

Clarion County  
Jail Best Practices Award  
Nomination Narrative

In 1995, Clarion County opened a new 70-bed county corrections facility at 309 Amsler Avenue in Shippenville.

As an initial response to increased awareness of prison overcrowding and discussion prompted by the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, Clarion County Jail Warden Jeff Hornberger initiated a program in 2002 of “double-bunking” all the inmate cells, which increased the total inmate capacity to 120. By 2007, local inmate population had soared to an all-time high of 110 individuals.

Catapulting from a conversation at a monthly County Criminal Justice Advisory Board meeting to create a prison overcrowding task force, Hornberger joined forces with several entities and created the Clarion County Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court program, which was approved by the board to start in October 2007 with the ultimate goal of inmate population reduction.

A Treatment Court team was formed and, in addition to the warden, includes a district magisterial judge, adult probation officials, county drug and alcohol treatment personnel, the public defender and a human services provider.

Treatment Court is offered to repeat - Level 3 and Level 4 - drug and alcohol offenders who are facing lengthy court sentences which likely would lead to incarceration at a state correction facility.

Participants must take part in a weekly treatment team meeting and submit to weekly drug and/or alcohol tests. In addition, individuals enrolled in the program attend court once a week to discuss their progress with the district judge and other team members. They must also adhere to all other stipulations of their court sentence, including house arrest.

As of January 30, 2012, there have been 8,160 days of incarceration saved for the county due to the creation of Treatment Court. Based on the average cost to house an inmate at the local jail being \$78.56 per day in 2011, the implementation has resulted in a total savings of \$641,049.60 to the county in a little more than four years.

Currently, there are 20 participants enrolled in Clarion County’s Treatment Court, who have an average sentence of four months incarceration. To date, 48 individuals have completed Treatment Court, each of whom also had an average sentence of four months incarceration. Throughout the history of the program, 14 individuals who began Treatment Court were unsuccessful and served or are currently serving out their jail terms.

In 2011, the average population at the Clarion County Corrections facility was 74.

While the drug and alcohol treatment court has proven to be a successful venture for Clarion County, Hornberger said the positive outcome is a direct result of a cooperative effort from various county officials and their ability to work as a cohesive unit. The project continues to rely on full support from the court and corrections departments as well as the commissioners’ office.

While there was admittedly some hesitation at the onset of the idea due to the additional time that would be designated to its implementation, local county officials are now confident in the success of the drug and alcohol treatment court system. In fact, Hornberger said that the overall lesson learned is that counties need to continue to look at alternative treatment programs. Clarion County leaders are already discussing the possibilities of opening up the doors to other treatment courts to serve more of its constituents as well as continue to maintain and reduce inmate population at the county corrections facility.

The costs for this program have been covered by annual Intermediate Punishment grants, which were written by the county’s adult probation office department head. In 2011, Clarion County was awarded \$140,762 which covered 65 percent of the salary and benefits of a probation officer who leads the treatment team and also completely funds the personal monitoring devices for each individual enrolled in the Treatment Court.

Hornberger, in his role as warden at the Clarion County Corrections Facility, as well as the Clarion County Justice Advisory Board and the Drug and Alcohol Court Treatment Court Team, have taken the lead for Pennsylvania counties in implementing a practice that has proven to be both a successful treatment measure and a cost-saving program for the residents of Clarion County.

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