

## **2016 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 Jonathan Grine who took over the position of Chair in January 2016, following the retirement of Judge Bradley P. Lunsford. The Vice Chair is County Commissioner Steve Dershem.

Offender reentry has been a focus of the Centre County 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 PCCD grant funds, the county retained Melanie Snyder, Executive Director of the Lancaster County Reentry Management Organization, to facilitate a series of six 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 County Commissioner Michael Pipe serving as Chairman. Meetings were initially held monthly and are now held bi-monthly, with excellent attendance. One of the first goals the Coalition tackled was the creation of the Reentry Guide. Copies of the reentry resource guide are provided to the returning citizen prior to their release from the correctional facility, but have also been provided to various agencies and organizations providing services to returning citizens. The resource guide contains sections on Housing, Utility Services, Food, Meals, Income, Identification, Clothing, Financial Assistance, Transportation, Health Services, Substance Abuse Treatment, Aging Services, Children Services, Parenting and Family Relations Services, Education, and Employment.

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 from Big Brothers/Big Sisters. A mentor is a caring, responsible adult volunteer, 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.

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Centre County like other Pennsylvania communities has been experiencing the effects of the opioid epidemic. The Centre County CJAB has been reviewing data on the number of overdose deaths within the county and formed the Drug Overdose Committee. As the CJAB 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 recent Opioid Symposium held at the end of January with over 300 in attendance.

Centre County CJAB took advantage of the opportunity provided by the Mental Health and Justice Center for Excellence to undergo a Cross System Mapping (CSM) workshop in April of 2015. The CSM report is specific to Centre County and reflects how individuals move through the local criminal justice system, identifies points for intervention or diversion of people with mental illness, and provides a visual depiction of the way in which treatment systems interact with the local criminal justice system.

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 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 2016 CJAB Best Practices Award.