

National Association for Court Management

2011 Justice Achievement Award

Projects Submitted for Consideration

The Adoption Permanency Project and Study

Oakland County, MI – Sixth Judicial Circuit Court

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Summary

A two-year pilot project with subsequent study demonstrated the effectiveness of multiple strategies to help legally-free children achieve finalized adoptions. The court and its collaborative partners helped bring about systemic change and re-introduce a sense of time urgency to the post-termination/pre-adoption process. By using a specialized docket and single jurist, together with expedited early review, scheduling orders, standardized data-specific court reports, case review by court staff, pre-hearing casework staffing, summary data sheets and checklists, draft orders and a specialized database, the court took a much more proactive and involved role in removing barriers to and expediting adoption permanency. The progress of children on the specialized docket was contrasted to a control group, both in the time to significant milestones and in achieving adoption finalization. This project and study were accomplished within existing resources and can be replicated in other jurisdictions. The project showed that significant savings in foster care cost can be realized and children can reach 'forever families' earlier as a result of these methods. The full study and sample documents are available from the court.

Automated Incident Report Systems (A.I.R.S.)

Administrative Office of the 19th Judicial Circuit
Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois

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Summary

One of the greatest challenges in developing an effective court security program is convincing complex inhabitants and users of the court complex that their lives may depend on it. As reported in court security literature, the number of actionable threats against judges and court staff has increased dramatically in recent years across the country and it is only a matter of time before we experience the same level of increase in Lake County. Prior to this project the Circuit Court did not have clear articulated processes or procedures to report such actions when such threat-of-violence subjects and situations occur. Situations or forms of threat and/or incidents come in different ways: actions or verbal threats that take place inside the courthouse come through via phone messages, letters from mailings, faxes, packages and the like. Some actions may come from individuals, groups or organizations that may include those who refuse to pay fines or costs in U.S. currency; those who claim to not recognize the authority of the Court or the government; organizations and individuals who promote disorder or disruption in the court process or proceedings; others who while not making an actual threat, might operate under the radar and could possibly become a threat in the future. Without proper documentation, protocol and guidelines in reporting such threats or incidents, protecting judicial officers, employees and the public may not be handled in a timely manner. The court was cognizant of this problem; the need for sharing information, safety of the judges,

safety of the public and the commitment to automation and technology were the catalysts that brought about the development of the Automated Incident Reporting System - A.I.R.S. Since the launching of the automated incident reporting system, there were about 33 reported incidents in which some of the reported incidents have similar patterns or issues from the same person or groups of individuals. With the availability of the incident reports, all Judges are made aware of the incident, to include the investigative unit and the Illinois Supreme Court Office of the Court Marshal.

Backlog Fines/Fees and Restitution Enforcement

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County
Court Technology Services

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Summary

Court Technology Services, the IT department for the Superior Court in Maricopa County, developed an application called *Backlog FARE* that tackled the need for better compliance to financial judicial orders by putting in place proactive collection and payment modules within an automated system in attempt to collect more fines. The project incorporates a system of getting cases into and out of FARE when certain circumstances are found to exist. The implementation of Backlog FARE established an online payment portal that provides an easier mechanism for individuals to pay monies owed. Further, the Backlog FARE system includes a Motor Vehicle Department notification component that results in the suspension of the driver's license for those who have reached a specific level of delinquency in paying monies owed.

COCO – Commonwealth Online Court Orders

Chesterfield Circuit Court Clerk's Office

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Summary

In a ground-breaking enterprise initiative, Chesterfield's Circuit Court Clerk partnered with Virginia Interactive (VI) and the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) to implement an online system by which criminal court orders are securely prepared, electronically entered (signed) by the appropriate judge, and immediately made available online to authorized criminal justice agencies and correctional facilities. The web-based solution, Commonwealth Online Court Orders (COCO), is the first of its kind in the Commonwealth and is the only known system in the nation to offer such broad functionality. In order to assist other courts/clerks, Chesterfield's Clerk ensured that the design of the end product was completely customizable to meet the needs of other Virginia courts. Since Chesterfield was the pilot, it encumbered the costs for requirements definition, design, development and testing; consequently, additional courts are now able to implement COCO under a transaction-based fee model, eliminating up-front costs. COCO has significantly streamlined the court order preparation process and enhanced public safety through improved and timely reporting of criminal dispositions to law enforcement and correctional facilities. Because case data is pulled from the automated case management system, the potential for clerical errors has dropped dramatically and automated processes have eliminated manual certification, postage costs, and labor time/costs.

