

STEPPINGUP

A National Initiative Reducing
Overincarceration of People with Mental
Illnesses

Collaborative Solutions for Behavioral Health in Rural Pennsylvania: Addressing Needs Before, During, and After Jail

April 22, 2025 | Scott Berry, Jennifer
Scott, Jared Soto, Gretchen Frank,
Audra Goldsmith



Agenda

- Overview of the Stepping Up Initiative
- PA Stepping Up TA Center
- Addressing Strategies for Rural Counties: County Spotlights
- Discussion/Q & A

Speakers

- **Scott Berry**, *Mental Health Director of Crisis, Emergency, and Disaster Services, Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (BHDS), Washington County*
- **Jennifer Scott**, *Administrator and Human Services Care Management Director, BHDS, Washington County*
- **Jared Soto**, *Social Worker, Public Defender Office, Carbon County*
- **Gretchen Frank**, *Senior Policy Analyst, Behavioral Health, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center*
- **Audra Goldsmith**, *Project Manager, Behavioral Health, CSG Justice Center*

The Council of State Governments Justice Center

We are a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that combines the power of a membership association, serving state officials in all three branches of government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities.

The Stepping Up Initiative: A Guiding Framework



STEPPINGUP Initiative

Stepping Up is a national initiative to identify, address, and reduce the overincarceration of people with mental illnesses in jails.



Justice Center
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

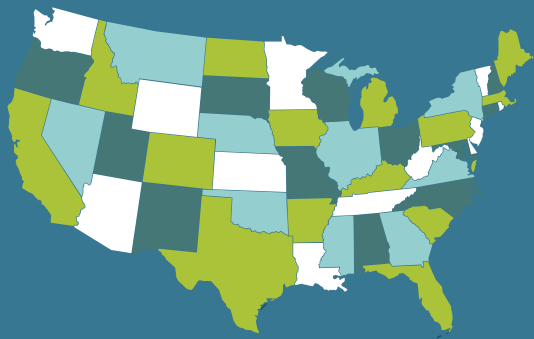
#StepUp4MentalHealth
www.StepUpTogether.org

STEPPINGUP

9 Years and Counting



More than **580** counties across **45** states have joined Stepping Up to reduce the prevalence of mental illnesses in jails.

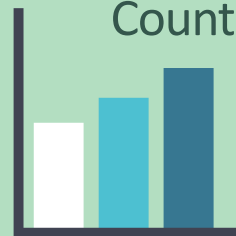


48% of Americans live in a Stepping Up county.



Communities are reducing their jail populations through cross-system alternative crisis responses, diversion, and access to services.

50+ Innovator Counties are blazing the trail in data collection.



5 states have launched statewide Stepping Up initiatives.



The Stepping Up Six Questions Framework

1

Is our leadership committed?

2

Do we conduct timely screening and assessments?

3

Do we have baseline data?

4

Have we conducted a process analysis and inventory of services?

5

Have we prioritized policy, practice, and funding improvements?

6

Do we track progress?



