

4/10/06

From Laurie Lee

Summary of meeting with Sarah Abbott Carr regarding the JDP

Chris Gordon of Advocates and Lt. Paul Shastany of FPD also attended

The December 3, 2004 analysis of the Jail Diversion Program is the best and most accurate source of information on this program. This can be used to compliment the following discussion. In addition, Sarah Abbot Carr is happy to speak with anyone who needs to follow up with a question.

Before the program social service agencies and the police had a serious lack of trust and understanding for each other. They approached issues differently and thought there was no correlation between viewpoints.

After JDP, each side learned that they were similar in more ways than one and their goals were the same. The viewpoints and understandings of the social workers has rubbed off on the entire police force and changed perceptions, attitudes and approach.

The viewpoints and understandings of the police have rubbed off on the social workers and the entire agencies and their perceptions and relationship with the police has changed dramatically for the better.

Now the two can work together.

The JDP came out of a need in Framingham: a problem surfaced, a need was obvious and a solution was found. It was not quite such a straight line though. It took creative and open minded people, like Lt. Shastany (emphasized by Chris Gordon). And it took the Psychiatric Emergency Services (PES) who was willing to think outside the box and willing to be open minded and creative as well.

The end result is not easy to measure in actual cost. The changes in the Police department are immeasurable: attitude, approach, knowledge, access to social workers for calls and prevention. For the SSA's the benefit is equally huge: trust and relationship with the police, access to the department for crisis and other emergency calls, influence over the way people in need of services are approached and ultimately treated.

The end result for the town is a more enlightened, caring and efficient police department. Police resources can be re-directed to other places and a response to a police issue that is not based upon arresting, but finding true solutions. This is a community based solution for a community problem.

Why haven't other communities implemented this program?

Lynn is currently considering it but their relationship with their local crisis center run through Tr-City is not amenable. They are considering hiring their own social worker. They are looking into the funding issue.

Lt. Shastany said that for the program to be implemented, other communities have to have the problems surface and the need felt for it, before they take the initiative, as Framingham did. He said communities with a social service presence would have that need and benefit greatly from this program. He named Lynn, Marlborough, Lawrence, Brocton and a few others as potentials.

Regional JDP's are a possible solution. Natick, Ashland and Marlborough to a certain extent have benefited from Framingham's JDP. The social workers have been able to assist other communities and save lives. They are always cautious not to dilute the program in Framingham.

The police department has access to someone from PES for 24/7. And they use it. It is a great benefit to them to have that available. Similarly, PES has access to the police for calls that they think need police assistance

This is a very symbiotic relationship that works well for everyone involved, including the town.

The 469 calls in 2004(see the 'analysis") were initiated through several channels:

- 911 calls
- Officer initiated call
- Board of Health calls
- Advocates initiated calls
- Community initiated calls

Since that 2004 report, Sarah did a statistical analysis of the people associated with the calls. 50% were people never before seen or known to the agencies in town. However, they were well known to the police force. Appropriate treatment is now available because of the JDP.

In addition, 50% of the JDP calls are for people currently in treatment either through the local agencies or out of town agencies.

Sarah commented that the impact on how the entire police force handles situations is evident. This was made clear at a recent event where the police had to respond to a violent offender who could potentially inflict self harm. The approach and strategy of the police officers came right out of the social workers handbook (my phrase). She thought it could easily have been her talking.

Note: this is being sent to Sarah Abbott, Chris Gordon and Lt Shastany so any errors or omissions can be corrected