

SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY JUSTICE INITIATIVE (CJI)

The Problem:

Summary probation is a common sanction for offenders committing misdemeanor offenses. Individuals committing low-level misdemeanor offenses are typically saddled with permanent criminal records that may affect their ability to find employment or secure housing. Many misdemeanants would benefit from support and services but they are not provided to the same degree as those individuals on formal probation.

The Response:

In 2014, the San Diego City Attorney's Office launched CJI, a post-plea program for individuals committing low-level misdemeanor offenses. The program allows participants to have their cases dismissed after completing 16 hours of community service administered by non-profit service providers, Alpha Project or Urban Corps of San Diego County (Urban Corps). Urban Corps provides opportunities for CJI participants to plant trees, recycle waste products, repaint graffiti, and clear illegally dumped trash from neighborhoods. Alpha Project allows participants to assist in services for the homeless, including its own initiative, Alpha Square. The City Attorney's CJI is a collaboration of the following stakeholders; San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), Alpha Project, Urban Corps, Public Defender's Office, San Diego County Sheriff's Department, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and community members.



The Methodology:

Researchers at SANDAG have conducted both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. An analysis of CJI participants and a matched comparison has been conducted to determine factors predictive of outcomes. Recidivism rates for CJI participants and a matched comparison has also been measured. Researchers conducted a cost-benefit analysis of CJI participants and the matched comparison.

Key Features:

CJI follows evidence-based practices and utilizes a risk screening and needs assessment. All program participants are offered a risk screening at court. An individual obtaining a risk score of medium or high may participate in a needs assessment and meet with a Case Manager at Alpha Project—the program's social service provider. The Case Manager can provide linkage to social services and other vital programs.

CJI Participants are directed to one of two local social service organizations

- Urban Corps of San Diego offers young adults, ages 18-25 years old, job training, community service work and assistance completing their high school education
- Alpha Project provides case management and focuses on higher risk participants while providing services to address addiction, mental health issues, job training and education

“ CJJ represents a cultural shift in criminal justice. The program focuses on treating people and their particular needs and not simply punishing them for their crimes. ”

-Lara Easton
Chief Deputy City Attorney

CJJ OUTCOMES:

(October 1, 2015-September 30, 2017)

- 5,536 cases filed
- 4,285 offers made
- 2,845 offers accepted
- 1,440 offers rejected
- 2,258 cases completed
- 450 failed cases

Biggest Challenge:

Although many CJJ participants readily realize the benefit of CJJ, the biggest program challenge has been convincing some participants who are resistant to intervention to take advantage of the program. A CJJ Community Advisory Board met regularly to strategize how to best reach this population of participants to create trust between the community and the justice system.

Lessons and Next Steps:

For a jurisdiction considering a similar program, the most important step is to get all of the potential partners engaged and committed from the outset. For CJJ, that meant the Public Defender's Office, the court, the Sheriff's Department, the local social service organizations, and even watchdog groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union.

“ For those who qualify, case managers work with CJJ participants to address the root cause of their criminogenic behavior. For instance, if someone stole because of financial insecurity, the case manager can work with them to find a job, obtain job training or create a resume. ”

-Lara Easton
Chief Deputy City Attorney