Four Key Measures



1. Reduce the number of people with mental illnesses booked into jails



2. Reduce their average lengths of stay in jail

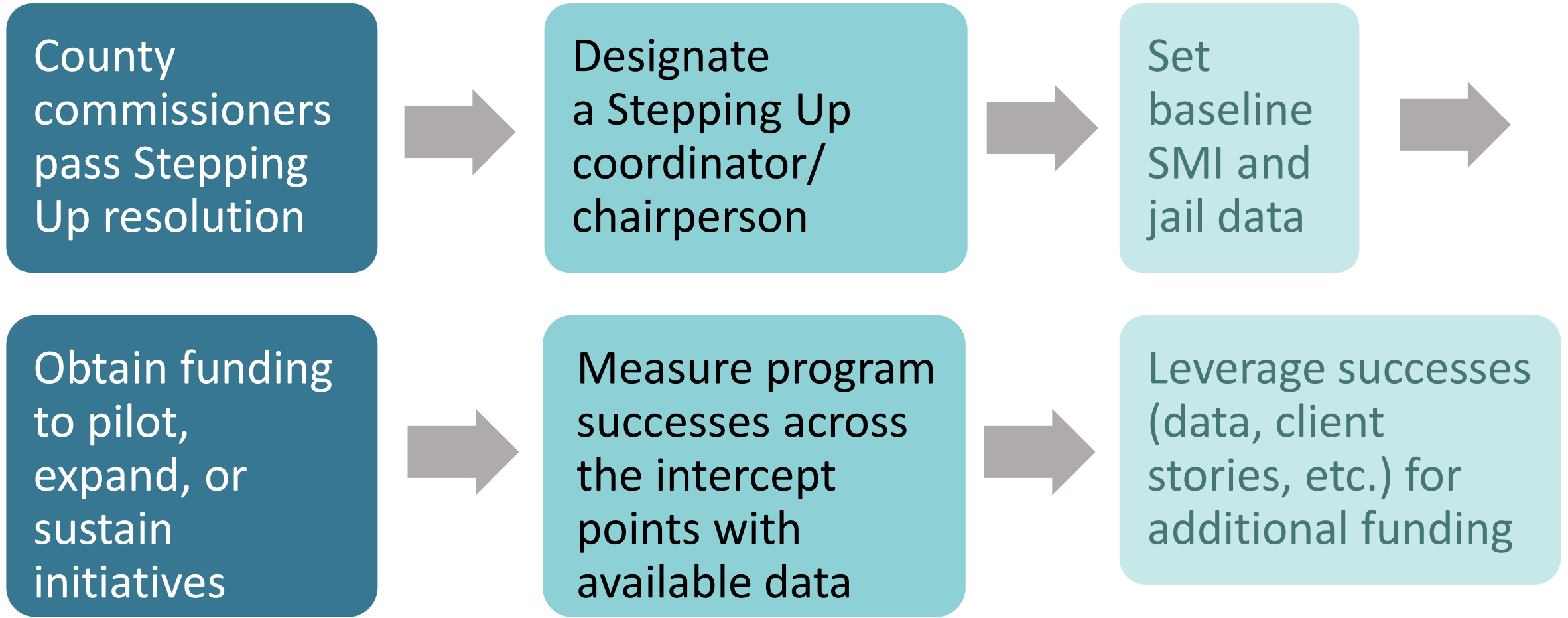


3. Increase connection to treatment for people who have mental illnesses



4. Reduce recidivism rates for people who have mental illnesses

General Recipe for Success with Stepping Up



Unique Challenges in Rural Communities



Wide geographic areas served



Constrained financial resources



Limited availability of community services (behavioral health support, transportation, housing)



Workforce challenges



Inadequate mental health supports in the jail



Sparsity in available crisis response and pretrial diversion difficult

Steps for System Improvement in Rural Counties



Build on existing programs (focus does not always need to be on developing new interventions).



Match resources to meet your county's needs (e.g., leverage telehealth options).



Apply a “one step, one policy” approach.



Continue to collaborate across agencies, systems, and counties and think creatively.

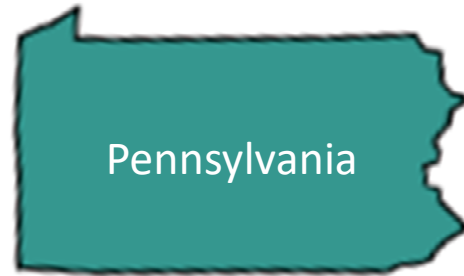


Connect with other counties to share approaches and leverage TA.

Pennsylvania Stepping Up TA Center



What is a Stepping Up TA Center?



The goal of a **Stepping Up TA Center** is to help improve the process of identifying community members who have a mental illness and are involved in the justice system. This way, they can be connected to care and, ultimately, counties can reduce recidivism.



Objectives of the TA Center



Establish and implement data-driven plans to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in local jails.



Identify best practice sites across the state to act as peer mentors and facilitate connections with other counties.



