

Grant money helps pilot projects for mentally ill in Chesterfield and Richmond jails

By VANESSA REMMERS Richmond Times-Dispatch | Posted: Thursday, December 15, 2016 10:30 pm

When someone with a mental illness commits a crime, the beds at mental health facilities often are full, and families don't have the resources to provide all the care that is necessary, Richmond Sheriff C.T. Woody said.

And so, it is behind the locked entrances of Woody's jail where the mentally ill often end up eating, sleeping and serving their time. In Chesterfield County, many of the jail pods have transformed into medical wards, Sheriff Karl Leonard has said.

"When someone with a mental illness can't be sent anywhere else, they are sent here," Woody said in a news release. "I have always said jail is no place for the mentally ill. We have worked with what funding we've had to do what we can for them, but it's difficult to give them the quality of care that they deserve."

Woody and Leonard said they hope that care will improve with the combined \$1 million their jails will receive from the state to support pilot programs for the mentally ill.

The jails are among six facilities across the state that were awarded grant funds. Richmond partnered with the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority and Offender Aid & Restoration (OAR), a nonprofit that offers re-entry services to those who were incarcerated, in applying for the grant.

The announcement from Gov. Terry McAuliffe's office came just before another in which he said he intends to propose \$31.7 million in new funds to improve the state's mental health system and address the opioid crisis.

Woody and Leonard intend to funnel the funds toward better support of those struggling with issues such as bipolar disorder, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Such inmates account for roughly 25 percent of the approximately 1,000-inmate population in Richmond and about 20 percent of Chesterfield's 350 inmates. Over this budget year and the next, Chesterfield's share



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In October, Tomme Pantoni hugged Chesterfield County Sheriff Karl Leonard after he said he would try and bring in a tattoo artist to the pod at the Chesterfield Jail to tattoo "Harpettes" on the women who wanted it. Pantoni and the other women are part of an opioid program in the jail. The program started with the male inmates and was called HARP for Heroin Addiction Recovery Program. The women have dubbed themselves the Harpettes.

of the grant is \$416,281 and Richmond will receive \$670,813.

Re-entry services expect to be a main beneficiary of the money. Research has shown, jail officials said, that better medication, housing and transportation services during an inmate's re-entry into society helps break a vicious cycle that often finds those released returning to jail.

"We could do everything here, but if they have nothing when they get out, then it doesn't help," said the medical director of the Chesterfield Sheriff's Office, G. Mantovani Gay, who wrote the grant application.

Evidence-based programs and services was one criterion state officials used to determine how to award the grant funds. Some of the other criteria were the use of mental health screening and assessment; the use of a collaborative partnership among local agencies and officials; establishment of a crisis intervention team; and training for jail staff in dealing with mentally ill inmates.

Details are grainy at this point, jail officials said, since the first few months of the grant will be spent planning.

It's too early to tell how many positions will be created in Chesterfield, Gay said. But the plan is to incorporate existing partners such as the Henrico County-based McShin Foundation — which works with recovering addicts — into the new work, he added.

Jail officials want to establish a re-entry coordinator and look into more training for the jail's medical staff and deputies, he said.

"A lot of times someone comes in, they are here for a week or two weeks, but don't have a place to go once they leave. Some may have their license revoked," Gay said. "This (money) is a big deal."

Leonard said the grant will allow the jail to expand on the \$196,000 the Board of Supervisors committed this budget year to address mental health issues at the facility. That \$196,000 allowed two full-time clinicians and a part-time psychiatrist to supplement the three counselors, two of whom are private professionals, who currently serve the jail's population.

"We do not have the resources to give adequate and effective care to those with mental illnesses," Leonard said in a news release after expressing gratitude for the local and state funds. "This is an at-risk population that suffers greatly when they don't receive the care they need, and I am happy that we will be able to provide that care to those individuals in our facility who are mentally ill or low-functioning."

The Richmond jail plans to work with the behavioral health authority and OAR to expand on a "behavioral modification" program to include those with a mental health diagnosis who are low-functioning. Five staff positions will be added, including two in the sheriff's office, two in the behavioral health authority and a community case manager with OAR.

"We have a pretty successful behavioral modification program where men and women have mental health diagnosis who are regulated on medication and can function in group settings," said Sarah Scarbrough, internal program director for Richmond Sheriff's Office. "We don't have as much programming geared toward lower-functioning inmates with a mental health diagnosis. This is a huge step in the right direction."

In addition to helping set up former inmates with housing, she said the funds will allow staff to increase one-on-one counseling, curriculum geared toward teaching inmates skills they don't know, and following up with former inmates six months after they are released to ensure in part that they are sticking to medication plans.

"They get out, and nine times out of 10, they don't continue on medications," Scarbrough said. "And that's where the vicious cycle starts again."

The grants were provided by the state Department of Criminal Justice Services. In total, the General Assembly appropriated \$1 million for projects beginning Jan. 1 through June 30 and then an additional \$2.5 million beginning on July 1 and ending July 1, 2018.

DCJS will report on the implementation and effectiveness of the pilot programs to the governor, lawmakers and other officials in October 2017 and October 2018.