

2018 Capstone of the Year Award Winner: Pine County, Minnesota, School-Justice Partnerships Certificate Program

The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy is excited to announce that the Pine County, Minnesota School-Justice Partnerships Certificate Program Team has been awarded the 2018 Capstone of the Year Award.

The Pine County team is composed of leaders from the East Central Public Schools, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Probation, Health and Human Services, and the County Attorney's Office. Through its Capstone Project, the Pine County team collaborated to design a comprehensive reform effort that addresses truancy and disciplinary practices issues in schools. With the explicit goals of reducing school-based referrals into the juvenile justice system, increasing student attendance rates, and decreasing the number of youth crossing over from the child welfare system into the juvenile justice system, the team created Project RISE (Restorative Investment for Student Empowerment) to achieve better outcomes for youth and families in Pine County.

Centered on aligning services and system practices, the team's efforts to launch Project RISE included several key components. First, the team embedded a restorative approach in its New Direction program, an alternative to school suspension/expulsion in the county. Instead of sending students home for misbehavior, the New Direction program holds youth accountable for their actions while providing academic and behavioral support. Moreover, the team partnered with the community to limit the collateral impacts of juvenile justice involvement. As a result of this partnership, truancy court hearings are now held in schools and on the Mille Lacs Band Reservation to minimize school disruption. The team also obtained funding to hire a cultural community coach and a school-based American Indian Liaison was obtained to provide additional support for tribal youth. Currently, they are working to create a Pine County Evening Reporting Center (ERC) to provide culturally sensitive wraparound services for pre-trial and post-adjudication youth within the community. Finally, the team revised discipline policies to shift staff responses to students' problem behaviors. The development of an objective graduated response tool, implementation of home visits, creation of a tiered intervention approach to truancy, and trauma-informed and cultural competency trainings are just a few examples of the discipline policy reforms.

Additionally, Pine County introduced a pre-charge diversion process that links youth to the C-5 Victim-Offender Conferencing program in lieu of formal system involvement. This has been a centerpiece of Project RISE. Juveniles get referred to C5 either pre-charge or as a condition of probation. Youth who complete the program successfully do not become involved in the justice system. The ultimate goal is to place kids on a positive track to becoming productive and contributing members of the community. On average, about 97 percent of youth involved in the C5 program successfully completed the program.

Project RISE promotes a proactive, restorative team approach to working with youth and their families by collaborating across youth-serving agencies and communities. Although the Pine County team has only been implementing Project RISE for about two years, it has already shown a positive impact. The cultural community coach has made contact with over 900 youth, with a focus on student's at-risk behaviors and truancy. The New Direction program served over 200 youth in the 2017 – 2018 school year, with an attendance rate of approximately 97 percent. One prominent outcome as a result of these efforts is the significant drop in high school truancy rate at the pilot schools, which decreased almost 30 percent. The truancy rate for 9th to 12th graders, on average, went from approximately 43 percent in the 2016 – 2017 school year to 15 percent in 2017-2018. We congratulate the Pine County, Minnesota Capstone team and look forward to their ongoing efforts to improve the well-being of youth in their community!

The Capstone team members include:

- **Andrew Almos, Superintendent, East Central Public Schools**
- **Carla Big Bear, Office Manager, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe**
- **Terry Fawcett, Probation Director, Pine County Probation**
- **Rebecca Foss, Director, Pine County Health and Human Services**
- **Reese Frederickson, County Attorney, Pine County Attorney's Office**
- **Stefanie Youngberg, Principal, East Central Public Schools**