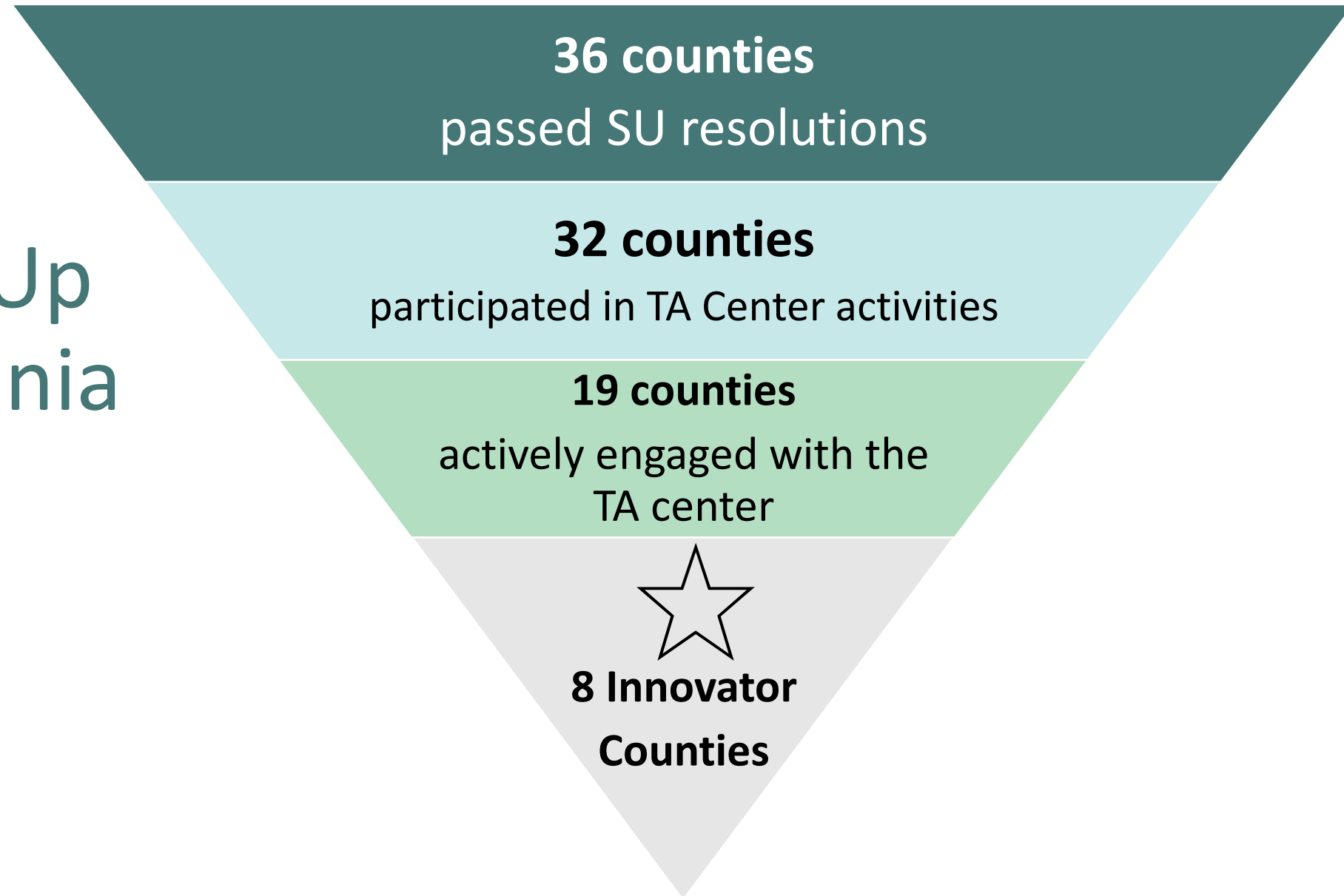
Create a central information bank for counties across PA on the intersection of mental illness and criminal justice.



Work with PA to determine state-level policies that can be adjusted or implemented to improve local-level Stepping Up efforts.



