

ESTABLISHING PRE-TRIAL DIVERSION: THE OKLAHOMA COUNTY DETENTION REENTRY SUPPORT PILOT:

OKLAHOMA



“Keep your big bright idea as the goal but understand that the first question should be what are the jail’s barriers to doing this work and what will help you in interacting with detainees.”

–Dedra Hansbro, Project Director

VISION


Oklahoma has consistently ranked among the highest of all states in prison rates for many years and despite some reform efforts, remains on a trajectory to continue incarceration growth which is socially and financially unsustainable. Although multiple jurisdictions have implemented diversion at police encounters and expanded court options there remains a significant gap through which many individuals with behavioral health treatment needs fall. They are the people with behavioral health conditions who are detained before court appearance, arrested on charges that police can’t waive in lieu of diversion, but for whom existing court-based options (eg. drug and mental health court) are too intensive. These individuals descend into a repeating cycle of jail incarcerations because, once released from custody, no formal mechanism exists to connect them to the community-based network of treatment options.

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) partnered with Oklahoma County jail to implement reentry support from initial detention to community services including behavioral health treatment and other community social supports such as housing, education, employment, and legal resources.

JAIL DIVERSION APPROACH

Although the project assists in reentry, the project seeks to divert individuals in detention after arrest and booking and before a court hearing. Oklahoma County jail houses some 1200 men and women who are held in detention from a few hours to many months. The complexity involved in screening and assessing individual needs and referring to appropriate services in such a large secure facility is daunting. Each detainee that is screened and assessed must be escorted from their cell block by a detention officer through multiple security checkpoints to a quiet room that enables confidential consultation. The treatment staff conducting the screening makes treatment and services recommendations best suited for the detainee to the public defender’s office for further case disposition. The treatment staff also coordinates with a local non-profit, Diversion Hub, to coordinate transportation and community engagement. The initial plan was to use web enabled tablets on-site to complete forms and arrange referrals during screenings. However, due to the facility design, treatment staff were unable to access wi-fi in the building.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Reentry support is based on length of stay in detention and has 5 tracks. Since its launch in March 2021 through 

June 2022, the project has screened 1,960 defendants within the Oklahoma County Jail. While many cases are still awaiting disposition as of June 29, 2022, 796 defendants have been diverted from prison to participate in some level of programming and 34 cases have been dismissed.

INTEGRATION WITH CRISIS SYSTEM

Diversion from pre-trial detention directly engages community mental health centers, precluding the necessity of crisis services. Should they be needed, Oklahoma County has three Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) that are required to provide mobile crisis teams. Oklahoma County also has crisis stabilization units including short term, Urgent Recovery Centers (less than 24-hours) and longer-term clinical settings.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EQUITY

The project collects data on race, gender and ethnicity. The table below illustrates the average daily population of the Oklahoma County Jail for 2021.

Male	84.20%
Female	15.80%
White	41.50%
Black	42.70%
Asian/Pacific Islander	10.90%
Hispanic	10.20%
Middle Eastern	0.33%
Native American	4.00%

Staff utilize this data to make appropriate community and treatment referrals. For example, the Latino Community Development Agency participates in screening, referrals, and services within diversion programs of Spanish speaking defendants. CCBHCs in the County are able to also meet the needs of multicultural clients as well as for the LGBTQ+ community.

PROJECT LEGACY

Detention officers and the Oklahoma County Jail Trust overseeing the jail are fully behind the project and their plans for a new jail facility include more accessible private spaces that enable confidential consultation



Oklahoma County Jail

and wi-fi. ODMHSAS will continue to fund on-site screenings and work with local providers to support diversion for those individuals in need of treatment and behavioral health services. Community providers will continue to work with the county jail to accept and treat referrals for behavioral health disorders. Other counties in Oklahoma have also expressed interest in this project.

WHAT HAS THE COUNTY DETENTION REENTRY SUPPORT PILOT TAUGHT US?

Despite efforts to divert before and during police encounters and the expansion of specialty courts, there remain a significant number of individuals with behavioral health needs detained in jails. While it is complicated by the rapid turnover of detainees and requires the active support of corrections staff, there is still a sizable population of people with behavioral health disorders that can be diverted. Approaching partners, both leadership and staff, with an understanding of their needs to maintain safety and security has facilitated work arounds to cut down transition times and allow confidential screenings. Working together, partners have located more confidential rooms and begun to schedule certain floors of the building for certain days of the week to reduce travel time through the building. Providing behavioral health screening on site has also allowed detention officers to begin viewing detainees as whole persons which helps to reduce stigma.

For further information about this project contact Nisha Wilson at NWilson@odmhsas.org.