

VIP NEWS VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

A NEWSLETTER FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROFESSIONALS AND POLICY MAKERS

DECEMBER 2013

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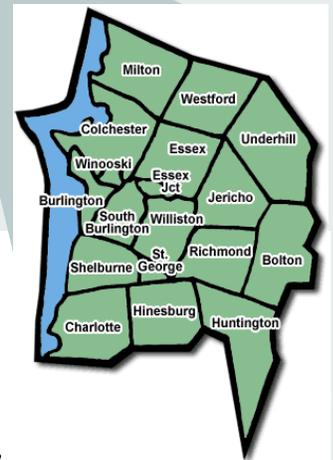
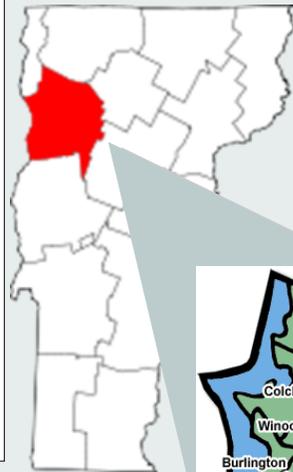
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GREETINGS

This is the inaugural edition of VIP News, a newsletter of innovative practices for criminal justice professionals in Vermont. VIP News will feature articles about creative approaches to crime and related problems and provide you with contact information to learn more about how your community might adopt these creative practices. We will also feature profiles of criminal justice professionals making a difference in their counties.

As with all new endeavors, the format and content of VIP News will most certainly evolve over time. Your thoughts, comments, and suggestions are encouraged. Please feel free to share this with others and let me know if you wish to be added to the email distribution list. Complete contact information can be found on the last page. Happy innovating.

Robert L. Sand
Sr. Policy and Legal Advisor
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POINTS OF INTEREST

- Check out the new [Innovative Criminal Justice Web Page](#).
- The Sequential Intercept Model is a key component in Innovative Criminal Justice Practices.
- Collaboration and creativity play an important role in VT innovative criminal justice developments.

CHITTENDEN COUNTY: RAPID INTERVENTION COMMUNITY COURT – A PROGRAM WHOSE TIME HAS COME

Responding to the typically long delay between an alleged offense and an initial court appearance, criminal justice professionals in Chittenden County developed the Rapid Intervention Community Court ("RICC"). Through RICC, alleged offenders are afforded a prompt opportunity to bypass the court process upon their willingness to engage in rehabilitative programming and to make amends to the community.

The RICC Coordinator reviews all the paperwork sent to the State's Attorney's Office for prosecution. From that

collection of roughly 7,000 cases annually, the Coordinator selects cases appropriate for RICC, typically involving misdemeanor quality-of-life offenses. The Coordinator then contacts the alleged offender, explains the RICC program, and schedules a meeting with the individual. This all occurs far more swiftly than the normal court process.

At the initial meeting, the RICC Coordinator uses an assessment tool to ascertain the alleged offender's

RICC (CONT.)

risk and needs level. Having identified the risks and needs areas, a contract is established that might involve mental health or substance abuse treatment with a local provider or participation in a community justice program. If the alleged offender successfully satisfies the contract, the criminal case is never filed in court and there is no court record of the incident. A failure to satisfy the terms of the contract results in the criminal matter being sent to court. Participation in RICC is voluntary and confidential.

RICC involves a high level of cooperation and collaboration between the prosecutor's office, the RICC Coordinator, and the RICC community partners which include the Community Justice Centers, Howard Mental Health, The Turning Point recovery center, Lund Family Services, Spectrum Youth Services, Mercy Connections, and others. As detailed below, these collaborations have proven to lower recidivism rates for RICC participants.

With RICC there are fewer lower-end cases filed in court, a reduction in recidivism rates, and a strengthening of community connections.

Truly, criminal justice innovation at its best!

SEQUENTIAL INTERCEPT MODEL

In this issue, and in future issues, you will see the term "sequential intercept." The sequential intercept model was developed by the [National Gains Center for Systemic Change for Justice-Involved People with Mental Illness](#).

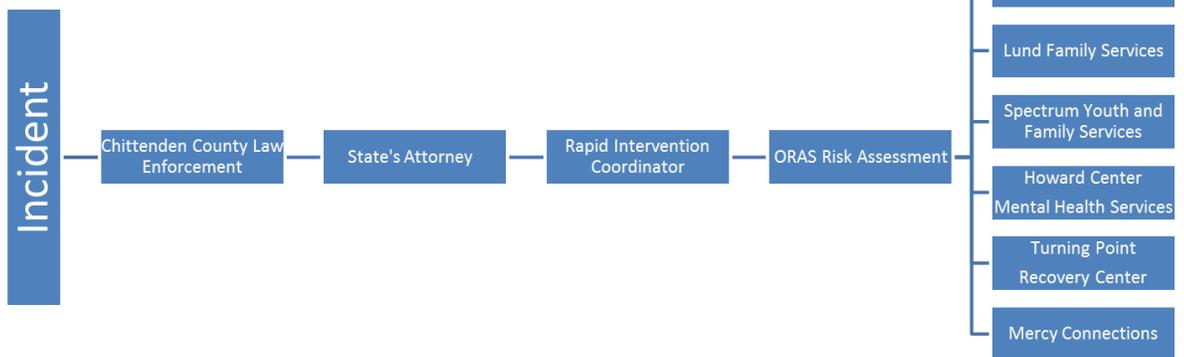
Sequential Intercept Points

1. Event/ Law Enforcement
2. Pre-Charge
3. Post-Arrestment
4. Sentencing/ Disposition
5. Corrections/ Release to Community