Stepping Up Pennsylvania by the Numbers



County Reflections

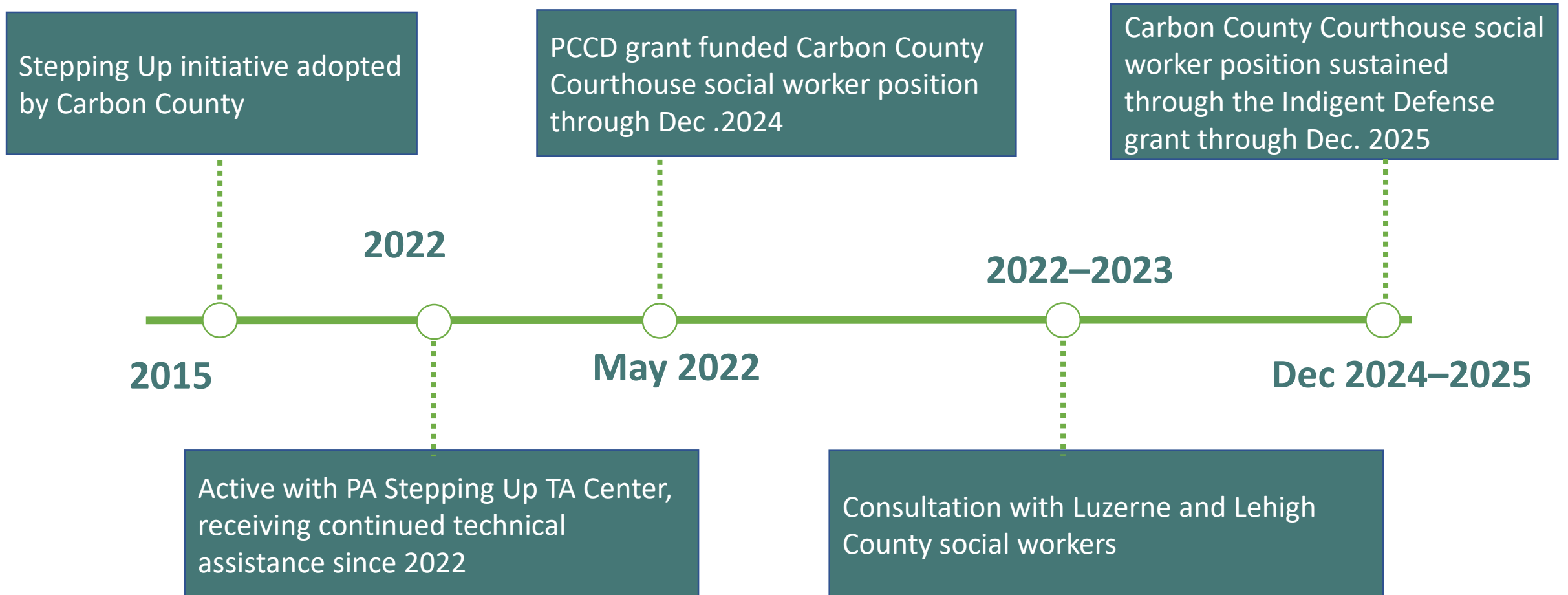


Carbon County, PA

Jared Soto
Public Defender Office



How It Started

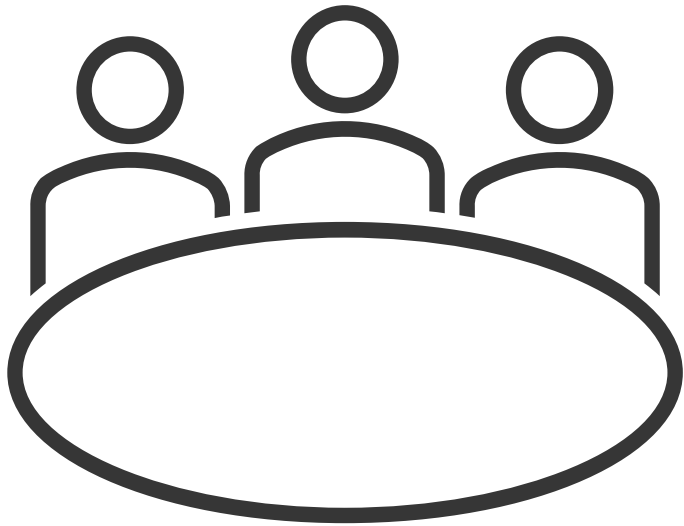


What Has Been Done

- Screening and assessment of needs for individuals represented by the Carbon County Public Defender Office
 - Reduces attorney time dealing with social needs of clients so they can focus more on legal matters
 - Increases continuity of care with communication between courthouse services and community agencies to coordinate client services
 - Provides recommendations to attorneys to advocate for their clients' long-term interests
- Coordination with psychologist, Dr. William Anzalone, out of Wilkes-Barre to provide mental health evaluations to determine diagnosis and make recommendations for ongoing treatment to the court
- Administer the CCCF Interagency Team Meeting

Carbon County Correctional Facility Interagency Team Meeting

In January 2023, Carbon County held its first Interagency Team meeting at the Carbon County Correctional Facility (CCCF) to primarily discuss clients with current behavioral health and substance use issues.



