



ILLINOIS
CRIMINAL JUSTICE
INFORMATION AUTHORITY

On Good Authority

Vol. 2, No. 1
October 1998

On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice. This report was written by staff Research Analyst Karen Levy McCanna. It is based on evaluations of the pretrial and drug intervention programs in Macon and Peoria counties. The evaluation was conducted by Ernest Cowles, Ph. D., and Richard Schmitz, J.D., of the University of Illinois at Springfield. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice in Illinois. The basic functions of the Authority are criminal justice research, federal and state grants administration, and information systems development and support.

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The evaluation was supported by grant 95-DB-VX-0017 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document do not necessarily represent the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Printed by authority of the State of Illinois, October 1998. Printing order #99-017. Copies: 3,000.

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Program evaluation

Pretrial and drug intervention programs in Macon, Peoria counties

Jail overcrowding and the need for alternative services has been a recognized problem in many Illinois counties. Pretrial services and drug intervention programs were initiated in Macon and Peoria counties to address growing jail populations.

A pretrial services program was created in each county's Probation and Court Services Department to help maximize the number of detainees released on bond by providing the courts with their criminal histories, information that is useful in determining eligibility for bond release.

Drug intervention programs providing alternatives to incarceration include the Day Reporting Center (DRC) in Macon County, the Macon County State's Attorney's Office Deferred Prosecution Program (DPP), and the Peoria County Probation and Court Services Department Drug Intervention Program.

The DRC provides supervision and services for drug-involved and violent offenders, while the DPP offers an alternative to formal court procedures for first-time offenders facing drug charges. The Peoria County Probation and Court Services Department Drug Intervention Program coordinates treatment for a targeted population of drug offenders.

Each program is supported by Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds administered by the Authority.

Evaluation Concepts

In May 1998, research evaluators from the University of Illinois at Springfield Center for Legal Studies conducted a two-year study of these programs. The evaluation addressed process and impact issues for the five programs in Macon and Peoria counties.

The implementation evaluation encompasses three central concepts:

- Assessing the extent to which program implementation was conducted according to pre-operational expectations;
- Guiding the refinement of the programs in the future; and
- Guiding future undertakings of similar programs by other counties.

Program administrators established goals based on the needs of their counties. The impact evaluation examined these goals, as well as each program's effectiveness in relieving jail overcrowding and providing alternative programming for drug offenders.

Pretrial Services Program— Macon County

Pretrial services provide the court with background information on defendants

seeking release on bond from jail. Criminal and social histories and other personal information on each defendant are presented to the court in a written bond report. Program staff also provide pretrial court-ordered supervision of defendants.

The pretrial services program has three goals:

- Based on a least-restrictive philosophy, increase the use of release on recognizance and other alternatives to pretrial detention;
- Decrease the pretrial jail population to open space for a more appropriate jail population; and
- Provide pretrial supervision and monitor release conditions.

Bond reports prepared by pretrial services staff provide the court with verified data on which to base bond-release decisions. These reports assist judges in assessing risks associated with the possible release of defendants appearing in bond court.

Pretrial supervision and monitoring are achieved by monitoring compliance with court-ordered release stipulations while the defendant awaits trial.

Macon County court records indicate that of 383 cases studied, 20 percent of the defendants assigned to supervision received a Failure to Appear (FTA) notification. Also, of 54 defendants removed from supervision, 43 did not receive FTA notification while on supervision. Eighty percent of defendants who received pretrial supervision services appeared in court as scheduled. Figure 1 illustrates the number of program terminations from October 1996 through February 1998.

In interviews, local members of the criminal justice system expressed confidence in the pretrial services program. The evaluators suggested the anticipated reorganization of the Probation and Pretrial Services Department would provide a convenient opportunity to solidify the program's goals and objectives.

Day Reporting Center—Macon County

The Day Reporting Center provides daily supervision services for a specific population of offenders in a community facility. Defendants are referred to the program and evaluated prior to program acceptance. Program participants are defendants with a court order to participate in pretrial supervision, or felony-level offenders sentenced to standard or intensive probation. Eligibility for the DRC program is determined by criteria based on substance abuse history, risk of offending, a need for daily supervision, and a need for special services.

Program staff provide some services, such as supervision, but the majority of services offered are contracted through community service providers. Service programs include substance abuse counseling, drug testing, life and employment skills training, basic adult education, and parenting and anger management courses.

