

# ***CASE STUDY: DATA COLLECTION, USE, AND BENEFITS OF EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS AT THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT JUDICIAL BRANCH COURT SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION***

## **INTRODUCTION**

In Connecticut, the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP) at Central Connecticut State University manages the Results First Initiative, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation<sup>1</sup>. The Results First Initiative includes a cost-benefit analysis model to compare state and local government programs to inform policy and budget decisions. It is based on assessments of evidence-based programs. Key components, then, are the identification of such programs and the collection and maintenance of program performance, outcome, and cost data.

The State of Connecticut Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (JB-CSSD) coordinates pre-trial services, family services, sentencing and supervision options for adults and juveniles, and juvenile detention centers. For some time, it has emphasized the use of evidence-based treatment programs that are (1) managed internally within the division and (2) contracted to community-based private providers. Recognizing the importance of research, accountability, and performance in the mid-2000s, the agency began to develop a more robust data system. Incorporating best practices, the system was intended to collect, maintain, and use information in order to monitor, document, and manage program results, thus saving state resources and enhancing outcomes for individual clients and public safety generally.

The identification of evidence-based programs along with the collection of data associated with them is the basis of the Results First model. IMRP is focusing on implementing the model in agencies with adult criminal and juvenile justice responsibilities: JB-CSSD and the departments of Children and Families, Correction, and Mental Health and Addiction Services. Eventually, it will be expanded to other departments and policy areas. Thus, other state agencies that become involved with application of the model Results First model would also need a robust data system that tracks evidence-based programs and focuses on program fidelity, maintains timely and accurate information, and documents measurable outcomes. This case study discussion of the development process for the JB-CSSD data system illustrates the elements necessary to commit to, create, and maintain such a system.

This paper does not recommend details of a particular data system, but describes JB-CSSD's development process, key system characteristics, its challenges and the benefits of implementation, and refers to the principles an agency can follow for successful project development.

We appreciate the contributions of Brian Hill, JB-CSSD Director of Administration; Cynthia Theran, Assistant Director of Programs and Services, and Celia Siefert, Deputy Director

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<sup>1</sup> The Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, works with states to implement an innovative cost-benefit analysis approach that helps them invest in policies and programs that are proven to work. Results First has also received support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

of Information Technology; Julie Revaz, Manager of Programs and Services; and Maureen Delude, Program Manager for CDCS/IY, in the preparation of this report.

## **HISTORY, ORGANIZATION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The JB-CSSD was established in the Judicial Branch in 1999, pursuant to a finding of the National Center for State Courts' assessment of the Branch's administration and organization. The division is responsible for (1) adult probation services; (2) adult bail/intake, assessment, referral pre-trial services; (3) family services in both civil and criminal courts; (4) juvenile probation; and (5) juvenile residential (detention) services. JB-CSSD Administration is the business arm of the division that supports operations in both the central and field offices. It oversees information technology for the Division, manages grants and contracts, and is responsible for research, data collection, training, and staff development.

## **EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS AND DATA COLLECTION**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a general cultural shift in correctional institutions revolved around research and experience with tools and practices that improve outcomes, such as reductions in recidivism. After a period when the philosophy characterized as "get tough" prevailed with a focus on punishment and retribution, the trend moved toward treatment and rehabilitation with performance-based standards in place. After the Judicial Branch reorganization in Connecticut, the JB-CSSD began referring to national scientific research and evidence-based programs. A Center for Best Practices was established in the Division to review research on effective program interventions and curricula, identify "best practices" models, and integrate them into existing program offerings. The Center trains JB-CSSD staff and private program providers and monitors results and outcome measures.

## **SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT**

Acceptance and implementation of the move toward evidence-based practices and programs requires a system for monitoring, collecting, and using program data. Originally, the Judicial Branch used an administrative case management system developed by a private company. But problems with and limitations of that system prompted the newly-organized Division to develop its own in-house system, thereby avoiding costly and time-consuming contract changes with the private company. In 2005, JB-CSSD committed to the concept of a comprehensive and accessible information-based Case Management Information System (CMIS). JB-CSSD management made a vigorous commitment to develop such a system as evidenced by a concentrated dedication of staff and available (rather than special) state budget appropriations to accomplish the project.

