

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Prince William County

Program Title: DIVERT (Mental Health Docket)

Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Christopher E Martino

Title: Deputy County Executive

Signature: Christopher E Martino

Problem /Challenge: In recent years, there has been growing concern that individuals with mental illness are becoming increasingly more prevalent in the criminal justice system. Individuals suffering from mental illness have become a burden on an already strained criminal justice system at national, state and local levels. Their mental illness is often the primary reason for involvement in the criminal justice system. Frequently the conditions of these individuals are exacerbated during incarceration which can be difficult for both the individual and their families. Additionally, limited mental health services in the jail for crisis intervention are often strained to treat this fragile population. At the Prince William –Manassas Adult Detention Center, approximately 25% of the total jail population are identified as having mental illness.

Criteria for Selection: The Prince William County DIVERT (Mental Health) Docket meets the VACO Award criteria in several areas including offering an innovative solution to a problem, situation, or delivery of services, and it promotes intergovernmental cooperation and/or cooperation with local, state, and federal entities and/or private enterprise in addressing a problem or situation.

Program Overview: Since 2008, the Great Prince William County DIVERT Team (Diversion Intercepts for Varied Emergency Responses and Treatment) has been in place. This multi-disciplinary collaborative team of local government agencies, non-profit agencies, and citizens has operated with a goal to better address the challenges faced by individuals suffering mental illness who become entangled in the criminal justice system. This team has encouraged a range of improvements on managing these cases in our community and has resulted in such innovations as the Crisis Intervention Teams at our local Police Departments and the Intensive Community Supervision Program at the Office of Criminal Justice Services.

In February 2014, the process to develop the DIVERT docket began when a group of stakeholders from the DIVERT team, which consists of both County employees and other stakeholders from our local criminal justice system, as well as the Prince William Bar Association, assembled to address the issue of

improving the efficiency of managing those individuals before the Court who also suffer mental illness. This team included General District Court Judge Steven Smith, Anne Godson, a defense attorney and advocate for the mentally ill, as well as the PWC Commonwealth's Attorney's Office. The partnering County agencies included: the Adult Detention Center, Community Services, and the Office of Criminal Justice Services. Research supports that diversion of individuals with mental illness from the jail is often the most appropriate approach when safe to do so. Individuals with mental illness are generally better able to receive and benefit from services in the community as their conditions often worsen during incarceration. This innovative approach has not involved additional staffing and has only utilized existing resources. This team developed a specialized court docket, with the initial goal of expediting mental health evaluations for individuals pending trial. The hope was to improve efficiency and quality of evaluations and to ensure that those with mental illness are not languishing in the jail while court ordered mental health evaluations are completed. Previously, these evaluations often lingered for months and repeated court continuances were common, while the individual remained incarcerated. Since implementation in August 2014, there has been a marked improvement with evaluations being completed in a more timely manner. This has resulted in the cases being resolved faster which reduces unnecessary incarceration. Also noteworthy is that several individuals have been diverted from jail and placed in the Pretrial Program while their evaluations are pending. This allows for a more humane and just process for individuals suffering mental illness in our local criminal justice system. While this is a pilot initiative, we are currently establishing data collection processes to develop outcome measures and we hope this docket may become more treatment oriented in the future and that treatment services can be monitored as well to assist in reducing the cycle of repeat offending and encouraging success in treatment services for individuals suffering mental illness.