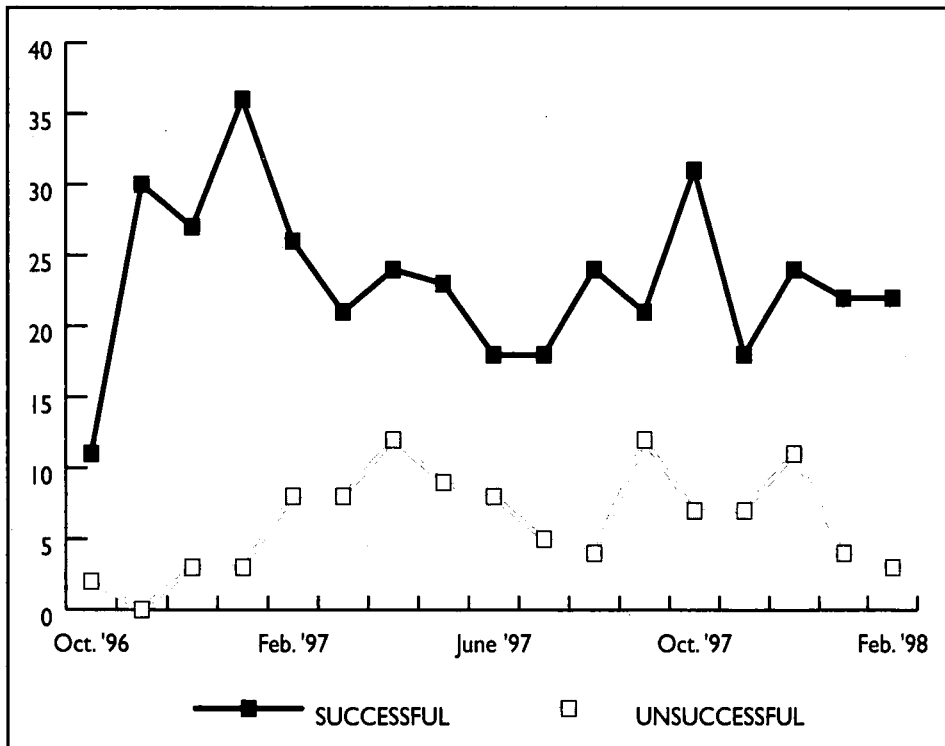
The ambiguity of stated goals has caused confusion for staff, and individual goal interpretation led to an "all things to all people" program theme. This attempt to provide global services, combined with a lack of unified understanding of eligibility guidelines by the judiciary system, led to client referrals that failed to meet eligibility criteria.

Improved communication between the judiciary and the Probation and Court Services Department has lessened the number of referrals for clients who do not meet the qualifications. From November 1996 to March 1997, the DRC program discharged 248 grant referrals. More than 90 percent of participant referrals came from pretrial or probation populations based on substance abuse history, risk of offending, need for supervision and special services. Others were court-ordered without assessment to participate in the program.

Deferred Prosecution Program—Macon County

The Deferred Prosecution Program, operated by the Macon County State's

Figure 1
Macon County Pretrial Services Program
Participant Terminations Oct. '96 through Feb. '98



Attorney's Office, is designed to steer drug-addicted offenders toward treatment and away from the court system. For first-time offenders, the program is voluntary. Participants must sign a contract with the state's attorney's office prior to entering the program. The original charges are dropped upon the offender's successful completion of the program.

Utilizing community treatment programs, the DPP offers drug-addicted offenders pre-treatment education courses, group counseling, continuing care, and relapse prevention. Participants receive 20 group counseling sessions and 16 continuing care group sessions. For individuals who have difficulty recognizing their substance abuse

problem, a maximum of 18 group sessions may be utilized for individual treatment. Drug testing is used to monitor program progress.

Of 332 individuals who participated in the program from February 1995 through February 1998, 111 were successfully discharged. Table 1 provides the numbers of successful and unsuccessful program terminations as represented by the 2,332 total cases examined by evaluators.

Personnel changes and the relocation of office facilities in the midst of the program were noted to have caused minor disruptions to the implementation of the program. A positive working relationship between the state's attorney's office and the service provider has facilitated resolutions to these initial problems.

The inability to share data electronically, which results in duplicated data entry, is another complicating factor.

