

Natural Re-entry Supports: The Beaver County Forensic Collaboration¹

Fact Sheet - November 2014

Background

Beaver County Behavioral Health (BCBH) has worked collaboratively with the criminal justice system for more than a decade with documented success. One of the aims of this effort is to identify individuals in the forensic system that have a co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder (COD), assess and engage them in treatment, and link them to formal and natural supports in an effort to reduce recurring involvement with the criminal justice system. These collaborative efforts have occurred within and across systems and across service providers that work in the jail and in the community. System-level collaboration is fostered through the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM)² subcommittee which is part of the county's Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB). Members of the subcommittee include adult and juvenile probation, state probation, the warden of the Beaver County Jail, the district attorney, judges, law enforcement, county behavioral health administrator staff, treatment and support service providers, community organizations, and consumers. The subcommittee meets quarterly and discusses issues such as participation in Mental Health First Aid training, referrals from the Regional Booking Center and District Magistrates, etc.

The provider-level collaboration occurs through a monthly partner meeting which is attended by administrators and some direct service staff from treatment and vocational service providers in the jail and community, an institutional probation officer, family/community-based sponsor programs, a youth cohort program for children of incarcerated parents, a training consultant, a SIM representative, an evaluator, a BCBH representative, and the designated project director. The meetings primarily consist of updates in enrollments and discharges in the jail and in the community, participation in other services in the jail and community, and post-release outcomes.

The third level of collaboration is among service provider and probation representatives who work with individuals in the Beaver County Jail. The purpose of this fact sheet is to describe this effort.³

Partners of the Forensic Collaboration

The Beaver County Forensic Collaboration is a re-entry initiative that focuses on Beaver County residents who are housed in the Beaver County Jail for their offenses and who have a COD. Partner organizations of the Forensic Collaboration provide services and supports to these individuals to enable their successful return to the community upon release from jail. One of the strengths of this initiative is the collaboration among the partners in addressing the issues that individuals face as they prepare to transition from jail to the community.

¹ Funded by Bureau of Justice Assistance under Grant 2011-CZ-BX-0049 (ChancesR) and Grant 2012-RW-BX-0005 (REACH).

² Munetz, M and Griffin, P. Use of the Sequential Intercept Model As An Approach To Decriminalization Of People With Serious Mental Illness. *Psychiatric Services*. April 2006.

³ Information for this fact sheet was gathered through telephone interviews with the individuals involved in jail based and reentry services, as well as jail representatives.

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NHS Human Services (NHS); Beaver County Rehabilitation Center (BCRC); Reaching Over Obstacles In Succeed (ROOTS) Transforming lives, Restoring hope, Advocating change Identifying resources, Life planning, and Supporting families (TRAILS); Beaver County Adult Probation; and the Beaver County Jail each serve a role as a partner of the Collaboration.



NHS is the initial contact for individuals referred by the court for a Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN) to be screened for needs related to mental health and/or substance use, physical health, risk/protective involvement, social environment, and employment. Based on this screen, a recommendation is made for a COD diagnostic evaluation, which is used to assess the needs and support programs for an individual. The evaluation determines what programs and available services best meet the needs of an individual. For example, a person may participate in behavioral health treatment groups with NHS, vocation/education assistance from BCRC, or additional supports from TRAILS and ROOTS.

BCRC provides vocational services, both pre- and post-release. These services include Supported Employment, job readiness, and General Education Development (GED) attainment. BCRC also assists individuals with securing a driver's license, Social Security card, and other forms of identification. Female participants who are assessed as having a COD and who are in work release are referred by NHS to BCRC. At BCRC, these women have an opportunity to participate in job readiness training and gain work experience. The aim is to prepare them for securing sustainable work post-release. They are also employed at BCRC.

TRAILS Ministries and ROOTS are two faith-based community organizations that work "with incarcerated individuals, families, and whole communities affected by the trauma of incarceration". They provide support to participants in the form of mentors/sponsors, transportation, clothing, and financial assistance.

The Beaver County Jail counselor processes requests from individuals who want to be assessed for programs and provides NHS with those referrals. Further, probation has always been an active partner in these efforts, and has regularly attended collaboration meetings for the past year.

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Partners of the Collaboration meet monthly to work together in an environment of open communication to discuss the status of the people with whom they are working.

The Benefits

Partners identified benefits of this Collaboration for individuals participating in the program, as well as for partner organizations serving the needs of individuals in jail.

- **Better Services for Individuals** – People in the jail have access to behavioral health and supported employment services. Consequently, participants feel “cared for” knowing that others are trying to help.
- **Reduction in the Anxiety Level of individuals** - From the jail’s perspective, the anxiety level of program participants is reduced through participation in services, because the participants are fulfilling the requirements of the Court by engaging in mental health or COD services based on the NHS assessment.
- **Better Behavior in the Jail** - Because of the confidence and positive attitude individuals gain through these re-entry services, participants become more “hopeful” and are less likely to act out.
- **Positive Outcomes of Work Release Program** - Females participating in the work release program speak positively about the program and report that they are learning professional and life skills that are necessary for healthy and crime-free re-integration into the community.

Partners of the Forensic Collaboration identified how the Collaboration has helped the partners individually and collectively, and how this has translated into **better services for the individuals served**.

A primary benefit of the Collaboration is “better services for individuals”.

- **Probation as a Partner** – As an active partner, Probation helps support post-release transition planning.

One partner expressed a “newfound joy” with Probation.

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- **Information-sharing** – Monthly meetings afford partners the opportunity to share information about participants, establish goals, share resources, and coordinate services. Additionally, having access to post-release information is an advantage to keeping released individuals engaged in services and programs.

This information-sharing prevents inmates from “falling through the cracks”.

- **Teamwork** – The Collaboration meetings are described as “positive” when partners work “together as a team”. Partners agree that they are “mostly on the same page” when making decisions about a person’s situation and service needs.
- **Communication** – Based on trusting relationships that have been established through the Collaboration, communication is ongoing beyond the monthly meetings with partners informally contacting each other when needed.

The Challenges

Any challenges relate primarily to the nature of the population served. Individuals who are homeless or who have unstable housing, legal situations in multiple counties, or who have severe drug and alcohol issues present challenges.

- **Engagement** - From the community re-entry program side of the Collaboration, one of the biggest challenges is *engagement* of individuals to continue services as they transition from the jail to the community. In the situation when an individual is suddenly released from jail, not having contact information is a barrier to connecting these individuals with their respective community programs.
- **Loss of Contact** - Another issue is with individuals who have substance abuse issues and upon release from jail, attend an out-of-county rehabilitation facility. In these situations, it is often the case that the re-entry program loses contact with the individual, either because the program is unaware of what facility the individual is attending or the program does not have a release for a facility, or an individual may choose to reside in another county or in a halfway house in another county. These circumstances put the individual out of reach of the re-entry program for an unknown period of time.

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