

Wayne County Mental Health/ Jail Diversion Program



ETHEL & JAMES

FLINN FOUNDATION

2023 Partner Case Study

The Problem

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Non-violent offenders with behavioral health challenges are often not provided the resources and remediation appropriate for their situation. Instead, they are incarcerated, given probation or hospitalized without support and accountability for treatment. It becomes a “revolving door” for many who have behavioral health struggles who end up in court over and over again. The lack of communication and coordination between law enforcement, courts, hospitals and behavioral health providers has been a system-wide challenge.

Judge Timothy Kenny of the Wayne County 3rd Circuit Judicial Court recognized this problem while presiding over his docket. In one such case, a woman with clear behavioral health challenges was charged with shoplifting at a drugstore. He knew she needed behavioral health care not incarceration or probation. This case prompted him to reach out to Judge Freddie Burton, Jr of the Probate Court, who – among other cases – presides over people with behavioral health challenges that may benefit from enforced hospitalization. Judge Burton also recognized the need for better communication and follow-up to help citizens get the support they needed, so they did not end up back in court.

According to [Urban Institute](#), a nonprofit organization that provides data and evidence to help with decision-making and improve the well-being of families and communities, roughly 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners and 64% of jail inmates have a mental health challenge.

The Project

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In October 2018, the Flinn Foundation supported a Wayne County Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) mapping workshop, which included 45 key stakeholders including courts, jails, law enforcement, mental health, substance use, social services, housing and others.

Facilitators and the SIM participants developed a comprehensive picture of how people flow through the Wayne County system and identified gaps, resources and opportunities at each of those intercept points to improve prevention and diversion efforts. The workshop was followed up with a two-day conference and a smaller contingent of leaders visiting Miami-Dade County to learn about their highly successful jail diversion program for those with mental health conditions. Spearheaded by Wayne County Chief Judges Freddie Burton, Jr. of the Probate Court and Timothy Kenny of the 3rd Circuit Judicial Court, the Mental Health Jail Diversion Program Committee was formalized to develop and implement a comprehensive, sustainable plan to address the diversion of non-violent offenders from jail to behavioral health care in the circuit court, and to create better accountability about mental health care for those with behavioral health issues that appear before the probate court. The goal was to:

- Improve cross-system data sharing and training
- Improve pre-booking alternatives for law enforcement
- Facilitate Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) implementation
- Explore other successful diversion models
- Ensure implementation of outpatient treatment

Current Collaborators

Wayne County Circuit Court

The Honorable Timothy Kenny
Staff Support

Flinn Foundation

Andrea Cole, Executive Director/CEO
Staff Support

Wayne County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Raphael Washington
Chief Robert Dunlap
Staff Support

Center for Behavioral Health & Justice

Dr. Sheryl Kubiak, Founding Director
Nanci Hambrick, MSW, Project Manager
Staff Support

Wayne County Government

Warren Evans, Wayne County Executive
Alisha Bell, Chair of County Commissioner
County Commissioners
Staff Support

Wayne County Probate Court

The Honorable Freddie G. Burton Jr.
Kristina Morgan, MBA
Staff Support

DWIHN (Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network)

Eric Doeh, CEO / President
Staff Support

Detroit Police Department

James E. White, Police Chief
Police Officers
Staff Support

The Outcome

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Five years after the idea for the Wayne County Jail Diversion Program was considered and pursued, the stakeholders have identified some key accomplishments that speak to its success and make the case for continued sustainability and growth. These accomplishments include:

- The 36th District Court created a Mental Health Court where those with behavioral health challenges who face criminal charges are seen. This has been a transformative change in the way those with psychiatric needs are handled in the Wayne County court system.
- The Wayne County Probate Court restructured its docket, so that one judge (currently Chief Freddie Burton Jr.) hears all mental health cases. This has provided accountability and better care for those who appear before the court.
- Crisis Intervention Team Training of Detroit Police Officers, so they can take people with behavioral health needs to a crisis stabilization unit or hospital rather than arrest them.
- Adding DWIHN social workers and behavioral health workers to the police dispatch offices.
- Creation of Behavioral Health Unit, which is the first of its kind in the state and is located in the Wayne County Probate Court.
- Increase in citizens with behavioral health challenges getting treatment – both outpatient and inpatient – depending on their needs and situation.

Success Factors

At this juncture in the Wayne County Jail Diversion Program, the following factors have been identified as essential to the program's success ...

Success Factor 1

Buy-In of ALL Stakeholders

Everyone had to recognize that this is a community problem – not a police, court or health services problem – and want to help fix it. It was critical to build relationships across the system to instigate collaboration in addressing the central problem. It was also imperative to have a neutral party like the Flinn Foundation help facilitate connections and provide resources.

Leaders and staff in those departments had to feel a commitment to help, particularly since it could mean more work with no extra compensation.

Success Factor 2

Breaking Down Silos

Agencies and organizations can have blinders on and only see their place in a process. The stakeholders and their teams had to break down that silo of care and consideration, so they could all see the full picture and make profound changes in systems across organizations.

In order to do that they had to create strong relationships and build trust, so they could comfortably and honestly share information and vulnerabilities.

Success Factor 3

Regular Communication

More than 80 different officials helped to make this program happen. They had to leave their egos at the door and communicate with each other.

An important part of this is a monthly meeting among key leaders to discuss how the program is going and address their individual challenges and holistic concerns and considerations.

The Challenges

At this juncture in the Wayne County Jail Diversion Program, the following challenges have been identified ...

Challenge 1

Leadership Transitions

When key participants/leaders step down from their positions, it can stall progress or cause a gap in program's efforts as a new leader takes over. Developing a plan to cultivate new leaders is a priority,, particularly judicial leaders as the Honorable Timothy Kenny has stepped down from his position and the Honorable Freddie Burton, Jr plans to step down in the next couple of years.

Challenge 2

Getting Data

Project leaders have not received any long-term data on how well the program is doing in connecting people to services and keeping them out of the court system. Some groups are reluctant to share data out of fear that they'll be judged for results that aren't positive. This layer of accountability will require reassurance about these concerns and perhaps a change in process and additional resources for the agencies involved.

Challenge 3

Continuation of Care

It is challenging to connect people with care in a large, complex community like Wayne County when there are many different points of care throughout the system. The ideal situation is a "warm handoff" when one system (i.e. jail or hospital) connects with the person's provider and they work together to facilitate a successful transition when the person leaves the jail or hospital and returns to the community.

Next Steps

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The following future efforts for the Wayne County Jail Diversion Program are planned or have been identified as initiatives that could help the program expand on its success ...

- Creation of a crisis center within city of Detroit. This free-standing facility, championed by DWIHN, would help with continuity of care.
- Expand training in the civil court to increase understanding and opportunities for behavioral health intervention. Consider having more judges in the probate court hear behavioral health cases, so it doesn't fall to one judge's docket.
- Improving data collection from many sites that are involved in the program. This is crucial to make data-driven decisions and to have the ability to fix any issues within the program..
- Work on the early stage of the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) by identifying ways to help people before they are arrested or hospitalized.
- Team up with other agencies to ensure that people are finding housing, employment and other markers to help sustain their progress. Work toward holistic care for these citizens.
- Identify and cultivate more partners in this program. Foster the next generation of champions for this important work.