

Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level

Getting to Know Yamhill County, Oregon

Yamhill County, Oregon encompasses 718 square miles, is home to more than 100,000 residents, and is located 40 miles southwest of Portland. Yamhill County is participating in the Evidence-Based Decisionmaking Initiative (EBDM) and was selected to participate in the JRI initiative in September, 2011.

JRI Phase I in Yamhill County

The County's JRI efforts have been led by a well-established Policy Team comprised of representatives from Community Corrections (including the Director), a County Commissioner, the County Sheriff, the Presiding Circuit Court Judge, a victim advocate, the Director of Health and Human Services, the District Attorney, a defense attorney, an Information Systems Manager, the Jail Captain, and a citizen representative. The Policy Team also included a professional for meeting facilitation and technical assistance. These stakeholders understand that the use of data-driven decision making and evidence-based practices is at the core of the Justice Reinvestment approach to improving their local justice system.

Through their initial participation in the EBDM Initiative, Yamhill County conducted a comprehensive analysis of their local criminal justice system from arrest to discharge from community supervision. That work resulted in the creation of four workgroups (pre-trial release, sentencing, correctional treatment programs, and offenders with special needs). The county understood that they were at a critical stage of systems change, and that their participation in JRI would provide them with the opportunity to further their work of systemically implementing evidence-based practices and decisionmaking. The team decided to

concentrate its JRI efforts on the pre-trial component of their system, as they concluded that this focus would result in the most demonstrable cost reduction by targeting pre-trial innovations.

During Phase I of the effort, the site's JRI technical assistance providers assisted Yamhill County officials to develop a workplan and timeline resulting in the redesign of Yamhill's pretrial processes, to bring those processes into alignment with evidence-based practices. This was designed to enable Yamhill officials—in collaboration with their technical assistance team—to determine if it were possible to reduce demand on jail beds through enhanced pretrial services. In support of this work, an analysis of jail data was undertaken so that the team would have access to a more complete picture of the county's jail population.

Phase I included assistance to Yamhill County in a number of areas to assist Yamhill County's leadership team to:

- Select a risk assessment tool to guide pre-trial release decisionmaking. The team chose the Virginia Pre-Trial Risk Assessment Instrument- Version 3 (VPRAI-3);
- Finalize their jail release matrix/guidelines; including guidelines for pretrial supervision standards based on risk level;
- Develop a snapshot of jail pretrial inmate data to establish baseline data;
- Design pretrial case processing data collection methods and accompanying tools;
- Support the leadership team in designing a pretrial system map that outlined how cases could be optimally processed;
- Develop a "Second Look" process designed to re-evaluate the possibility of release for those inmates who are not released at their initial arraignment;
- Engage a full time Pretrial Services Officer who is responsible for assessing defendants and formulating a release recommendation

This project was supported by Grant No. 2010-RR-BX-K069 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the SMART Office, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.

Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level

- for the Court;
- Develop a job description and hire a second full time Pretrial Services Officer to assist with pretrial monitoring of defendants released from jail on pretrial status, and
- Develop and finalize a formal Release Recommendation Report for the Court.

Additionally, the site's pretrial release officer and jail booking officers received training on the use of the county's selected risk assessment instrument, the VPRAI-3, in October 2012. Other key stakeholders (judges, defense bar, and prosecutors) were also briefed on the tool. The team received follow-up assistance to assure inter-rater reliability, and has finalized the policies and procedures for use of the tool, agency-specific release and supervision guidelines, and design of specific pretrial supervision levels. Full scale implementation of the VPRAI-3 began on November 1, 2012. As the tool was implemented, additional assistance was provided to Yamhill County in order to:

- Collect data on a sample of incoming pretrial cases to determine the number and characteristics of defendants;
- Analyze and report on pretrial case flow to determine the level of alignment between intended and actual case processing;
- Identify opportunities for additional changes to pretrial policies that support legal and evidence-based practice; and
- Present the results of the pretrial analyses, particularly as it relates to jail bed use, to the Policy Team.

JRI Phase II in Yamhill County

In September of 2014, Yamhill County submitted a letter of interest regarding Phase II participation. In that letter, Yamhill County reported that their efforts during Phase I had succeeded in reducing 1) the number of pretrial defendants in the jail, 2) the number of jail bed

days used by pretrial defendants, and 3) the average time in jail for pretrial defendants. That request observed that, having learned that there were minimal financial opportunities for reinvestment, the team was declining the opportunity for Phase II funding, but were requesting admission to Phase II in order to receive continued technical and research assistance. Their efforts during Phase II yielded a number of key accomplishments.

A pretrial processing decision matrix and accompanying data collection system were developed. The decision matrix consisted of a graphical depiction of each step of the pretrial process, documenting all decision points and potential bottlenecks that could lead to delays and thus lead to longer stays in the jail and more court hearings. Analysis of the VPRAI, as part of this work, demonstrated this previously adopted assessment tool, to be less helpful than the Oregon Public Safety Checklist (PSC). The PSC is a fully automated, actuarial assessment of risk developed and normed on a large sample of justice-involved persons in Oregon. When compared with the VPRAI, the PSC was more effective at correctly identifying pretrial detainees at all risk levels, and it was therefore recommended that the PSC become the *de facto* pretrial risk assessment relied upon for decision making. In addition, the PSC, being an automated, actuarial assessment normed on an Oregon criminal justice population, possessed a number of advantages over the VPRAI, which required an individual interview and was not normed on a local population. The VPRAI was maintained for use as a secondary pretrial assessment tool when a PSC score was not available due to lack of assigned defendant state ID number or when there is an extensive out-of-

Justice Reinvestment Initiative at the Local Level

state criminal history as the PSC does not include this data in its scoring.

Analysis of the pretrial data system provided a number of insights into pretrial cases and processing, leading to a focus on attempts to reduce the number of FTAs exhibited by persons granted pretrial release. For instance, those pretrial detainees who were assessed as high risk on the PSC demonstrated a significantly higher rate of subsequent failure during pretrial release than did those assessed as low or medium risk. This finding emphasized the practical utility of the PSC in decision making regarding pretrial release. The high rate of FTAs also suggested that some of the FTAs were a likely result of detainee failures in terms of organization and scheduling. This finding led to exploration of the potential impact of automated reminder calls on reducing FTAs. The most recent local data has shown that Yamhill County has been able to reduce its pretrial jail population by approximately 20% and data for the first quarter of 2016 showed a failure to appear rate of only 2.7%.

Technical assistance also led to the conclusion that much of the data could be gathered from extant data sources within the county using an automated aggregating process, thereby significantly reducing time spent hand entering data (as well as the errors associated with hand entry). An automated pretrial case management system is being developed as a result of these efforts, which was set to go live in June, 2016. This automated system will allow relevant pretrial stakeholders to access data remotely, greatly expanding their real-time knowledge of pretrial cases and facilitating greater degrees of collaboration and more consistent decision making throughout each stage of the pretrial process. The system will also contain significant reporting functions, with canned and custom reports providing real-time metrics regarding pretrial case management. The automated call system provides significant analytic capabilities as well, which when linked with the automated pretrial data system will allow for significant analysis and reporting for purposes of continued performance measurement and the assessment of progress towards objectives.