

## **2016 Nomination for the Western Region CJAB Best Practices Award – McKean County**

The McKean County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) was established by the Board of Commissioners in 2008; their mission is to examine and address community criminal justice issues and recommend ways in which key stakeholders can efficiently, effectively, and collaboratively deliver criminal justice programs to local communities. Since inception, the CJAB's membership has continued to flourish, boasting over 30 members from law enforcement and criminal justice to human services and county government, as well as individuals from housing and higher education, many that not only serve on the CJAB's 14 sub-committees, but other local collaborative boards as well. Balancing the schedules of their committees and other local boards, the CJAB still continues to meet anywhere from 4-6 times a year to plan initiatives around reentry, diversion, technology, prevention, and justice-related interventions.

In the early years the CJAB focused on efforts to broaden law enforcement's access to JNET and establishing reception for first responders working in remote areas. The CJAB also saw the county through renovations to the existing county jail, as well as the construction of a Work Release Center, designed to alleviate jail overcrowding and out of county inmate incarceration costs. Over the last several years, the CJAB has really hits its stride. CJAB members were instrumental in the design and implementation of the county's Central Court, and assessing the most appropriate alternatives to incarceration for a rural 6<sup>th</sup> class county, which lead them to the establishment of both an Intermediate Punishment Program, and a well touted community services program, "Good Growing Gardens." Today the program not only provides training and skills to its participants and local volunteers, but it also provides the community and the jail with sustainable resources through cultivation, as well as rehabilitation of local trails and grounds.

In the Spring of 2013, McKean County CJAB reached out to the Pennsylvania Center of Excellence on Mental Health and Justice to conduct a Cross-Systems Mapping to assist with priority planning in order to better serve individuals with mental illness, substance abuse, and co-occurring disorders that come into contact with the criminal justice system. Early intervention and prevention strategies, training for law enforcement and first responders, continuity of care from the jail, and expanded housing options were among the priorities outlined through the mapping process. Through this, and it's ongoing strategic planning process, the CJAB has played a crucial role in defining justice-related goals for the county's Human Services Block Grants and as such, many of McKean County's CJAB members now serve as members of the McKean County Collaborative Board, designed to identify local strategies, services, and resources in McKean County. Through this partnership, a Mental Health Matters grant was secured, and the first adult Mental Health First Aid training was held for first responders and law enforcement in the spring of 2014.

In addition, the CJAB and the Collaborative Board began to address early intervention and prevention efforts, identifying truancy prevention as an urgent need, which lead to the formation of a truancy improvement coalition and the development of a truancy protocol, which was implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. School districts throughout the County have already reported improved attendance through the implementation of a Student Attendance Improvement Plan. In 2015, members of the Pennsylvania Truancy

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Advisory Committee lauded the county for being a leader in demonstrating the effective strategies, strong collaborations, and partnering with families and schools to identify early interventions in eliminating truancies.

In late 2015, on behalf of the CJAB, McKean County's Department of Human Services applied for, and subsequently received, a Mental Health and Justice Housing Initiative grant. They've partnered with the McKean County Redevelopment and Housing Authority to provide supportive housing opportunities to justice involved individuals with mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorders (MI/COD), transitioning them from criminal justice system to the community. The establishment of these much needed housing opportunities and supportive services addresses one of the final priorities outlined in their 2013 Cross Systems Mapping.

In addition to these lofty tasks, the CJAB's Reentry Subcommittee conducted an analysis on reentry services available to individuals housed in McKean County Jail, as well as those returning to the county from state incarceration. CJAB members established training opportunities for key stakeholders on changes in the Child Protective Services Law, as well as training on a domestic violence lethality assessment. The CJAB also recently reinstated a Sexual Abuse Response Team within the county, working with their new Child Advocacy Center to seek funding to train additional Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners.

The CJAB has also begun to chip away at the ever changing face of substance abuse, including the proliferation of meth amphetamines, K2 Spice, Bath Salts, and in more recent years, a rise in prescription drug thefts. In an effort to combat the rising substance abuse epidemic, the former CJAB Co-Chair and District attorney developed a community awareness program to help with the identification of illicit substances. The CJAB's Prescription Drug Abuse Subcommittee has also reached out to local medical providers, hospitals, and community groups to raise awareness on prescription drug abuse. One other recent initiative includes the investigation of implementing appropriate procedures and data retention for the use of the body cameras in law enforcement.

Finally, in an effort to foster ongoing collaboration and information sharing, the McKean County CJAB has continually extended their experience and training opportunities to other state and local organizations, whether it be on the success of their uniquely rural approach to community service programming, or through panel discussions on their efforts to establish a Multi-Disciplinary Investigative Team and accredited Child Advocacy Center. They also continue to share resources and training opportunities by holding regional symposiums and summits. In 2013, the CJAB sponsored a one-day symposium for rural counties across Pennsylvania to learn about evidence-based practices in juvenile justice, through the expertise and ingenuity of the Carey Group. Continuing down this path of creativity, innovation, and collaboration, in the spring of 2016 they will host a local Opiate Addiction and Overdose Awareness Symposium.

As a result, Staff respectfully recommends the McKean County Criminal Justice Advisory Board for the 2016 CJAB Best Practices Award.