CCCCF Interagency Team Meeting Members

PrimeCare (jail medical
and clinical provider)

Warden/Deputy
Warden

County Mental Health
and Developmental
Services Provider
(Carbon/Monroe/Pike
MHDS)

Pathstone Pathway 2
Home (Male and
Female Re-Entry
Program: ended 2024)

Carbon County District
Attorney Office

Carbon County Office
of the Public Defender

Carbon County Adult
Probation

County Drug and
Alcohol Services
Provider
(Carbon/Monroe/Pike
MHDS)

Pinebrook Family
Answers Leaving Jail
(Women's Re-Entry
Program)

Carbon County Collaborations

Drug Treatment
Court

Pitt-Peru
(SCOPE)

Suicide Fatality
Review Team

Crisis
Intervention
Team (CIT)

SWIM
through
PDAP

PA
Stepping
Up TA
Center

YSRP
(Youth Services and Re-Entry Project)

Diversionary
Committee

Vision for the Future

1. Coordination of screening between the CCCF, PrimeCare, and Carbon MHDS for early identification and referral
2. Development of a Stepping Up/Behavioral Health Subcommittee through Carbon County CJAB
3. Encouraging MOUs for purposes of data-sharing between agencies to collect data and apply for grants through the county government
4. Consideration for the county to implement programs that compel mental health treatment, in certain circumstances, such as assisted outpatient treatment (AOT)
5. Providing opportunity for evidence-based mental health and trauma programs at the county jail such as “Thinking for a Change” and “Seeking Safety”

Washington County, PA

*Scott Berry and Jennifer Scott
Behavioral Health and Developmental
Services (BHDS)*



Knowing Your County

- What resources are available in your county?
- How do you access those resources? Where do you start? Do you know who to call?
- I encourage you to speak with your county office of behavioral health, local agencies, and providers to determine the programs they offer and what is available within the legal system to assist individuals.
- Now let's start by knowing what to look for!

What to Look for—Behavioral Health

- Prior involvement in the behavioral health system
 - ✓ Open at the County Base Service unit
 - ✓ Prior inpatient psychiatric treatment
 - ✓ Prescribed psychotropic medications
 - ✓ Presenting symptoms of mental illness
 - ✓ Involvement in peer support programs
- Prior or current mental health crisis services
 - ✓ Has the individual used telephone, walk-in, or mobile crisis services?
 - ✓ Have they used or contacted 988?
 - ✓ Has the individual been to the emergency room at local hospitals for MH symptoms?
 - ✓ Have they contacted 911 or has any first responder been dispatched to their location due to presenting MH symptoms?

What to Look for—Criminal Justice

- ✓ Interaction with local law enforcement department
- ✓ Previous incarceration or legal charges
- ✓ If the individual is on or has been on probation

Who Are Your Partners?

Jail or Correctional
Facility Counselors

Law Enforcement
Officers

Probation Officer
and Pretrial
Probation Officers

Public Defenders
and Private Legal
Counsel

District Attorney's
Office

Common Plea
Court and
Magisterial District
Court (MDJ) Judges

Booking Center
Staff

Jail Medical
Contracted
Providers

Community Mental
Health Program
and Service
Providers

What Can We Learn from Our Partners?

- Mental health
 - ✓ Any known mental health diagnosis from prior mental health records and psychological and psychiatric evaluations
 - ✓ Past and current medication records
 - ✓ Prior inpatient psychiatric history and records
 - ✓ Crisis criteria and identifiers
- Presence of intellectual disability through IQ testing
- Prior competency evaluations
- Current and/or prior legal charges
- Medical records or any indication of medical conditions

Release Planning

- Now comes the most important piece of everything you have learned, observed, reviewed, and identified—THE PLAN!
- Remember your role.
- Always discuss release planning and services with the individual.
- Coordinate with corrections facility, probation, treatment and service agencies, public defender or representing legal counsel, and the district attorney's office.