Continuity of Care Application

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County
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Summary

Court Technology Services (CTS), the IT department for the Superior Court in Maricopa County, developed an application called *Continuity of Care* that adheres to Rule 11, which involves seriously mentally ill (SMI) individuals. The Continuity of Care application helps ensure SMI individuals are appropriately handled and facilitates the evaluation of SMI patients' treatment. These actions are completed by the application sharing, condensing, and presenting information in useful ways to service providers and the Court.

Enhanced ADA Assessment and Accommodation

Pierce County Superior Court

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Summary

In response to the passage of General Rule 33 (GR-33) by the Washington State Supreme Court, Pierce County Superior Court has enhanced and simplified the means by which persons with disabilities can request and receive reasonable accommodations from the court, in addition to which a specific process has been implemented for evaluating the appointment of counsel at court expense in certain qualifying circumstances. The Deputy Court Administrator has been appointed by the court's judicial executive committee as the designated ADA compliance officer and contact person. A court policy has been written and all court staff have received training on the proper implementation of that policy. Simple and understandable documents and instructions are readily available at each public service counter and in the courtrooms, which allow a person with a disability to complete a written request or, if needed, to have court staff reduce their verbal request to writing or otherwise assist them in completing the request form. The Deputy Court Administrator reviews all requests which includes doing an assessment on all requests for attorney's at court expense. While the Deputy Court Administrator has the authority to grant or deny requests for accommodation, denials can be appealed to a court judicial officer for a review of the decision. All confidential information, such as healthcare or disability records, that are used in making the determinations, are filed with the court clerk's office under a sealed cover. With the exception of the more complex requests for court appointed attorneys, which require a careful and more lengthy evaluation and the provision of supporting documentation, nearly all ADA accommodations are rendered within 1 to 2 working days of the submission of the request.

Probation Reentry Initiative: Transitioning Offenders from Prison to the Community

Maricopa County Adult Probation Department

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Summary

There are over 8,000 offenders in the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) who will return to Maricopa County with a consecutive probation sentence following their discharge from prison. In response to an increasing prison population with consecutive probation, a group consisting of interagency collaborators began identifying gaps within the system to address supervision issues such as inaccurate release dates, the lack of reentry planning, and the large number of offenders who absconded prior to reporting to a probation office. The goal of the *Probation Reentry Initiative* is to reduce recidivism of individuals released from the ADC to probation, thereby increasing neighborhood safety and the efficiency of the criminal justice system. To accomplish this goal, the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department (MCAPD) formed a specialized unit to provide reentry needs assessment, pre-release discharge planning, and immediate interventions to smooth the transition between prison and probation. After just one year, the program has dramatically improved the reentry process and demonstrated noteworthy reductions in recidivism.

Problem Solving Court Diversion Program

Lubbock County Office of Dispute Resolution

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Summary

In a college town, minor first-time young adult offenders can easily become “just another number” in an already overburdened system. These offenders will often pay a ticket in an effort to avoid parental involvement and walk out of the Court House with a permanent mark on an otherwise clean record, leaving any potential to learn from the experience at the door. Recognizing this problem, three Lubbock County entities developed a program that can turn two negatives into two positives: rather than a criminal record and yet another case on the Court’s docket, the alleged offender addresses a problem early on, and the Court can focus on other cases. The Problem Solving Court Diversion Program is the result of collaboration between the Lubbock County Office of Dispute Resolution, the Lubbock County District Attorney, and Lubbock County Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4, and is overseen by the Lubbock County Board of Judges. This mediation diversion program gives first-time Class C Misdemeanor offenders, age 21 and under, the opportunity to participate in a mediation with a parent or legal guardian to develop a plan of action through which the communication between parent and child will be expanded, the participant will confront any potential addiction issues, and the participant will gain a sense of accomplishment through community service. If the participant completes the program successfully, fulfilling all conditions of their mediation agreement within a 90-day period, the District Attorney has agreed to drop the pending charges against the participant. This program allows for a low cost way for a County to handle a large number of first-time offenders while benefiting both the offenders themselves and the community as a whole.

