

2020 Nomination for the Western Region

CJAB Best Practices Award – Beaver County

The Beaver County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) was formally established in May of 2008, with their core membership derived from their longstanding Criminal Operations Committee which is tasked with addressing the inner working and issues of the Courts. This committee continues to meet monthly, teeing up broader system wide issues to be addressed at their quarterly CJAB meetings. To date, the COC, the CJAB and their committees have been instrumental in tackling difficult policy and procedural issues to streamline their case filings, flow and processing, as well as booking efforts, evaluations and assessments, cost and fines, warrant resolutions, addressing sentencing changes, and other key concerns.

With a comprehensive membership derived from County, State, and local stakeholders, the CJAB provides an ongoing forum for communication and joint problem solving among county officials on a wide range of criminal justice, public safety, and community health related initiatives, including but not limited to truancy, reentry, housing, mental health and substance abuse, victims' rights, and strategic planning. Periodically one member is selected to serve as the Chair; it then becomes their responsibility to carry the torch forward, fostering discussion at quarterly meetings and collaborating with local partners to move the CJAB's strategies forward.

In their early years Beaver County's CJAB focused on chipping away at policy and procedural issues to implement effective strategies in processing cases and addressing the needs of individuals involved in the criminal justice system. They implemented technological enhancements and established cross training protocols to improve data collection and awareness on the needs and services available to special populations while fostering collaboration among law enforcement, local attorneys, and criminal justice system personnel in order to provide more effective supports for justice involved individuals. These early initiatives included the establishment of one of the regions most successful booking centers, a highly effective and streamlined central court system, Mental Health First Aid training for public safety and community providers, a Veterans Court program, the establishment of Specialized Probation Officers, Reentry Liaison's and Peer Support Specialists who can be engaged with individuals on crisis planning. The County was also an early leader in tackling complex sexual offender supports and training opportunities.

One of the ongoing strengths of Beaver County is the recognition that the criminal justice system has become a major source of mental health treatment for individuals with serious mental illness. With local jails surpassing both state and private mental health facilities as the largest provider of mental health treatment in the nation, the CJAB relies heavily upon the expertise of the County's behavioral health and substance abuse treatment partners. As one of the CJAB's guiding committees, the Behavioral Health Subcommittee continually works to develop a comprehensive system of services and supports using the Sequential Intercept Model to inform the CJAB's overall strategic planning process. Chaired by a representative from Beaver County's Behavioral Health (BCBH) System, this subcommittee includes members representing all major behavioral health and criminal justice partners, as well as family members, community partners, and individuals involved in the behavioral health and criminal justice systems.

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In 2012 the Single County Authority convened a Drug Abuse Coalition, kicking off a series of endeavors to support communities in addressing the overdose epidemic sweeping the Nation. They held a series of town hall meetings and community education forums, provided Narcan training and distribution to colleges, schools, first responders, treatment providers, the county housing authority, and county offices, and they worked with the DA's Office to place 19 Prescription Drug Take Back Boxes throughout the County. As part of their ongoing efforts, they were recently selected as one of 5 counties in Pennsylvania to receive a Federal 2019 Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Program (COAP) grant to establish new quantitative, real-time forensic drug chemistry analysis workflow protocols designed in partnership with Pitt PERU.

In an era where formerly incarcerated individuals and those with even minor criminal records are often discriminated against in seeking employment opportunities, housing, and basic services the County recognized the need to further improve upon the Criminal Justice System. In order to address these concerns more fully, the County and CJAB have begun focusing more on the front and rear gates to the Justice System. Perhaps one of the most ambitious efforts born of the Drug Abuse Coalition was their work with the District Attorney's office and the Courts to establish a new Magisterial District Court Diversion Program. This 180-day program offers eligible participants an opportunity to participate in treatment and supportive services in lieu of further penetration into the justice system. Individuals who successfully complete their pre-trial service and treatment requirements are eligible for dismissal of their charges.

The County Jail and Adult Probation and Parole have also begun offering a collaborative training program where life skills coursework, such as financial management, resume building, and cognitive support programs begin within the jail, and are offered as a continuum of services through Probation and Parole. These services are offered alongside other educational, behavioral health and medication assisted treatment programs, case management, and recovery services that were established under their ChancesR; Reentry, Reunification, and Recovery Program, a Second Chance Act Adult Offender Reentry demonstration project, and other similar initiatives. As part of the CJAB's ongoing efforts they will continue to build upon these solutions for justice involved individuals to ensure that those with mental illness, substance use disorders and co-occurring disorders that become entangled within the justice system receive the services and supports they need to achieve successful reentry. These efforts will surely dovetail nicely with their semi-annual Reentry Seminars where individuals can receive credit for participating in educational programming, learn about driver's license restoration, employment opportunities and receive assistance with criminal record expungements.

In addition to having a strong and actively involved membership, the Beaver County CJAB continues to build upon the strengths within their community, emphasizing outcome measurement and program sustainability as markers for long-term success. Over the last two decades, their collaborative spirit has continued to grow, fostering new relationships and embracing innovative concepts that modernize the face of the criminal justice system. Staff respectfully recommends the Beaver County Criminal Justice Advisory Board for the 2020 CJAB Best Practices Award.