Resources in the Community

Develop linkage agreements or a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with these programs to learn how to access them and what they do:

- ✓ Mental health crisis services
- ✓ Crisis stabilization and diversion unit
- ✓ Emergency delegate services
- ✓ Social determinants of health (SDOH)/person-centered forensic dollars
- ✓ Care managers
 - Mental health court/90-day diversion care manager
 - Prevention and diversion care manager

Resources in the Community

Human service
department and
county behavioral
health office

Case management
(blended,
intensive,
administrative)

Peer services and
NAMI

Shelters and
missions

Partial
hospitalization
program

Outpatient and
inpatient mental
health

ACT teams

Community
residential
rehabilitation
programs (CCR)

Correctional Facility Case Coordination

- Bring people together!
- Weekly team meetings in the corrections facility with:
 - ✓ Jail counselors
 - ✓ Mental health professional
 - ✓ Drug and alcohol professionals
 - ✓ Contracted medical provider
 - ✓ Contracted mental health provider

Specialty Courts

- Mental health court
 - ✓ 18-month program
 - ✓ Assigned probation officer
 - ✓ Assigned mental health care manager
 - ✓ Regular court appearances for status updates
- Veterans court
- Drug court
- DUI court

Diversionary Programs at the Magisterial District Judge (MDJ) Level

- Identify and divert individuals at the MDJ level.
- With the assistance of legal counsel, determine if the charges will allow for diversion from further legal proceedings.
- Provide an opportunity to link the individual to mental health treatment to avoid unnecessary incarceration.
- For our county, a 90-day period is identified to allow for coordination of treatment and services.
- Diversion of youth and young adults

Opportunities for Training and Collaboration

- Crisis Intervention Team Training
- Law enforcement (LEO) trainings at local police departments regarding mental health treatment, services, structure, policies, and procedures
- Cross-training with:
 - ✓ Local law enforcement and sheriff departments
 - ✓ EMS
 - ✓ 911 dispatch
- Mental Health First Aid training
- Educational opportunities with the courts
 - ✓ Education on the mental health system for judges, district attorney's office, public defender's office, and private attorneys through the local bar association

Next Steps

Find your
resources

Identify your
key stakeholders

Collaborate with
your CJAB
(assess forming
subcommittees to
focus on this area)

**Build bridges between your organization and those you will need to work with for the betterment of the individuals!

Takeaways

- Do not let money stop you. There are funding sources out there to assist (i.e., PCCD who gave us the grant for the prevention and diversion care manager). Some items do not take money, just coordination and better use of the resources that are already around you.
- Coordinate with others.
 - The AOPC Summit and upcoming regional summits are great opportunities to brainstorm, learn from others, and identify areas of growth.
 - The Council of State Governments Justice Center/TA Center are invaluable resources.
 - Stepping Up is a great research-based way to improve the system within your county to best support individuals with serious mental illness/mental health needs that become legally involved.

Discussion/Q & A



Resources

- [Reducing Mental Illness in Rural Jails](#) *(Stepping Up Initiative)*
- [Reducing the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jail](#) *(CSG Justice Center)*
- [Tailoring Crisis Response and Pre-arrest Diversion Models for Rural Communities](#) *(SAMHSA)*
- [Ask the Expert: Crisis Response in Rural Areas](#) *(CSG Justice Center)*
- [Planting Seeds of Change](#) *(Rural Health Information Hub)*
- [Collaborative Comprehensive Case Plans](#) *(CSG Justice Center)*
- [Justice and Behavioral Health Strategy Lab](#) *(CSG Justice Center)*



County Stories: Celebrating 10 Years of Stepping Up

Share your county stories here to help us celebrate our 10-year milestone!

Your story can inspire others, demonstrate the impact of your work, and inform ongoing advocacy for mental health and justice reform.



PA Stepping Up TA Center: How to Get Involved

- Email **Gretchen Frank** at gfrank@csg.org to be added to the TA Center distribution list.
- You will receive notifications of TA opportunities (e.g., upcoming webinars, peer-to-peer connection hours) and other resources.
- Visit the TA Center website using the QR code here:



Thank You!

Join our distribution list to receive updates and announcements:

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/resources/newsletters/>

For more information, please contact:

Gretchen Frank, gfrank@csg.org

Audra Goldsmith, agoldsmith@csg.org

The presentation was developed by members of The Council of State Governments Justice Center staff. The statements made reflect the views of the authors and should not be considered the official position of The Council of State Governments Justice Center, the members of The Council of State Governments, or the funding agency supporting the work.

© 2025 The Council of State Governments Justice Center