

JJIS



By Karen Brazeau and Jill Petersen

Oregon's Juvenile Justice Information System:

**A Successful
Partnership**

Jake, 17, lives in rural eastern Oregon but has just been arrested for starting a fire in an ocean resort 300 miles away. He has been drinking, is belligerent and refuses to provide his last name. Upon Jake's delivery to the local detention facility, the intake worker on duty types what is known about Jake into a computer: He is 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighs about 160 pounds, has light brown hair and brown eyes and has a wizard tattoo on his right shoulder. Using a dropdown menu on her screen, the detention worker prompts the system to search its database for any and all males who fit this physical description.

After quickly sorting through thousands of records for nearly every youth who has had contact with Oregon's juvenile justice system, the detention worker learns that this is not Jake's first run-in with the law. She sees his last name, address, parents' names, prior criminal conduct and sanctions, names of previous social and caseworkers and, probably most important, she learns that Jake has no history of assaultive or suicidal behavior. She does see, however, that he takes anti-seizure medication.

Feeling comfortable that Jake is safely placed in detention, the woman updates Jake's record with information regarding this most recent arrest, alerts his current probation officer in eastern Oregon of his status, contacts his parents and makes arrangements for Jake to receive his medication. When the shift replacement worker logs onto the system later that night, he will find Jake's name added to the detention roster and will see a chronicle of the evening's events.

This scenario is a realistic description of the power of Oregon's new Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS). For the first time, Oregon's county juvenile departments and the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) share electronic records with real-time access to a common database. County and state juvenile parole officers use JJIS to manage their cases. Local detention staff and state institutional staff use JJIS to manage and track populations. And state and county administrators rely on JJIS as a management tool. Oregon's legislators and its governor are anticipating that JJIS will help them with tough policy decisions — ranging from institutional funding to funding for interven-

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tion programs that have demonstrated success — when they convene for Oregon's next biennial legislative session in 2001.

An Effective Tool for Success

JJIS exemplifies the real benefits of partnerships that go beyond the usual lip service given to their value. Certainly, hours of discussion and hundreds of meetings had to be endured, but these activities resulted in an arrangement that adds tangible value to the immediate partners as well as to others across the broader partnerships in Oregon's criminal justice system.

The partnership is successful because it is borne out of a common need. Oregon, like the rest of the nation, experienced a dramatic increase in both the rate and severity of juvenile crime in the early and mid-1990s. After years of limited capacity, neither Oregon's counties nor the state could respond to policy-makers' and budget committees' requests for basic programmatic and fiscal information about juvenile crime, treatment services or recidivism rates.

Common Needs

Oregon's system of juvenile justice is less a true system than it is a loosely joined framework of 36 independent county systems and a state system operating under a single set of state laws, but with a great deal of local discretion. In fact, this disparity and the inability to speak in a single voice motivates the partners to willingly work together, conform practices and establish the common definitions required of a statewide information system.

In 1995, Oregon's Legislative Assembly, recognizing the need to bring more focus to juvenile corrections, established OYA as a separate state agency. One of the new agency's first actions was to assemble a steering committee for what was to become JJIS and secure federal funds to help establish a vision, garner county support for a statewide information system, and prove that it could be done by developing and piloting the initial software module.

The importance of the partnerships became evident when OYA sought state funding for full development and implementation of JJIS. The 1997 Legislature approved the project but made funding contingent upon OYA's ability to secure intergovernmental agreement with counties that had formally established their participation in JJIS. There was no model for this kind of partnership and many doubted that 36 counties and the state could overcome the daunting political and logistical barriers. In fact, the project's quality assurance contractor identified this kind of complex partnering as the single biggest risk to the project.

Successful Partnering

Oregon's collective ability to remove seemingly immovable blockades is evidenced by the status of JJIS today. The state and two-thirds of the counties are online, sharing a

common database and exchanging information in real time with 34 of the 36 counties involved. More than half the software has been developed and is in use. The JJIS Steering Committee continues to drive the project and currently is evaluating the schedule for developing interfaces with secondary partners.

While numerous problems, including the challenge of long-term maintenance of JJIS, loom ahead, there is general agreement that Oregon is on the downside of the "pain curve" that comes with the change inherent in implementing a statewide juvenile justice information system. The state also agrees that it couldn't have accomplished this task without the commitment of all the partners.

JJIS' primary partners are OYA and county juvenile departments, while other state and local agencies, such as law enforcement, courts, schools and social service agencies, are secondary partners. Representatives of primary and secondary partners form the JJIS Steering Committee, which directs all aspects of JJIS, beginning with the development of a shared vision for the system, the content and sequence of software modules, and the implementation of JJIS in state and county offices and facilities.

JJIS' Vision

The vision of JJIS is to promote public safety, youth and juvenile justice accountability, and to offer opportunities for youth rehabilitation through the development of a statewide information system that provides a single comprehensive view of information about youths in the juvenile justice system across state, county and local agencies. JJIS will provide:

Statistics

- Number of juvenile delinquents by geographic location;
- Demographic makeup of the delinquent population;
- Type, severity and geographic location of crimes committed; and
- Criminal recidivism rates.

Planning, Development and Evaluation of Programs

- Track goals for youths and their progress;
- Track provider performance;
- Track outcomes of youths who have participated in service or treatment programs;
- Compare youths' behavioral profiles before and after treatment; and
- Track youths' criminal histories after services.

Decision-Making Information

- Criminal referral history;
- Reformation and restitution obligations and progress against obligations;
- Prior behavioral assessments, risk assessments and behavioral incidents;
- Educational, vocational and medical needs; and
- Prior services and treatments provided to the

youths.

How JJIS Assists Users

JJIS helps its users by providing automated document preparation, electronic communication and information-sharing, electronic search capabilities to help identify

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youths, and electronic reminders for events and actions to be taken.

In addition, detention and facility staff have a working knowledge of a youth's background on the first day he or she enters the facility. There are no information delays due to missing paper work. Field officers also have timely information on youth progress in closed custody facilities.

Institution staff can obtain background information on new youths and plan for after-care resources through JJIS.

Tangible Benefits

Clearly, JJIS provides a number of benefits, including:

- Better utilization of bed space;
- Improved ability to identify and use the most effective treatment services;
- Reduced time tracking down paper case files; and
- Faster identification of youths, local and statewide.

Conclusion

With JJIS development and implementation well under way, the steering committee is grappling with new problems that are products of JJIS:

- While many people want access to the rich JJIS database, who should, and legally can, have access?
- Following the initial state-provided training, how will ongoing training be provided?
- What are the appropriate interfaces with other criminal justice databases?
- What will this new system reveal about the quality and effectiveness of Oregon's juvenile justice system as a whole?

Responding to these questions will be as challenging as initial efforts to conceptualize and build the system. Hopefully, finding the answers will pave the way to better partnerships and improved outcomes.

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