

Measurable Progress Series

Illinois' JWatch Probation Data & Case Management System

This summary of the JWatch system is one in a series of reports highlighting key changes in Illinois' juvenile justice law, policy and practice from 2005 – 2013. For a comprehensive overview of these changes, please see Measurable Progress, available at www.modelsforchange.net.

Illinois' 64 probation departments use a wide variety of commercial and "home-grown" data systems to gather and manage information on youth on juvenile probation caseloads and to track the work of probation officers who supervise and support them. Some departments utilize standalone databases or spreadsheets. Others rely upon costly proprietary data systems, which can be difficult to update or modify to produce needed reports. Many counties must hand-tally the aggregate data required to be reported to the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts on a monthly basis.

JWatch is a real-time, web-based data collection and case management application developed with Models for Change, Redeploy Illinois, federal and local support to address the challenges. Its current version includes a complete Juvenile Probation Module and a Juvenile Police Contacts Module, which allow the efficient collection, use and sharing of a large volume of information regarding youth in conflict with the law and those on probation. In Illinois' Second Judicial Circuit, probation officers in the Circuit's 12 counties use this enhanced data capacity to improve youth outcomes, monitor their work and improve community safety. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) provides programming support, technical assistance and data security. Based on the successful implementation of the JWatch Juvenile Module, an Adult Probation Module has been developed for rollout in early 2014 and a Juvenile Detention Module is in early development. Each component of the JWatch system is or will be available for use, without charge, by probation agencies across the state.

The issues

Probation officers gather and use a wide range of data on the youth on their caseloads, ranging from information on the youth's sentence and conditions of supervision, family contacts, assessment results, case plans, court dates, services provided and progress on probation goals. Probation supervisors, in turn, need access to both case-level and aggregate information to effectively administer the work of their departments. Early in the Second Circuit's participation

as an Illinois Models for Change demonstration site, it became apparent that a lack of user-friendly and economical data systems undercut state and local efforts to manage, analyze and support the critical work of juvenile and adult probation departments across the state. Leaders of the Second Circuit's Models for Change team consulted with their counterparts across the state and determined that many, if not most, departments were struggling with antiquated, costly or rigid data systems that did not meet their needs for data access or reporting. As a result, availability and use of probation data at the local level for planning or management purposes varies widely, as do practices for sharing this information among counties or departments or reporting it to state agencies.

To further complicate matters, there are no state standards for these probation data management systems, nor is there state funding available to develop or maintain them. And there is virtually no way to transfer or share relevant information among departments in different counties or judicial circuits or with the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC). While aggregate data on the number of delinquency petitions filed, probation intake interviews conducted, fees or restitution ordered and services or placements ordered is required by the AOIC on a monthly basis, much of this data is collected and tallied by hand.

Innovations

JWatch development was spearheaded by the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the UIUC and the Probation and Court Services staff of the Second Circuit. The system was designed to provide a user-friendly, easily-accessible and economical data management system for justice system practitioners to gather, record, access, share and analyze the comprehensive data needed to provide effective supervision, support and services to justice-involved youth. Throughout the various application development stages, Second Circuit staffs were active and involved participants. Their ideas and insights were the building blocks for the creation of a case management application that supports and meets the needs of probation officers charged with the critical work of supporting young people, ensuring public safety and advising the courts. Feedback from these front-line officers and administrators drove decisions on the operational, reporting, positive youth development, and planning functions of the system. Similarly, the perspectives of local law enforcement agencies informed the development of the Police Contacts Module.

In listening to these practitioners, JWatch developers heard several clear messages. The system had to allow real-time entry and access instead of paper-based or office-based systems, which could only be accessed from designated locations. It needed to have various access levels to allow appropriate data entry and viewing while protecting against unauthorized data entry or revision. The system needed to protect youth confidentiality through secure data servers as well as controlled security protocols. It needed to allow users to enter and access a wider range of information than just the usual "court process" data, including the YASI¹ and other

¹ *The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) measures an individual's risks for delinquent conduct as well as "protective factors" or strengths which can mitigate that risk and serve as the basis of an individualized treatment plan. In 2003, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts adopted the YASI as the statewide juvenile assessment tool to be utilized by all probation departments in Illinois as part of its efforts to implement effective, evidence-based probation practices across the state. Since 2006, Illinois probation departments have been required to perform a YASI with every youth placed on probation, with the tool now in use by all departments.*

assessments or evaluations, the youth's individualized case plan and expanded information about the youth's strengths and assets and the youth's adult and family support systems. And lastly, users urged JWatch developers to ensure that the program could produce both case-level reports and aggregate reports to support local policy-makers' efforts to improve youth and community outcomes. The developers heard these priorities and developed JWatch to accomplish these goals and more.

