

THE CJAB DOCKET

LATEST NEWS FROM THE LEBANON COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADVISORY BOARD.



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(Contact: John Shott, CJAB Coordinator, 273-1557 x177)

IMPLEMENTING THE LSI-R IN LEBANON COUNTY

A MORE EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL TO MEET OFFENDERS' NEEDS

In late 2016, The PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) awarded Lebanon County a grant of over \$15,000 to defray the cost of administering the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) to most adult offenders under supervision. The LSI-R is a well-recognized, proven assessment tool that determines an offender's criminogenic needs and enables Probation Services to craft a supervision plan focusing on those needs. The goal is to reduce the risk of re-arrest, decrease the rate of recidivism, and improve public safety. Using LSI-R underscores the County's ongoing commitment to evidence-based practices and methods of improving the probation/parole system. The grant application had the complete support of the CJAB.

Probation Services began full use of the LSI-R in early 2016 to assess approximately 1,750 offenders under active supervision. This was an intensive, "full-court press" that required field officers to shut down field activities to remain at Probation Services to assist with the high number of assessments required.

Prior to LSI-R, Probation Services only assessed an offender's level of risk than his/her needs. As a result, this approach offered limited benefit to officers striving to develop appropriate plans for those on supervision. LSI-R is an advanced instrument that assesses those needs and paints a clearer picture of the level of supervision required to decrease an offender's likelihood of re-offending.

Probation Services anticipate using the LSI-R to assess or reassess around 1,800 offenders this year. An offender who has been given the assessment will be reassessed at least six months later, sooner if recommended, to evaluate progress and the possible movement from one level of supervision to another. Monitoring the progress of each offender and determining whether their level of supervision based on LSI-R scoring has been the most appropriate level is a key element in ensuring the effectiveness of this assessment tool.



Grant funding is being used to pay for the cost of administering the LSI-R to offenders at the rate established by Multi-Health Systems, Inc. of Canada, which has proprietary ownership of this tool and imposes a fee for each assessment. Projects funds are also set aside to complete the installation of the LSI-R online, as undertaken by the County Commissioners Association of PA (CCAP). Upon completion of this project, officers will be able to conduct the assessment online, a much-desired alternative to the paper/handwritten process. An online system requires the purchase of additional tablets for probation officers who administer LSI-R at off-site locations, including the Correctional Facility, Central Booking, and the planned Day Reporting Center. Regarding Central Booking, the plan is to administer the LSI-R to arrestees there as part of the pretrial diversion program focused on getting eligible offenders into drug/alcohol treatment as soon as possible. *(This pretrial program is funded by a PCCD grant discussed in the November 2016 issue.)*

It is important to note that the County submitted a joint application with Lancaster County for funding to train up to five officers in how to train others in administering the LSI-R. “Training the trainers” is essential in making LSI-R an integral part of Probation Services. The five officers will be attending training this month. We are thankful that Lancaster County invited us to join them in this endeavor, which has been approved by PCCD.

“BRIDGE FUNDING” FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS IN NEED

MST AS A KEY APPROACH

PCCD has also awarded the County a grant of \$46,000 to provide “bridge funding” that will pave the way for at-risk juvenile offenders to begin Multisystemic Therapy (MST), an evidence-based, family and community-driven program, immediately upon referral. This is designed to eliminate any delays in MST while juveniles’ families apply for Medical Assistance.

At present, Lebanon County does not have a placement facility of its own, requiring that juvenile offenders be sent to outside facilities, adding more dollars to the county's expense sheet. MST is a proven intervention that will keep offenders at home while providing them with the guidance needed to make positive behavioral changes. The goal of MST is to provide parents and caregivers with the skills and resources necessary to address the challenges that arise when raising adolescents. It also gives adolescents the skills they need to cope with issues at home, school, and other places.

Under a service agreement with the County, PA Counseling Services, Inc. provides MST to eligible juvenile offenders referred by Probation Services. Trouble is, without the grant funding, any juvenile referred to PA Counseling for MST could not receive services until his/her family applied for Medical Assistance, which covers all costs. The grant alleviates this situation by



providing "bridge funding" that pays for MST services until Medical Assistance coverage starts. In the absence of the grant award, the County had two options: pay for services during the "bridge" period with local dollars, creating more budgetary headaches for Probation Services; or, delay MST while families await Medical Assistance, a period that could take several weeks. Not such good options. We believe that at-risk offenders should begin MST as soon as possible and that delaying this service could have a detrimental effect on offenders and their families.

The County plans to refer at least 20 juvenile offenders for MST services this year. The long-term outcome is a reduction in the number of out-of-home placements. The long-term goal is to make MST available to all at-risk juveniles who come in contact with other county agencies, such as Children and Youth or MH/ID/EI. Expending funds on MST could mean greater savings to the public in terms of reduced crime, reduced need for costly out-of-home placement, lower recidivism, and less victimization.

RENAISSANCE-CROSSROADS UPDATE

Encouraging news about the County's highly successful Renaissance-Crossroads program, which has been helping drug and alcohol-addicted offenders since 2001. PCCD has approved a plan to allow Level II offenders to take part in the program. Under previous guidelines, the program could serve only Levels III and IV offenders, who would normally be sentenced to State incarceration due to the severity of their offenses. Level II offenses are less severe offenses under State sentencing guidelines, but it is fair to say that some who commit these crimes also have drug or alcohol issues that should be addressed before their dependencies lead them to greater crimes. We definitely view this as a positive step focused on helping more people defeat the scourge of substance abuse and end their involvement with the criminal justice system.



DAY REPORTING CENTER STILL PART OF THE COUNTY'S PLAN

Despite a setback over the issue of zoning, the County remains committed to establishing a comprehensive Day Reporting Center (DRC) as an effective alternative to incarceration. The County Commissioners awarded a contract to PA Counseling in late 2016 to operate this kind of program. The original plan was to house the DRC at one of PA Counseling's facilities in downtown Lebanon. In December, the City Zoning Board ruled against using that location for a DRC, requiring the County and PA Counseling to devise a back-up plan. PA Counseling intends to start a temporary DRC at its main office at 200 North Seventh Street. This enables the County to get a DRC off the launching pad until the Zoning Board's ruling goes before the Court of Common Pleas, on appeal, at a date yet to be announced. No matter how the zoning matter gets resolved, the County will have a DRC for eligible offenders, who will surely benefit from the kind of professional counseling and education they would not receive while incarcerated. This adds another important component to the County's Intermediate Punishment Plan.

