

2013 CCAP Partners Award Submission

Name of Organization and Chief Officers: Berks Connections/Pretrial Services

Mark Stone, President, Linda Faye Epes Esq., First Vice President, Thomas Rentschler Esq., Second Vice President, John Yawornitsky, Treasurer, Larry Medaglia, Secretary

Narrative: Berks Connections/Pretrial Services (BCPS) is a non-profit agency founded in 1975 by a group of concerned members of the community as a means to provide caring support to incarcerated individuals and their families. Since that time the organization has grown to become an integral part of the Berks County Criminal Justice and Jail Systems. The mission of BCPS is to work to create a safer, more prosperous community by providing services, support and community-based outreach to adult offenders, at-risk youth and their families through successful community reintegration and by providing pretrial related assistance to the courts and effective supervision of pretrial defendants. More specifically, BCPS provides the following programs and services that are geared toward lowering the jail population and reducing recidivism in an efficient and effective manner that prioritizes not only the successful reentry of ex-offenders but the safety of the community as well.

Reentry and Jail Based Initiatives: BCPS staff works alongside jail staff to provide both pre and post release case management support and employment assistance to residents of the Berks County Jail System's Community Reentry Center (CRC). Several of these staff are Offender Workforce Development Specialists (OWDS) and head a multi-agency Employment Council comprised of other entities working specifically with the employment of offenders and ex-offenders. BCPS also operates the Reentry Resource Center at their Berks County Courthouse location. Here, reentry assistance is provided to those leaving local, state and federal institutions. BCPS publishes and distributes the Reentry Guide to Services that identifies programs and services for ex-offenders. In addition, BCPS operates a HUD funded Housing Program specifically for ex-offenders and also assists the PA State Board of Probation and Parole with the Parole Reentry Program. BCPS is a founding member of the Berks Community Resources Network (CRN), a group of over 50 non-profit, government, and faith based organizations involved in the Berks County Criminal and Juvenile Justice systems. BCPS also trains, places, and supervises community volunteers who serve in the jail and CRC as mentors, tutors, and who participate in jail based family reunification events that the agency runs. BCPS volunteers operate the Mother's Voice Program, which connects female inmates with their young children and provide recreational and support services to residents of Bethany Children's Home.

Pretrial Initiatives: BCPS conducts post-arrest interviews and assessments and furnishes verified results to the local judiciary and operates the county funded Community Release Program. Approximately 900 defendants are supervised by BCPS Pretrial Officers on an annual basis. These defendants enter the program either through the posting of 5% bail or are released on an unsecured bail and ordered into the program by the courts. Many receive intensive supervision that includes drug monitoring and referrals for mental health and drug and alcohol treatment. BCPS pretrial staff also provides support for the Intermediate Punishment Program and participate with all Berks County Treatment Courts. In addition, BCPS works collaboratively with the Berks County's Mental Health Developmental Disabilities program to provide assessment and diversionary services to the non violent mentally ill criminal justice population.

Nominated by: Peggy Kershner, Executive Director, BCPS/Berks Connections 610-478-6920 (Ext 3925)

County Corrections Facility: Berks County Jail System