



Indiana
LaPorte Circuit Court
LaPorte County Family Recovery Court

10/01/19 Grant Start → 09/30/22 Grant End

Overview

LaPorte County, in rural northwest Indiana, has a population of 111,000. The county is ill-equipped for the battle against opioid abuse, with 17 percent of residents living below the poverty line and 10 percent unemployed. Nearly 100 residents died of a drug overdose between 2012 and 2016. Limited access to treatment and lack of awareness or acceptance of the problem, together with insufficient funding, were contributing factors. More than half (57 percent) of all treatment admissions in LaPorte County in 2017 were due to opioids, significantly higher than the 37 percent statewide. The county has one community mental health center that offers substance abuse services, but the detoxification program is outsourced to a city an hour away and does not accept uninsured individuals. There are several mental health/addiction counseling services, but only one is building a medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program. LaPorte County has a drug court that serves up to 30 adults. However, the circuit court recognizes that it cannot meet

the need of families dealing with addiction. Last year, 387 Child In Need of Services (CHINS) cases were related to substance abuse, 11 of which resulted in termination of parental rights. These parents are referred to treatment but are seen infrequently by the court and take significant time to get into a program. Most are dealing with multiple issues, such as domestic violence, mental health challenges, and homelessness.

Grant Focus

- Employ the use of alternatives to incarceration programs for nonviolent drug offenders.
- Support children and youth affected by the opioid epidemic.
- Build capacity in underserved regions impacted by the opioid epidemic.
- Educate public safety and criminal justice stakeholders about substance abuse.

Program Approach

The goal of the project is to build a Family Recovery Court (FRC) to reduce termination of parental rights among CHINS cases coinciding with substance-offending parents. The FRC will:

- Monitor and support families by facilitating timely entry and engagement in treatment and decreasing the time it takes to reunite parents with their children.
- Offer alternatives to offenders who might otherwise lose parental rights.

A program coordinator will work with the planning team made up of individuals from the legal, judicial, and mental health systems. The team will apply the key components and evidence-based design features for problem-solving courts, as well as the key elements of family recovery courts.

The post-adjudication court (Intercept 3) will require all participants to plead guilty to their crimes and sign an agreement of participation clearly informing them of the program's policies, procedures, incentives, and sanctions. A continuum of family drug treatment and rehabilitation services will be integrated into justice system case processing, offering an alternative path to rehabilitation and family reunification. The FRC will include MAT as an option in cases where it has been warranted by an approved treatment provider and deemed medically appropriate. The Swanson Community Mental Health Center and Choices! Counseling Services will provide services for opioid detoxification, intervention, and ongoing random drug testing.

Target population eligibility criteria include the parents, guardians, and/or custodians of children found in need of services that are directly related to crimes involving illegal substances. The judge will provide continuous supervision during judicial reviews and will be the enforcer of sanctions for noncompliance. Evidence of success in the program will be rewarded with praise, recognition, and incentives, including gift certificates and inspirational tokens.

All formal CHINS cases involving the parents' substance abuse—including, but not limited to, use of methamphetamine, heroin, or cocaine; abuse of prescription drugs; and/or abuse of alcohol—will be flagged by the Department of Child Services (DCS) and/or the court as potential participants for the FRC.

Parents also will be permitted to participate in a voluntary FRC screening prior to adjudication. Any parent, court-appointed special advocate, service provider, public defender, or interested party may request a screening for the FRC through the DCS caseworker. The coordinator will screen candidates and then follow up with the DCS family case manager to schedule a review by the FRC team to make a recommendation of admittance or denial. Final decision of eligibility will rest with the FRC judge.

Roy Fowles, Ph.D., retired Bachelor of Social Work Program Director at Purdue University Northwest, will evaluate the effectiveness of the court's operations. Public dissemination of this information will be a valuable symbol of public accountability.

Project Partners

- LaPorte County Children's Services
- Magistrate Pamela Munsey
- Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Mary Lake
- Judge of Circuit Court Thomas Alevizos
- Choices! Counseling Services
- Swanson Community Mental Health Center
- Dr. Roy Fowles, Purdue University Northwest
- Public Defender's Office

Contact Information

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