Remote Interpretation Program

Superior Court in Maricopa County
Court Interpretation and Translation Services

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Summary

The Court implemented the Remote Interpreter Program to meet a growing demand for interpreter services. The program allows the Court Interpretation and Translation Services (CITS) Department to provide an interpreter to parties with limited or no English-speaking abilities to over 25 courtrooms located throughout Maricopa County in all areas of the law from a central location. This program has increased the interpreters' productivity and has provided a means to satisfy the demands of the public and the court while improving the utilization of resources.

Transitioning From Pen to Digital Ink Technology

Administrative Office of the 19th Judicial Circuit
Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois

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Summary

One of the greatest challenges in implementing a new technology is the acceptance of change. "CHANGE" is a good thing. We get better with change even if we turn a corner. In this economic times, using information technology as a tool aligned with the business process will help promote accuracy, efficiency, reduce redundancy and promote re-usability. This process of change was applied to the Pretrial Bond Report process at the 19th Judicial Circuit Court of Lake County in Illinois. The Pretrial bond officers prepare bond reports for judges who determine whether or not someone may be released on bond. The bond report provides a complete criminal records check, employment and resident status, and a recommendation for the type of bond, cash or recognizance. Officers interview defendants in a small area in the jail with a chair but with no desks. The officers record the information by hand during interviews on a bond report form using a regular pen and a clipboard. When officers return to their work area, the information is verified and applies the necessary changes to the report by hand. The verification of the information obtained from the defendant during the pretrial interview is an important part of the process before submission of the bond report and recommendation. Once the handwritten report is finalized and approved by a Supervisor, the same handwritten report is delivered to the judge. The clerk then makes additional copies for the prosecutor and the defense attorneys. This process was both awkward and time-consuming, leaving a wide margin for error in transcribing, copying, and storing the data gathered. Recognizing the inefficiency and ultimate costliness of the data capture process, a decision was made to look for a more streamlined and reliable system than the traditional use of handwritten paper bond reports. After researching different options, a digital pen and paper solution was implemented. Today, Pretrial Bond Officers use a digital pen using a well formatted form. The solution relies upon Anoto digital pen and paper technology, which enables digital capture, transfer, and processing of handwritten text by leveraging a digital pen and custom printed form with Anoto's patented dot pattern. This allowed for a productive tool that operates real time or near real time to be integrated without drastically changing the end users direct workflow and day to day habits. What was accomplished was the ability to get a more robust solution and user acceptance. The new system was able to accomplish all of the key business drivers without major disruption to the Courts, as well as deliver a multifaceted solution serving forms driven work flow, data capture, business rules engine, and document distribution and

management with automatic indexing for search and retrieval. The success of this project was based on the validation of accomplishing specific objectives well documented within the Strategic Plan, as well as follow recommendations to streamline processes and reduce costly delays. This project greatly supported the objective of improving case processing, meeting the Expedition and Timeliness standard as well as Fairness and Integrity by producing a clear and concise bond report and preserving court records through digital records.

Video Orders of Protection-Safety for Victims of Domestic Violence

Maricopa County Justice Court Administration

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Summary

Video Orders of Protection was designed to help ensure the safety of the victims of domestic violence in the Phoenix area. This pioneering program has helped hospitalized and emergency room victims obtain an order of protection remotely from the county hospital. By establishing a video link between the West McDowell Justice Court and the county hospital, victims of domestic abuse and violence no longer have to jeopardize their safety or compromise their medical condition, in order to seek an Order of Protection by traveling to a court. A Domestic Violence advocate assists victims at the hospital with the court forms and allows a judge to interview the victim remotely, via a video connection into the courtroom, to issue and sign the order. In most cases a police officer is standing by to serve the order. This innovative program integrates the resources of Justice Courts, Maricopa Integrated Health System and MedPro DMG (District Medical Group), making the program a trusted community partner in the fight against domestic violence.
