create standard reports, which will be used in monitoring the system’s status. The CJS Planning Team also works to measure outcomes resulting from various justice initiatives. All programs funded by the County are now expected to show data and outcomes in order to demonstrate a return on the dollars invested.

Sustainability Plans

Strategy 1: The County Manager included Re-entry Services in the proposed budget for fiscal year 2017. This will provide funding for the current program manager and case management positions in FY17 and in the years to come. The program is also beginning conversations around moving program staff so that they are co-located within the neighborhoods where most clients are living. The CJAG subcommittee’s Community Campaign is exploring ways to address other re-entry needs that exist in the community, including the JRI priorities – the Re-entry Center and the Community Resource Center.

Strategy 2: CCI and University of North Carolina, Charlotte researchers presented findings and recommendations from the citizen-initiated warrant process/court evaluation before the Criminal Justice Advisory Group on February 10th, 2016. The CJAG subcommittee, Neighborhood Campaign, has adopted this strategy to provide dedicated attention and develop appropriate next steps as recommendations emerge from the evaluation findings. Criminal Justice Services and

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the Magistrates' Office are working together to gather four months of data (from March through June of 2016) from citizens utilizing the citizen's magistrate window, which will be used to explore implementation of the recommendations provided in the evaluation. Once the data is gathered and analyzed, the Neighborhood Campaign will work with the CJAG to arrive to agreements on the best next steps to improving the citizen-initiated warrant process.

Strategy 3: In January of 2016, the Drivers' License Restoration Clinic became a formal clinic of the Charlotte School of Law. The clinic is supervised by a local expert in license restoration laws and practice, who is paid through the law school, and the Public Defender's Office continues to provide office space and additional oversight. Criminal Justice Services has continued to support the program by creating an Access database, through which the clinic interns enter and store all case information. CJS has also conducted an evaluation of the pilot year and will have a report ready by the summer of 2016.

Strategy 4: The CIT program is creating a stand-alone database to begin the data collection and evaluation process for the CIT program. Additionally, the CJAG subcommittee, Street Campaign, is working through an action plan for addressing the cycle of people with mental illness through the system. This work is intended to further support the CIT program to divert individuals with mental illness from the local justice system.

Strategy 5: Criminal Justice Services has made plans to continue to sustain the Data Warehouse within its three-year strategic business plan covering fiscal years 2017 through 2019. CJS is working closely with County ITS (Information

Technology Services) to create a long-term plan for software updates, long-term infrastructure supports and updates, and the necessary funding allocations.

Pre/Post Quantitative Changes

Strategy 1: During the funding period from October 2014 through September 10, 2015, the re-entry program processed 177 referrals and enrolled 90 program participants enrolled and had 64 successful program completions, meaning the client completed program requirements and was either employed, pursuing an educational degree, or receiving benefits. The program made 87 job placements between October 2014 and August 31, 2015. At hire, 42 percent began at an hourly rate between \$8.01 and \$10, and an additional 16 percent began at \$10/hour or higher. Fifty-nine percent were able to maintain the same job for a period of 90 days, while 35 percent maintained the same employment for 180+ days. The program logged 1,278 services ranging from employment services (592 provided) to food access services (96 provided) to employment skills services (208 provided). A complete listing and count of services provided may be found in Appendix B. As of March 31, 2016, a total of 63 participants were gainfully employed.

Strategy 2: A formal external evaluation report by the Center for Court Innovations and UNC was provided on September 30, 2015. Quantitative changes for this strategy are pending the implementation of recommendations from this study.

Strategy 3: Between September 1, 2014 through September 10, 2015, the Driver's License restoration clinic processed 204 referrals and

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drafted action plans for 156 clients. In 2016, 68 additional clients have received action plans. Full or limited driving privileges were restored to 24 drivers. As of May of 2016, no individuals who have completed the program successfully have been re-arrested on repeat DWLR offenses.

The pilot manager gathered data on the clients to assess the factors contributing most to a

resident's inability to obtain his or her license. These factors were collated to create client profiles to aid with the process of follow up and technical assistance. These profiles are outlined in Table 1. Within each profile, the underlined number indicates the number of clients served; the number does not equal the total number served as some client files were unavailable due to other court processes.

