



Eric Holcomb, Governor
State of Indiana

Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
402 W. WASHINGTON STREET, P.O. BOX 7083
INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46207-7083

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 11, 2022

FSSA announces pilot program to integrate mental health, addiction peer recovery professionals in Indiana county jails

INDIANAPOLIS – The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration’s Division of Mental Health and Addiction today announced the launch of a pilot program designed to engage incarcerated individuals with mental health and substance use disorders with certified peer professionals and wraparound services.

The Integrated Reentry and Correctional Support program (IRACS) provides peer-driven, Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) support for inmates with mental health and substance use disorders upon arrival at one of the five Indiana county jail pilot sites. SIM provides a comprehensive picture of how individuals with mental health and substance use disorders encounter and move through the criminal justice system, aiming to divert them away from the justice system into treatment.

“The first three steps an individual takes upon exiting the justice system are often the most important steps they will take in their recovery journey,” said Douglas Huntsinger, executive director for drug prevention, treatment and enforcement for the state of Indiana. “Regardless of how an individual ended up in the justice system, how they move forward matters. By providing access to peers and wraparound services while individuals are incarcerated, we intend to reduce recidivism and future involvement in the justice system.”

The IRACS program is a collaboration between DMHA, Indiana Forensic Services and the Indiana Recovery Network, programs of Mental Health America of Indiana, and is being launched at Blackford, Daviess, Dearborn, Delaware, and Scott County jails. Inmates booked at each of the five jails will be evaluated as potential IRACS support clients, resulting in treatment and formal support for identified clients.

Forensic peer teams are stationed at each jail and consist of a certified program supervisor, certified peer support, resource peer navigator, reentry peer, and peer engagement coordinator, all employed by the Indiana Recovery Network’s regional recovery hubs. These



teams work within the jail settings and collaborate with correctional, pre-trial and nursing staff and all community providers to support incarcerated individuals during their time in the program. Jail staff will receive special training to support IRACS personnel and incarcerated clients.

Using the IRACS Recovery Engagement Pathways, peers will walk alongside each identified client and provide responsive support and resources relevant to their needs. These pathways are reentry-focused and can change as their legal process develops and sentencing is established.

“The engagement pathways allow forensic peer teams to meet individuals as soon as they enter through the door of the jail and provide one-on-one support at a critical moment when meeting someone, where they’re at, can make all the difference,” said Jayme Whitaker, vice president of forensic services at Mental Health America of Indiana. “With the vision and funding provided by state leadership and the strong local collaborations in all five pilot counties, the IRACS forensic peer teams are meeting people at some of their hardest moments and ensuring they have someone to walk alongside them, every step of the way.”

The IRACS program is funded through June 2023 by Recovery Works, Indiana’s voucher-based system to support partnerships between the justice system and mental health and addiction treatment providers. Each of the five pilot sites has received a grant of up to \$500,000 to build their teams and the infrastructure necessary to support a full-spectrum reentry process that collaborates with community partners outside the jail to ensure continuity in care upon release. At the conclusion of the pilot program, data gathered will be reported by the participating sheriffs to FSSA for evaluation. If proven successful, the State of Indiana is committed to expanding the IRACS program to more Indiana county jails within the next three years. “I want to thank the state of Indiana, local government and health officials, and all the volunteers who have made the IRACS program possible in Delaware County,” Delaware County Sheriff Tony Skinner said. “We have been hit especially hard with substance use and untreated mental illness for the past several years and this program is exactly what our community needs to help us stem the tide and begin recovering.”

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Media Contact:

Shelby Thomas

317-504-1682

shethomas@gov.in.gov