The JB-CSSD information technology (IT) staff worked on the project along with consultants. Building the system required an experienced IT architect, report developers, access to current software, and a strong liaison with user groups.

Later, JB-CSSD's commitment and effort resulted in the Contractor Data Collection System (CDCS) for collecting client-level service and treatment data from private providers.

Their information is incorporated into the in-house system. In 2007, the national Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) at the Community Resources for Justice ([www.crj.org](http://www.crj.org)) began working with JB-CSSD to support the CDCS. CJI assisted JB-CSSD with project planning and implementation, then quality assurance. It provided guidance on how to improve stakeholder support and compliance, develop reports and performance measures, and assure quality data input.

The current web-based system functions as a management tool to (1) monitor contracted program service providers, (2) assess treatment program delivery, (3) provide information on client outcomes, and (4) evaluate and improve performance. The CDCS includes client-level service and treatment data collected from private providers. It incorporates JB-CSSD's probation, bail and family services data, and arrest information to evaluate internal and contracted programs. The system gives the Division empirical evidence to support its policy and budget decisions.

### **Ease of Use**

At the development stage, communication between IT and the agency operations staff is critical. System designers recognized the need to keep the data collection process manageable. Menus are clear and uncomplicated.

JB-CSSD "owns" the system code and can edit, enhance, and update it as necessary. Its server is located and maintained in East Hartford. Since there are no proprietary issues, the system can be shared with other state agencies.

The JB-CSSD staff emphasize an important aspect of the development process: they created a system that balances the demands and expectations required of users with the benefits they receive from it. Rules, definitions, deadlines for data entry are built into the system, as are the job enhancements and improvements that users value.

### **Multiple Uses**

A versatile system that benefits multiple contractors and department functions assures quality and promotes efficient use of agency resources. Program staff have the tools to help them manage their workloads and meet deadlines.

The CDCS gives JB-CSSD the data it needs to review private providers' performance and manage its contracting process. Outcome information is available as the basis for communications between providers and Judicial Branch staff. Providers understand that the division has the past performance information it needs on which to base contract bid award and renewal decisions.

In 2007-08, the system helped JB-CSSD comply with Results-Based Accountability, which required them to produce program data to measure accountability.

Users see that the data is shared and utilized and can even be available for applications that were initially unanticipated. Flexibility and savings are attributable to the system, which has become an effective management and monitoring tool. It can be used for business analysis, needs assessments, and resource allocation among programs. It helps staff avoid duplication of efforts.

## **SYSTEM USE AND MAINTENANCE**

### **Support**

JB-CSSD provides training for system users. Monthly sessions are offered for new employees and users new to the system. Refresher courses are available. IT training staff will meet users on-site or conduct sessions by teleconference.

A responsive, courteous, and welcoming Help Desk is also essential. JB-CSSD has assigned IT staff to provide technical assistance to CDCS users who encounter problems. Users feel comfortable asking for assistance, assuring more timely and accurate data entry.

### **Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance is a critical component of the system. From May 2012 to November 2015, JB-CSSD contracted with the Crime and Justice Institute to manage the quality assurance process. The timeliness and accuracy of the data is now monitored by JB-CSSD for all individual program locations. Yearly data quality audit reviews give providers immediate verbal feedback, a written report, and an easy-to-understand rating or score. Users receive positive reinforcement and rewards, where appropriate.

JB-CSSD staff emphasize the importance of ongoing assessment of data quality and clear communication about identified problems. Retraining is available.

### **Utilization**

Involving prospective system users in the design and development phase maximizes the system's utility. Identifying categories of data and the potential uses for administration and management, report generation, and program evaluation result in a versatile, nimble, and comprehensive system. A comprehensive data system like the CDCS can have additional utility not intended in the original system development once agency staff become aware of its components.

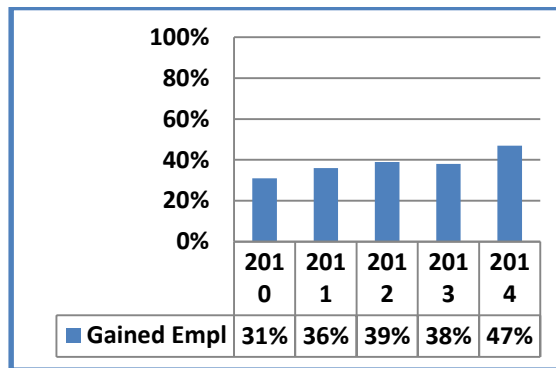
Users are more likely to maintain a system they find helpful in the performance of their own jobs. Managers have the information they need to evaluate employee performance, service delivery, resource allocation, and program outcomes.