Table 1. Mecklenburg County Drivers' License Restoration Clinic: Client Profiles

G1. Mecklenburg Only Issues; Indefinite Suspension; Has Funds Served: 32	G2. Any Location of Issues; Permanent Revocation; Has Funds Served: 2	G3. Mecklenburg Only Issues; LDP Only*; Has Funds; Lives in Mecklenburg	G4. Mecklenburg and Surrounding County Issues; Indefinite Suspension; Has Funds Served: 7	G5. Any location of Issues; Permanent Revocation; Has Funds; Lives in Surrounding Counties	G6. Mecklenburg and Surrounding County Issues; LDP Only; Has Funds; Lives in Surrounding Counties
Y1. Mecklenburg Only Issues; Indefinite Suspension; Doesn't Have Funds Served: 11	Y2. Mecklenburg Only Issues; LDP Only; Doesn't Have Funds ; Lives in Mecklenburg Served: 2	Y3. Out of County issues ; Indefinite Suspension; Has Funds Served: 5	Y4. Mecklenburg and Surrounding County Issues; Indefinite Suspension; Doesn't Have Funds Served: 8	Y5. Mecklenburg and Surrounding County Issues; LDP Only; Doesn't Have Funds ; Lives in Mecklenburg and Surrounding Counties Served: 2	Y6. Out of County Issues ; LDP Only; Has Funds; Lives in Mecklenburg or Surrounding Counties
R1. Out of County Issues ; Indefinite Suspension; Doesn't Have Funds Served: 21	R2. Any Location of Issues; Permanent Revocation; Doesn't Have Funds ; Lives in Mecklenburg Served: 8	R3. Any Location of Issues; Permanent Revocation; Doesn't Have Funds ; Lives in Mecklenburg or Surrounding Counties	R4. Any location of Issues; Permanent Revocation; Doesn't Have Funds ; Lives Out of County Served: 4	R5. Out of County Issues ; LDP Only; Doesn't Have Funds ; Lives Out of County Served: 1	R6. Any location of Issues; Permanent Revocation; Has Funds; Lives Out of County

Strategy 4: Mecklenburg County has trained over 700 officers through its CIT program. These include law enforcement from the City of Charlotte and all the surrounding towns, dispatchers, school resource officers, and even university patrol officers. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has reached the national benchmark of training at least 30

percent of its force.

Strategy 5: The servers for supporting the CJS Data Warehouse were put into place in March of 2015 and the data warehouse "went live" in May of 2015. There has not been sufficient time to measure the impact of the warehouse on long term outcomes.

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Impact of Strategies on the Average Daily Jail Population

When the JRI project began in 2011 the jail population stood at 2,164. The jail population today is approximately 1,400. It is not possible to attribute all of this reduction to any specific JRI activities. However, at a minimum, it appears that JRI work or JRI inspired efforts helped to contribute to this reduction in the jail population.

Insights for Other Jurisdictions

The JRI process was instrumental in convening key stakeholders in a conversation about meaningful data and evidence-based practices to address the issues that emerged. Consequently, the group has been prepared and responsive in participating with other data-driven efforts to improve the system.

Several lessons learned were gleaned from the implementation of these strategies. Primarily, the pilot of the Driver's License Restoration Clinic required several changes and further analysis of the issue to finally achieve the program's goal of restoring driving privileges. First, the pilot was started with an accompanying experimental evaluation by an external evaluator. This greatly

limited the program's eligibility criteria and Public Defenders declined to refer clients to the clinic due to the risk that their client would not receive services (as part of the control group). The evaluation was changed to fit a quasi-experimental design in order to overcome this problem. The project director also worked with the District Attorney's Office to begin taking referrals from both Public Defenders and Assistant District Attorneys, which greatly increased referral rates. Finally, the project director worked with law students to categorize cases and determine the major obstacles presenting to their clients in obtaining restored driving privileges.

Lessons were also learned around engaging all the relevant parties – including those outside the justice system. Two projects funded by JRI depended on the involvement of the County's IT department. As this department underwent changes in leadership, the new director and new way of conducting projects had to be assimilated into this project's processes. Moving forward, all criminal justice IT-related projects will include a long-term strategy to address the maintenance and storage needs that may not be considered when first starting a criminal justice reform project.