

Meeting Minutes of the Governor's Council on Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Courts and Justice-Involved Populations Subcommittee July 9, 2024, Approved

Attendees:

Subcommittee Members: Amber Blankenship, Stephanie Bond, Candace Facemyer, Cindy Hill, Judge Jim Rowe, Justin Smith, Stephanie Thornton (chair)

Guest Speaker: Jess Gundy

Staff: Bradley McCoy

Opening:

Stephanie Thornton (chair) provided welcome and opening remarks of this meeting of the Governor's Council on Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Courts and Justice-Involved Populations Subcommittee. The meeting was called to order on Tuesday July 9, 2024, and was conducted by Zoom conference. A quorum was present to approve June meeting minutes. Stephanie Bond made the motion to approve the minutes and Cindy Hill seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion passed with all in favor, and none opposed. The purpose of this meeting was to listen to guest speaker Jess Gundy talk about the Angel Initiative and stigma reduction in law enforcement, discuss upcoming Town Hall Meetings, and review of other activities of the Subcommittee.

Agenda Items:

Guest Speaker Jess Gundy (Criminal Justice Program Director at the WV Department of Homeland Security) Presenting on Law Enforcement Training and Stigma Reduction

- All West Virginia State Police troopers have been trained on the Angel Initiative by legislative mandate. This was an involuntary, required two-hour training that occurred during in-service training this year. This initiative is focused on having troopers emphasize treatment over incarceration, facilitating that connection, and hopefully reducing stigma from within while doing so.
- Stigma exists at every level of the Sequential Intercept Model, and it worsens with rearrest as people continuously repeat the steps of the cycle. Courts are supposed to meet with Law Enforcement to discuss how to diminish stigma in this cycle. West Virginia's Angel program mirrors that of Kentucky and seems to have had a positive impact thus far.
- The referral process of Angel is that they must be under arrest for non-violent drug charges, then an intake form is filled out at the detachment center, and a referral is made to First Choice

Services to get them into treatment. First Choice Services has also participated in the Angel training.

- The group brought up the question of WVSP statewide jurisdiction. Local police departments are also supposed to be aware of the Angel Initiative and can get someone in contact with WVSP from there if WVSP is not their initial touchpoint.
- The only current recording of Angel referrals is from the intake forms done at each individual detachment site.
- There is currently no measurement of how Angel is reducing stigma and burnout for law enforcement. Qualitative measures such as anecdotes about getting frequent reoffenders into treatment and out of the justice system cycle would be helpful in documenting this.
- Oftentimes, overdoses and drug-related calls are in association with other crimes such as domestic violence and shoplifting so individuals would still have to be arrested and charged for those crimes. In this case, they would have to work this out in the court system with the magistrate and may be referred to something like LEAD instead since they were not eligible for an Angel referral at their first touchpoint.
- It is concerning that individuals could disappear between their Angel referral and a treatment bed opening for them so that they would again fall through the cracks of the system. The idea of detaining these individuals in jail is not the more humane option or cost effective either.
- Having law enforcement refer to these individuals as people with substance use disorder rather than derogatory terms is one of the biggest components of stigma reduction.
- Angel Initiative training does not include types of treatment available for substance use disorder because First Choice Services handles the actual referrals to treatment.
- Jess Gundy has an application for law enforcement training where one would provide a biography and outline of the suggested training. Stephanie Thornton has ideas of what could be submitted for future training to show diversion and deflection's worth.
- Law enforcement training is open to observation but in-service training ended in May so the group could attend next year's.

Town Hall Meeting Planning and Fall Planning for 2025 (Final Plan Due November 15, 2024)

- Bradley McCoy provided a reminder about the Town Hall Meetings occurring every Wednesday in August and that the subcommittee's final plan will be due November 15, 2024.

Additional Discussion

- Justin Smith shared a bed availability tool. Every Monday morning, he sends out a Google Form survey to over 100 facilities about their bed availability. This is broken down by level of care (detox, treatment and recovery) and demographic (male, female, youth, and maternal). He usually gets between 16 and 20 responses. Right now, it is recreated weekly as to memorialize the last week's data, but he is working on getting it made into a secure website so that it will have live updates in real time.

Adjournment:

Stephanne closed the meeting by thanking all subcommittee members for their attendance and participation. The subcommittee will meet again on Monday August 19, 2024.