The model focuses on five critical points in the criminal justice system from the time of initial interaction with police through sentencing and community involvement with released offenders. Click [here](#) to see the model.

The Rapid Intervention program described in this issue operates within intercept Points 1 and 2.

WHAT DOES THE RICC PROCESS LOOK LIKE?



"I think state's attorneys and a lot of judges and people in law enforcement are naturally disinclined to do this because they don't think it works, and this study demonstrated that it does work."

-T.J. Donovan,
Chittenden County
State's Attorney

EFFICACY: DOES RAPID INTERVENTION WORK

In February 2013, the Vermont Center for Justice Research published its evaluation of the Rapid Intervention program. The report can be found [here](#).

The report noted that only 7.4% of participants in RICC who successfully completed the program were reconvicted of a crime. Conversely, 25.4% who did not complete the program were reconvicted. The report went on to conclude

that these reduced recidivism rates were most likely attributable to the benefits of RICC and not demographic or criminal history characteristics of the participants.

Included in the report's findings are the following statements:

"The RICC appears to be a promising approach for reducing recidivism

among participants who successfully complete the program."

"In conclusion, this study has shown that the RICC is a potentially effective program in reducing recidivism among participating offenders and warrants further research. "

"All preliminary indications are that a rapid response to people with mental health and/or substance issues can improve outcomes."

A COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER'S PERSPECTIVE ON RICC

Karen Vastine is the Coordinator and spokesperson for the Burlington Community Justice Center (CJC), which implements RICC. The CJC is founded on “restorative justice” principles, which are considered to best serve the community for addressing low-level criminal offenses. Specifically, the main principle of restorative justice is that conflict harms human relationships and the focus of redress must therefore be on “connecting what a person does to what a person did.”

Ms. Vastine says that one of the most rewarding aspects of RICC is the coordination and cooperation among police,

the office of the state’s attorney, and service providers to effect change in peoples’ lives. RICC is especially beneficial, allowing the CJC to work with a wider range of offenders, by encouraging people to get the treatment they need for substance abuse issues. The use of evidence-based practices has allowed them to evolve and try new things.

In RICC, treatment and meaningful participation allow participants to change their behavior. This is a better way to address crime because the penalty is more closely tied to the offense than it is with the conventional criminal code. For example, a project that the offender has created and

tailored himself is more meaningful to him for taking responsibility and to the victim for healing than just a fine or jail time would be. Ms. Vastine says “crime is isolating” for both victims and offenders; the restorative justice process allows communication to break down that isolation. Significantly, it allows offenders to see themselves for who they are and can become and not just as the stereotype of a criminal.

While Ms. Vastine states that the most disappointing part of the job is not reaching everyone, she says “RICC is reaching a lot of people!”

For more information on Community Court Programs:

- [Burlington Community Justice Center](#)
- [National Center for State Courts: Community Court Resource Guide](#)
- [Bureau of Justice Assistance: Community-Based Problem-Solving](#)

STARTING A RAPID INTERVENTION PROGRAM

Emmet Helrich, Coordinator of RICC, addresses some of the hurdles for establishing a rapid intervention program. He says the most important thing to consider when creating a program is the need for full cooperation among the court, law enforcement, and community services. The court wants to see that the program will result in a decrease in the number of repeat offenders. Law Enforcement needs to know that the program will reduce the time they spend on apprehending repeat offenders. Finally, a variety of community service organizations should understand that they are an integral part of mitigating criminal behavior and be willing to act quickly if a crisis should arise.

Mr. Helrich also discusses the importance of finding the right person to act as the Program Coordinator. It is necessary that the person have intimate knowledge of the population which the program serves and of the court system. He says one of the most crucial requirements for the job is “empathy and all the social skills that make someone feel like they are being heard and understood.”

Mr. Helrich suggests starting with the following resources if you’re interested in developing a rapid intervention program:

- [Rapid Intervention Community Court](#)
- [Center for Court Innovation: Community Court](#)
- [Red Hook Community Justice Center](#)

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NEXT ISSUE: SEQUENTIAL INTERCEPT POINT 3: PRE-TRIAL SERVICES

Chittenden County– Rapid Referral Program

Windsor County– Sparrow Project

Worth Noting

The Vermont Law School has launched an [Innovative Criminal Justice Web Page](#).

On the site you will find information and links about all of the innovative, evidenced-based practices in Vermont.

To sign up for this Newsletter click [here](#).