

2017 Nomination for the Central Region CJAB Best Practices Award – Centre County

The Centre County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) was created on June 8, 1999, by a joint resolution signed by the Board of Commissioners and then President Judge Charles C. Brown, Jr. Judge Brown, now a Senior Judge, was instrumental in creating the Centre County CJAB.

The Centre County CJAB is composed of key stakeholders from the courts, county government, law enforcement, and various community organizations that interact with the criminal justice system in one way or another. The mission of the Centre County Criminal Justice Advisory Board is to provide an ongoing forum for communication and collaboration among key decision makers for the purposes of evaluating, analyzing, planning, and recommending action to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Criminal Justice System of Centre County.

The Centre County CJAB is advisory in nature, and makes recommendations to elected officials, the courts, and criminal justice agencies on matters pertaining to juvenile and criminal justice operations. The current chair of the CJAB is Judge Katherine Oliver who took over the position of chair in September 2016. The Vice Chair is Commissioner Steve Dershem.

Offender reentry has been a focus of the Centre County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) for a number of years and in 2012, the CJAB created a Reentry Planning Subcommittee. The focus of that subcommittee was to make recommendations on offender reentry to the CJAB. In June of 2014, with the aid of its PCCD grant funding, the county retained Melanie Snyder, Executive Director of the Lancaster County Reentry Management Organization, to facilitate a series of reentry planning meetings and assist the county in developing a comprehensive offender reentry plan and creating an ongoing reentry coalition. Given the magnitude and wide-ranging needs of the reentry population, the county recognized that it would be essential to coordinate and concentrate community efforts. The Offender Reentry Planning Subcommittee worked with Ms. Snyder to identify community and social service representatives to be invited to take part in the reentry planning process.

As a result the Centre County Reentry Coalition was established by November of 2014 with Commissioner Michael Pipe as the chair. The coalition currently has two subcommittees including: Community Outreach and Life Skills. Since its creation the coalition has created a Reentry Guide, created a new Reentry Coordinator/Counselor position at the Centre County Correctional Facility (CCCF), added reentry information to the county website, a transition class at the CCCF was developed, and implemented Evidenced-Based Programs for inmates.

Another Reentry objective is the Building Hope Mentoring Program, collaboration between the faith-based community, the correctional facility staff and the Reentry Coalition. Building Hope is a mentoring program created to assist returning citizens in becoming constructive, contributing members in the community. Through Building Hope a community member will be matched with an inmate to begin meeting weekly at the Centre County Correctional Facility while the participant is incarcerated. The pair will continue to meet in public locations upon the release of the participant in a similar role to a sponsor from Alcoholics Anonymous or a big from Big Brothers/Big Sisters. A mentor is a caring, responsible adult volunteer,

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who serves as a positive role model and guide to a returning citizen. They help to ensure that the participant develops important life skills, is exposed to new opportunities, and a wide array of resources. The hope is to establish trusting relationships with accountability and responsibility by both parties working together to foster positive life choices.

Centre County like other Pennsylvania communities has been experiencing the effects of the Opioid epidemic. The Centre County CJAB began reviewing data on the number of overdose deaths within the county and formed the Drug Overdose Committee. As the board discussed this issue and possible responses, Gene Lauri reached out to PCCD. This resulted in Centre County CJAB members being a part of the Opioid Workgroup that assisted in the development of the Opioid Symposium held in January 2016 with over 300 in attendance.

In May of that year the Centre County HOPE (Heroin and Opioid Prevention and Education) Initiative grew out of that CJAB subcommittee. The Centre County HOPE Initiative is comprised of various community agencies working in collaboration to eliminate substance abuse, including the unsettling rise in opiate drug use and overdoses. The Centre County HOPE Initiative and its members will achieve this through dedicated outreach, effective education, raising awareness, and offering recovery support and treatment options to all members of our community.

Shortly after it was formed in May of 2016, the HOPE Initiative began sponsoring a series of Town Hall meetings to bring awareness of the heroin and opioid epidemic to Centre County community members. The first Town Hall meeting focused on identifying the heroin and opioid problem in Centre County, and was held on July 26, 2016 at the Mount Nittany Medical Center. With standing room only, it was clear that the community was ready to talk about this growing epidemic. Several other town hall meetings followed covering topics regarding understanding treatment and recovery, prevention and education practices within the county and the criminal justice system.

Later this month the HOPE Initiative will sponsor a Remembrance Ceremony and Addiction Resource Fair. Following a candlelight remembrance ceremony for loved ones lost to the disease of addiction, people will have the opportunity to have one-on-one conversations about addiction with representatives from a variety of organizations and will be able to ask questions and obtain information relating to their personal situation. Addiction resources that will be available include information on inpatient, outpatient, and medication assisted treatment; recovery; prevention; education; family support; Naloxone; and pain management. In addition to those resources, there will be members of the community present who have personally been affected by the disease of addiction, and who want to support others by letting them know that they are not alone.

After much discussion and research, Centre County will be adding a Drug Court to their specialty court programs. "The court has long believed that we have a crisis in our court systems with the heroin and opioids," President Judge Thomas Kistler said, "and this is one of the tools that we think will be valuable in helping us to treat people with some kind of therapy, some kind of treatment, rather than simply

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with incarceration.” Centre County hopes to the new program will be operational this fall. Centre County currently has a successful DUI Court.

Another strong effort of the Centre County CJAB was to the secure grant funding for the implementation of the Centre County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT). Centre County has been very successful in their CIT training and has assisted other counties in their training. Centre County even initiated the Statewide CIT meeting which is now a collaboration with PCCD to host this annual event.

Centre County CJAB has experienced numerous other successful projects including: Central Booking Center, technological improvements to improve efficiencies, the 911 Radio System upgrade project, and many more.

The Centre County CJAB has been diligent in its efforts to create efficiencies that improve the administration of the criminal justice within the county. The level of motivation and collaboration among the CJAB members and stakeholders is evidence that Centre County is committed to providing services to the citizens of the county that are efficient, effective and enhance public safety.

As a result, Staff respectfully recommends the Centre County Criminal Justice Advisory Board for the 2017 CJAB Best Practices Award.