

For Immediate Release
Contact: Seth Unger / Paul Verke
(916) 445-4950

March 18, 2009

Council on Mentally Ill Offenders (COMIO) Announces Best Practices Awards

Two programs receive awards, four recognized as "promising projects"

SEASIDE -- The Council on Mentally Ill Offenders (COMIO) announced the recipients of the annual Best Practices awards today at its council meeting. The Integrated Mental Health Assessment and Treatment Continuum for Juvenile Probation and Youth (IMAT), a Sacramento County collaboration, received a Best Practices award in the Juvenile Programs category. In the Adult Programs category, San Bernardino County's Supervised Treatment After Release (STAR) program received an award... These projects... are recognized for their effectiveness in measuring the successful treatment of mentally ill patients/clients to decrease the likelihood of future involvement with law enforcement and corrections and increase the individuals' likelihood of effectively transitioning back into the community. In addition to the Best Practices Awards, this year the Council has created a new subdivision of recognition to be known as Promising Projects. A Best Practice Project typically has a combination of program maturity and a statistical analysis and evaluation approach used to document the project's success. A project is considered "promising" when it demonstrates unique qualities or innovative direction, but may not have the program maturity or analysis seen in Best Practices Projects.

2009 Best Practices

Juvenile Program

Integrated Mental Health Assessment and Treatment Continuum

for Juvenile Probation and Youth (IMAT)-- Sacramento County Collaboration

The **River Oak Center for Children** began implementing Multisystemic Therapy (MST) in 2004 in collaboration with the Sacramento County Probation Department. This was expanded in 2007 to include Sacramento County Mental Health, Quality Group Homes and Panacea Incorporated. The objectives of the program, which focuses on youth ages 10-17 for 3-5 months, are to reduce anti-social behavior, improve family problem-solving and enhance positive school and vocational involvement. Nearly 200 clients have been served and 400+ additional children and family members have benefited from the MST approach. From 2004 to 2008, 73% graduated, 72% of the youths were living at home at time of discharge, 84% were in school or working, 82% have no new arrests, and 81% of parents have demonstrated the skills necessary to handle future problems. The approach of an effective use of outcome measures offers a strong case for measuring an individual's successful completion of the program.

Adult Program

Supervised Treatment After Release (STAR) -- San Bernardino County

STAR has been in operation for ten years and was created to affect a shift in institutional response from the criminal justice system to the mental health system and to maintain seriously mentally ill individuals in the least restrictive environment possible consistent with personal and community safety. More than 600 individuals have been served, usually within a 12 to 24 months period. An analysis of the behavior of 149 participants over a seven-year period indicates the number of bookings had decreased by 64%, the number of "jail bed days" decreased by 65% and the number of institutional placement days was reduced by 66%. STAR has effectively reduced recidivism for incarceration, shifted the demand for services to the mental health system and provided significant benefits for consumers in terms of deinstitutionalization.

2009 Promising Projects

Juvenile Program

Juvenile Mental Health Court -- Los Angeles County

Since 2001, the Juvenile Mental Health Court (JMHC) has accepted 315 children. It acts as a referral court for all minors found to be incompetent in Los Angeles County and is the only delinquency court in California that specifically accepts children who have been found incompetent by the referring courts. Typically, the JMHC probation period lasts two years and with successful completion of probation, the minor's case may be dismissed. A diverse collaborative team looks at each child and devises a treatment plan that addresses each child's disabilities as well as strengths.

Adult Programs

Mental Health Court -- Placer County

Since 1999, the Placer County Mental Health Court has served about 600 defendants and presently does not receive any funding from collaborative agencies. The Mental Health Court's success uniquely depends upon commitment from all participants representing diverse, and sometimes even oppositional agencies. Partner commitment encompasses dedication to improve outcomes of mentally ill offenders including reduced recidivism. While data collection methods are under development, evaluation analysis has not been used to determine success, to date. Still, the project's participants sense that jail population and recidivism are diminishing, and that more defendants are receiving needed mental health treatment, resulting in an improved quality of life.

Mental Health Court -- Riverside County

(Western Riverside County / Desert Region)

The Riverside County Mental Health Court was originally established in 2001 and reestablished in 2006. Misdemeanors offenders, as well as felons are considered for acceptance. Referral can originate from a variety of sources building upon a collaborative that is composed of formerly conflicted agencies. The program objective is to provide individuals with a linkage to mental health treatment outside of detention, identify community resources to facilitate continuity of care, increase treatment compliance and promote public safety. The two court locations serve 115 and 70 individuals annually. While the program has not implemented the model of rigorous data design and evaluation referenced in their application, the project does use measures to determine program success including completion of treatment goals, stabilization of mental illness and compliance with the terms of probation.

Whatever It Takes (WIT) Court

Orange County

The Whatever It Takes (WIT) Court is a post-adjudication alternative serving chronically mentally ill individuals who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, and have pending criminal charges. Initiated in 2006, participants are provided intensive mental health and/or substance abuse treatment, case management and an intense level of judicial and probation supervision and monitoring. Similar to other problem-solving courts such as drug courts, this is a collaborative partnership made up of a multi-disciplinary team. Unique to the WIT Court is that each participant is assigned a Personal Service Coordinator, at a ratio of 1 to every 10 clients, who provides supportive treatment and assists clients with every facet of their recovery. Ninety-eight individuals have been admitted to the program with sixteen being terminated. Of the five graduates, the average length of time from program entry to graduation is 630 days. While this program is immature with a small number of participants, data is being collected and an internal evaluation of the program is planned.

COMIO is comprised of an eleven-person panel of experts and practitioners selected to tackle the difficult challenges posed by mentally ill offenders. The legislation designates as permanent members the Secretary of the Youth and Adult Correctional Agency (now the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation-CDCR) and the Director of the California Department of Mental Health, with the CDCR Secretary serving as the chair. The other members are appointed as follows: three by the Governor, at least one of whom shall represent mental health; two each by the Senate Rules Committee and the Speaker of the Assembly, each appointing one representative of law enforcement and one representative of mental health; one by the Attorney General; and one superior court judge appointed by the Chief Justice. There is one vacancy, currently. Members include the following individuals:

Chairperson:

Matthew L. Cate, Secretary, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR)

Vice-Chairperson:

Stephen Mayberg, Ph.D., Director, California Department of Mental Health (DMH).

Joel Fay, PsyD., Mental Health Liaison Officer, San Rafael Police Department

David Lehman, Chief Probation Officer (retired), Humboldt County, and former member of the Board of Corrections (now the Corrections Standard Authority)

Wendy Lindley, Judge, Orange County Superior Court

Duane E. McWaine, M.D., Medical Director, Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center, Los Angeles

David Meyer, J.D., Professor, Institute of Psychiatry, Law and Behavioral Science, Keck School of Medicine, USC, and former Chief Deputy Director, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

Jo Robinson, M.F.T., Program Director, San Francisco Jail Health and Psychiatric Services

James W. Sweeney, J.D., Principal, James W. Sweeney & Associates

Charles L. Walters, Ph.D., Assistant Sheriff, Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department