



MAINE CRIMINAL JUSTICE/MENTAL HEALTH BRIEFS

BOUNDARY SPANNERS

Policymakers in Maine and around the country face the serious challenge of addressing the needs of people with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system. One strategy is to employ a person to act as a liaison between the criminal justice, mental health, and substance-abuse treatment systems. This 'boundary spanner' coordinates services in order to most effectively link offenders to appropriate treatment.

What are Boundary Spanners?

Boundary spanners can be any individual who facilitates the movement of offenders through the criminal justice system, and if necessary the mental health, criminal justice and substance-abuse treatment systems. A boundary spanner needs to be familiar with both the formal and informal norms of the criminal justice, mental health, and substance-abuse systems, and be able to successfully work among all three. In other words, a boundary spanner should understand the organizational culture and the individual rules and procedures of each system. Further, the roles and responsibilities of the boundary spanner should be agreed to by representatives of all relevant systems, so that this position has a clear authority.

How do Boundary Spanners Operate?

The boundary spanner coordinates services by acting as a liaison among the different systems, adapting services to the specific needs of an offender and linking the offender to those services. This involves working with prosecutors, judges, and mental health officials to identify the best treatment option. The boundary spanner also often provides follow-up to ensure continuity of treatment after release. Ultimately, the boundary spanner works with the offender to reduce the likelihood of recidivism, which is accomplished through connecting the offender with appropriate services.

The Multnomah County Jail Diversion Program

The boundary spanner in the Multnomah county Jail Diversion Program is a social worker who is an integral part of the county's diversion program. The position was created in order to increase collaboration between the local mental health center and jail. The local jail staff identifies and refers inmates with possible mental illness to the boundary spanner, who then interviews them, checks charges, and develops program options. After program options have been identified, the inmate and boundary spanner meet to discuss options and to determine the inmate's willingness to participate. The boundary spanner regularly meets with the local prosecutor, court officials, and mental health providers to further develop and advocate for inmates' treatment options.

Publication Date:
January 2006: Brief #2

Contact:

Lars A. Olsen, Director of Programs
Maine Department of Corrections
State House Station #111
Augusta, Maine 04333

Sharon Sprague, Acting Director
Office of Adult Mental Health
Maine Department of Health
and Human Services
221 State Street
Augusta, Maine 04333

Author: Becky Noréus

Diversion Re-Entry Steering Committee

The Committee is established to oversee the implementation of a joint action plan of action to address the needs of people with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system. The Diversion/Re-Entry (DRE) Steering Committee will focus on diverting people with mental illness from the criminal justice system and improving re-entry planning from prison or jail.

Maine Association of Criminal Defense
Lawyers (MACDL)
Maine Chiefs of Police
Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Maine Coalition to End Domestic
Violence
Maine Criminal Justice Academy
Maine Department of Corrections
(MDOC)
Maine Department of Health and
Human Services (DHHS)
Maine Judicial Branch
Maine Mental Health Association
Maine Pre-Trial Services
Maine Prosecutors Association
Maine Sheriff's Association
NAMI Maine
Parents Of Murdered Children – Maine
Volunteers of America Northern New
England (VOA-NNE)

