

**2018 Nomination for the Central Region
CJAB Best Practices Award – Potter County**

Potter County is an eighth-class county located midway between the eastern and western boundaries of Pennsylvania along the New York border, with Coudersport serving as the county seat. With just over 17,000 in population this rural county is known as “God’s Country” says the locals and the numerous signs that welcome you as you cross the county line. But don’t let the small size fool you; they are doing great work in Potter County!

The Potter County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) was established in 2009. President Judge Stephen Minor serves as the Chair of the Potter County CJAB. Colleen Wilber, Drug and Alcohol Administrator, serves as the CJAB Facilitator. The board has a dedicated membership of forty-one that meet quarterly throughout the year.

The Potter County CJAB has identified three current priority issues in their strategic plan: Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Mental Health and Recidivism. Each year their CJAB generates an annual report to review their progress towards these priority issues. Let’s review some of Potter County’s initiatives.

The Potter County DUI Treatment Court originated in September of 2013. To date this specialty court has saved approximately 10,000 jail days and graduated twenty-two participants from the program. Of those twenty-two, only three have re-offended with an alcohol/drug charge. The program has had a total of thirty-one participants (this number includes those currently in the program) and of those thirty-one, only three have been removed from the program. In 2016 the Potter County DUI Treatment Court was accredited by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC).

In May of 2015, Potter County initiated their Drug Treatment Court. To date this specialty court has saved approximately 7,000 jail days and has graduated eleven participants from the program. Of those eleven graduates, only one has re-offended with a drug/alcohol charge. The program has had a total of twenty-nine participants (this number includes those currently in the program) and of the twenty-nine, ten have been removed from the program.

According to Colleen Wilber, a Drug and Alcohol Administrator at Potter County Human Services and a member of the Northern Tier Community Health Collaborative (NTCHC), Potter County’s Treatment Courts support the work of the substance abuse workgroup by helping to reduce access to prescription drugs for misuse and abuse. The mission of the Potter County Treatment Courts is to reduce recidivism by facilitating treatment and increased supervision of offenders with moderate to severe substance use, as opposed to incarcerating them. The goal is to return recovering individuals to the community with an improved quality of life so they’re better equipped to maintain their recovery, thereby having a positive impact on and improving the community as a whole. Graduates of this program may also give back to the community by presenting educational classes as well as strengthening the recovery community.

In November 2016, a grant secured through the Pennsylvania District Attorney’s Association supported “Prescription Drug Take Back” boxes at four locations in Potter County. These collection boxes have helped to stop prescription drug abuse by removing potentially addicting medications from homes that have the potential to be stolen and/or misused. During the first year of the program, 160 pounds of medications were collected locally.

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Recently, Potter County CJAB began focusing their efforts on a new Pre-trial Services Program for which they received funding through the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. Theirs goals include assisting the Courts in reviewing and amending the conditions of bail release and to provide supervision of defendants and assure compliance with conditions of release that have been set by the courts. Additionally, they hope to reduce recidivism by providing treatment and supervision sooner to those suffering with addiction issues. In September of 2017, Potter County had their first participant in their Pretrial Services Program.

Potter County Human Services is working with the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) and Drexel University to implement the Garret Lee Smith Grant in Potter County. OMHSAS was awarded funding to focus on youth suicide prevention efforts in school districts, community colleges, and universities throughout the state. OMHSAS and Drexel University will provide technical assistance for developing suicide prevention plans, training for staff, and screening with facilitated referral for diagnosis and treatment. OMHSAS and Drexel University will be working with the Student Assistance Teams in schools throughout Potter County, and with the SAP Liaison agencies. This grant, awarded by SAMHSA, includes funding to assist provider agencies to have staff trained in validated screening instruments and in providing evidenced based treatment for students who are identified through the screening process to be in need of mental health or substance abuse services. In the end, this project will serve our Pennsylvania school districts to not only meet their new Act 71 requirements but make a larger impact in their schools and communities.

The Potter County Drug and Alcohol Program received funding through the State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis Grant and will be purchasing a new evidenced based program: Botvin Life Skills Training (LST) and also will have the county's prevention specialist trained in Strengthening Families Program. The grant will also provide new Student Assistance Program (SAP) Training as well SAP Maintenance to all districts in the county as requested.

Potter County also finds unique ways to address issues that arise. In 2016, they applied to utilize the technical assistance grants offered through PCCD to purchase bicycles for their treatment court participants. Since Potter County has no public transportation to offer and many treatment court participants lack a driver's license, bicycles seem like the best option. Not only can individuals travel to their substance abuse counseling, 12 Step meetings, probation appointments, employment, career training, medical appointments and court reviews, they could also improve their physical activity and thus their health. It addition, it could be beneficial in their journey to sobriety.

Potter County recently began Partnering in a National Data-Driven Justice Initiative (DDJ). By accepting a partnership with the DDJ; Potter County has agreed to pursue measures that can more effectively address criminal cases involving two populations: (1) people with addiction and/or mental illness who have a high number of encounters with law enforcement, EMTs, and emergency rooms, and other services; and (2) people held in jail before trial because they cannot afford to pay bail, not because they are a risk to the community or a risk of flight. Specifically, the county has pledged to advance 3 innovative solutions than can better serve these populations, while stabilizing communities and generating savings to taxpayers: (1) Implementing data-driven risk assessment tools to ensure decisions on pre-trial release (2) Diverting people who may be committing low-level crimes primarily due to addiction and/or mental health from the criminal justice system (3) Creating or expanding, where possible, real- or near-real-time local data exchanges that

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combine justice, health or other system data, consistent with applicable legal and privacy protections, to enable identification of multiple system utilizers.

Potter County has passed a resolution to join Stepping Up, a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails.

The Potter County CJAB has been diligent in its efforts to create efficiencies that improve the administration of the criminal justice within the county. The level of motivation and collaboration among the CJAB members and stakeholders is evidence that Potter County is committed to providing services to the citizens of the county that are efficient, effective and enhance public safety.

As a result, Staff respectfully recommends the Potter County Criminal Justice Advisory Board for the 2018 CJAB Best Practices Award.