Results

The initial version of JWatch went live in August 2009 and has undergone subsequent upgrades based on user feedback. It utilizes a Linux Operating System and features streamlined access to all data pages, ease of navigation from one data page to another within the same youth's probation case file and a "case notes" section for customized notes and reports by users. Web availability allows the users to enter and/or access data in court, at home, in their vehicle, on home visits, or anywhere there is internet access.

The JWatch Juvenile Probation Module captures data from the time a youth is referred to probation to case closure. It utilizes drop down and pop-up menus to allow probation staff to easily capture required and useful information to manage their caseloads and to monitor all probationer activities and information, including YASI and other assessments, social service referrals and programs, drug testing, Redeploy Illinois participation and the youth's scores on the Circuit's detention screening instrument. JWatch includes DSM-IV codes to facilitate Medicaid claiming processes and, based on user feedback, will soon include an "Officer Alerts" feature to prompt probation officers when specific circumstances occur or the officer is due to contact or follow up with a youth, service provider or other practitioner.

There are several drop-down and pop-up menus throughout the application to aid the user with quick and easy data entry and to reduce data entry errors, particularly for complex information like Illinois criminal offense codes, offense descriptions and offense classifications. Relevant information not captured in the data fields on each screen can be entered in a "case notes" section available on each data entry screen throughout the application. The user can also create and print a complete or partial case notes report as desired. The adult probation module will also include a case plan and drug court component.

JWatch generates numerous online reports and forms, which can be printed and/or distributed electronically. The system also allows supervisors to audit their officers' data entry and case management and allows all users with appropriate permissions to create custom ad hoc data queries. This allows users to access and use their data without the need to continually ask the developer to create new reports and incur additional costs. The Juvenile Probation Module currently produces automated aggregate reporting required by the AOIC and additional reporting customized by users. The Adult Module will produce these reports as well, pending revisions to AOIC reporting requirements.

The Police Contacts Module allows for the capture of information on pre-judicial system contacts between youth and law enforcement officers. It provides for the recording of demographic information, suspected offense and circumstances, and the manner in which the

contact is cleared by the officer – *i.e.*, release to parents, ticketing, referral to the state’s attorney, arrest/detention, or stationhouse adjustment or other diversionary measure.

Development of the Police Contacts Module was based, in part, on Ogle County’s innovative use of standardized data forms to capture information on youth / police interactions. This data is used to provide objective, relevant information to enhance diversion of individual youth from formal justice system involvement, while aggregate information on police contacts assists the Second Circuit’s Juvenile Justice Council in building and maintaining a continuum of services and support which meet the needs of youth and families in contact with the justice system.

Next Steps

JWatch is ready for diffusion to other probation agencies across the state. The JWatch Juvenile Probation Module has been fully and successfully implemented by the 2nd Judicial Circuit Probation and Court Services Department. The Police Contacts Module is ready for use with feedback from local law enforcement practitioners, and police agencies and prosecutors in the Second Circuit are interested in using it. The Adult Probation Module is in the final stages of development with Second Circuit guidance and will be available for use in early 2014. Initial planning has begun on a Juvenile Detention Module. Based on the successful implementation of these components, the JWatch team is currently exploring development of Juvenile Court and Adult Court Data Modules as well.

UIUC servers are ready to accommodate additional circuits and users. Because JWatch was developed with grant funding, new users will not be assessed development or user fees, except for modest data storage and any specific application tailoring requested.

Resources

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This brief is one in a series describing new knowledge and innovations emerging from Models for Change, a multi-state juvenile justice initiative. Models for Change is accelerating movement toward a more effective, fair, and developmentally sound juvenile justice system by creating replicable models that protect community safety, use resources wisely, and improve outcomes for youths. The briefs are intended to inform professionals in juvenile justice and related fields, and to contribute to a new national wave of juvenile justice reform.