Pretrial Services Program— Peoria County

Similar to Macon County's pretrial services initiative, the Peoria County Pretrial Services Program provides verified data for use in bond court and court-ordered supervision of pretrial releasees as the program's primary function.

Pretrial services officers check newly-admitted detainees for pretrial release eligibility. These individuals are interviewed and officers, through record checks or telephone calls, verify the information gathered. A report is written and taken to the court in time for bond hearings.

Pretrial supervision takes place only when ordered by the court. Officers monitor the releasees' activities to ensure they comply with stipulations placed by the court. Any failure to comply is reported to the court.

Evaluators identified a lack of consistent data collection. Individual case level data is collected during a pretrial interview for persons ordered to pretrial supervision. However, data is not collected for individuals released without

participation in a pretrial interview with officers.

Inaccurately reporting the data also was cited as a problem in Peoria's Pretrial Services Program. Data comparison across counties will be hampered by a lack of uniform reporting.

Drug Intervention Program— Peoria County

The Peoria County Drug Intervention Program provides a systematic means of drug screening, drug testing, and referrals to community-based substance abuse treatment for probationers with a history of drug-related convictions or drug abuse. The program aims to identify high-risk probationers and refer them to treatment in an effort to reduce the number of probation revocations.

Originally, clients could enter the program upon a joint referral from a community treatment provider and their probation officers. Once the treatment provider completes a substance abuse assessment, the program officer will complete an interview and screening of the prospective client. In November 1997, Drug Intervention Program officers began reviewing all felony probation cases for eligibility to increase their caseload.

The program utilizes three levels of supervision. Each client is assigned to a level and may progress to lower levels of supervision while in the program. Supervision levels also may be increased if the probationer fails to meet requirements. Each level of supervision includes face-to-face visits with the probation officer, home visits, contact with the primary service provider, collateral contacts, urinalysis, and arrest checks.

Between February 1996 and February 1998, 44 probationers left the intervention program. Of those who exited, 23 successfully completed the program requirements, 19 were unsuccessful exits and two individuals were transferred to another county. Of the 23 successful completions, 20 were returned to regular probation caseloads, one was assigned to Intensive Probation

Table 1
Deferred Prosecution
Days until program termination

SUCCESSFUL	
Days in program	Offenders terminated
1 to 30	1
31 to 60	3
61 to 90	11
91 to 120	8
121 or more	88
TOTAL	111
UNSUCCESSFUL	
Days in program	Offenders terminated
1 to 30	20
31 to 60	26
61 to 90	33
91 to 120	31
121 or more	58
TOTAL	168

Services and two completed their probationary periods.

One issue identified by the evaluators is the role of the program officer within the Peoria County Probation Services Department. An unclear definition of the officer's duties in relation to the duties of other probation officers created some conflict. Changes initiated to alleviate the situation include expanding the Drug Intervention Program caseload to 70 clients and assigning program officers to make all in-house court-mandated referrals for drug treatment.

Recommendations

Recommendations made by the evaluators to improve the programs in both Macon and Peoria counties include:

- Strengthening the clarity of each program's goals and objectives;
- Utilizing data systems more effectively; and
- Building more cohesion among staff during reorganization.

The goals and objectives of each program clearly state a mission to reduce jail overcrowding. In addition, an examination of the goals and objectives of each of the five targeted programs clearly points to two other broad and universal goals: improving the health and competency of the program participants, and creating community-based resources for criminal offenders.

As they are adapted to accommodate change, the goals and objectives should be clearly articulated to staff and those conducting business with, or otherwise interested in, the program. Such communication should help keep staff and management on the same page, and allow for a more accurate assessment of each program's performance.

Each program suffers from technological deficits in its ability to store, retrieve, and analyze data. Program staff have taken steps toward improving their technological capabilities. A persistent inconsistency in the data collected also was noted. Substantial variations were observed between monthly data and

individual-level data, and data inaccuracies were revealed in some instances.

The programs are encouraged to continue their quest for improved data handling capacity. These concerns can be rectified over time through the purchase of additional equipment and software, as funds become available. It is recommended the programs take steps to clarify data reporting procedures and terminology through the development of appropriate policy and procedure and staff training. The programs also must work on the collection of data at the individual offender level, rather than in aggregate form.

Also, because reorganization inevitably will result in some officers performing tasks related to programs they were only marginally familiar with prior to the reorganization, care must be taken to provide these staff with a clear orientation of program goals, objectives, and procedures. ■

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