## Example

JB-CSSD is committed to research and evidence-based programs and its data system is an essential element of that policy, a tool to accomplish intended results. In the decade or so since this effort began, a variety of factors have contributed to the improving trends associated with quality and outcome improvements at JB-CSSD. The system alone is not responsible for the improvement in reduced recidivism, nor is it simply coincidental. Its value is in measuring, supporting, demonstrating, and facilitating the use of best practices. The charts below, from the Judicial Branch's *2015 Program Report Card* on its Alternative in the Community – Employment Services Program, show that, in this example of its general approach, JB-CSSD has the information to reflect and the tools to achieve the benefits of this particular program.

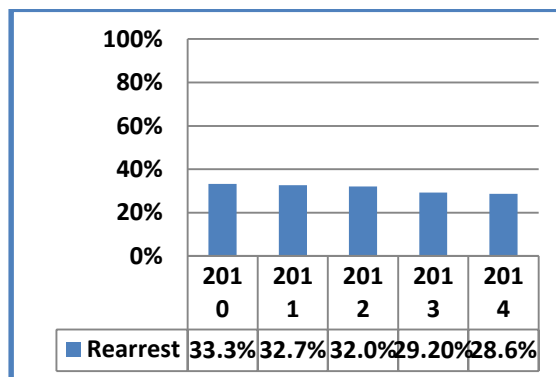
### Is Anyone Better Off?

Percent of Employment Services Group Completers Gaining Employment, 2010-2014



**Story behind the baseline:** This performance measure examines the rates at which clients that participate in Employment Services obtain employment prior to discharge from the AIC. Despite the economic downturn this measure continuously improved from 2009 through 2012. After a small decline in 2013, 2014 jumped to 47%. This increase was due to a reinvestment of program resources to support the position of job developer across the AIC network. **Trend:** ▲

12-month Rearrest Rate for Completers, 2010-2014



**Story behind the baseline:** This performance measure examines the rate at which clients who complete AIC services are re-arrested within 12 months of discharge. In the past five years, there has been a downward trend in re-arrest of AIC completers, with a modest reduction each year. In 2014, the recidivism reached a low of 28.6%. Fewer AIC participants being rearrested directly affect community safety.

## **BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES**

Consistent, sustained Division leadership was committed to developing a strong, workable data system to capture evidence-based program performance information. Work on the system required dedicated resources and the tenacity to work through problems that inevitably arose and new ones that come up. JB-CSSD continues to enhance and improve the system, based on users' experience with it. The imposition of data collection duties gives employees the tools they need for daily operations as well as information for purposes of accountability. It gives the agency the data it needs for contract procurement and evaluation processes. Division staff have come to rely on the system for a variety of purposes, some that were unanticipated.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM**

JB-CSSD's experience in developing the CMIS and CDCS can inform other agencies' efforts to create a new or amend an existing data system in order to facilitate and benefit from the use of evidence-based programs. The following suggestions may be helpful.

- ✓ Adopt and advocate an underlying agency culture committed to the benefits and use of accurate and complete data in policy development and implementation.
- ✓ Devote resources to technology and the development of a data collection system, within available appropriations where possible, to ensure ongoing commitment and system maintenance.
- ✓ At the outset, identify all classifications of users and involve them in system development, including in-house operations staff, contracted providers, and consultants and department IT staff.
- ✓ Create a system with built-in rules, definitions, and requirements (such as data entry deadlines) along with the tools for users to monitor quality.
- ✓ Provide appropriate hardware and equipment, where needed.
- ✓ Avoid any need to duplicate data entry operations.
- ✓ To assure cooperation, create incentives to input quality data, such as report capabilities that benefit the user.
- ✓ To assure quality input, audit data entry routinely and make users aware of audit procedures and frequency.
- ✓ Provide robust training for new users as well as refresher sessions for all staff with positive reinforcement for good performance.
- ✓ Provide a friendly and responsive IT Help Desk.

February 23, 2016