

TRI BRANCH TASK FORCE ON JUSTICE & MENTAL HEALTH (CO-OCCURRING) COLLABORATION

Introduction

The TriBranch Task Force (formerly the Chief Justice Task Force) on Justice and Mental Health (co-occurring) Collaboration began meeting in August 2007. The Task Force was appointed by the Supreme Court and charged with creating a plan to improve the response to individuals with mental illness and co-occurring disorders who are involved with, or at risk of becoming involved with, the criminal justice system. The strategic planning process was supported by a small grant from the Council of State Governments. The Task Force is an interdisciplinary group that includes representatives of Vermont's judicial, executive, and legislative branches as well as advocates and consumers.

Statement of Purpose

The Task Force adopted the following statement of purpose to guide its work:

The Task Force is a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort that will design and begin to implement a statewide strategy to improve the response to individuals with mental illness and co-occurring disorders who are involved with, or at risk of becoming involved with, the criminal justice system.

The Task Force will focus on pre-arrest, pre-trial detention, and sentencing. Strategies will be designed to respect individuals and their rights and to engage the most appropriate, least restrictive community services on their behalf. Strategies will enhance public safety, address the cycle of re-offense, improve the health and quality of life of the individual and community, and make good use of taxpayer dollars.

Target Population

The target populations for the plan are those individuals whose conditions result in cognitive impairment, functional impairment, and impairment in decision-making. This includes individuals with mental health conditions, substance abuse conditions, and other conditions that affect functional ability (e.g., developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, traumatic brain injury).

The Sequential Intercept Model

Throughout the planning process, the Task Force utilized the framework provided by the Sequential Intercept Model. The model offers a conceptual framework for considering the interface between the criminal justice and mental health systems as they address concerns about criminalization of people with mental illness.¹

¹ Munetz, M.R. and Griffin, P.A., *Use of the Sequential Intercept Model as an Approach to Decriminalization of People with Serious Mental Illness*. Psychiatric Services. ps.psychiatryonline.org, 57:544-549, April 2006.