

Monroe County Community Corrections' future looking brighter

Program has made a big financial turnaround in one year's time

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Last year's Monroe County Community Corrections annual report showed the department was in jeopardy. Bleak financial projections had community corrections in the red by 2015. This year's annual report shows the financial future of community corrections through 2018 afloat and in the black, thanks in part to the county's purchase of the Johnson Hardware Building that houses the department.

The 2012-13 annual report also details how community corrections saves taxpayers dollars and benefits the community through its programs. Community Corrections, a division of the county's probation department, offers alternative sentencing programs with various levels of supervision and treatment and counseling options. Offenders participate in programs in lieu of being incarcerated. "We came here last year and gave you a very bad report. Gloom and doom. We did projections, project income. It did not look good," director Tom Rhodes told the Monroe County commissioners at their Sept. 6 meeting.

"We are in good shape to survive. Last year, I couldn't tell you that," Rhodes told the commissioners.

Based on revenue and expenditure projections, last year's annual report predicted community corrections' cash balance would be in the red \$3,163 by 2015. In this year's annual report, the forecast cash balance is predicted to be \$406,896 in 2014; \$441,431 in 2015; \$463,867 in 2016; \$408,375 in 2017; and \$347,471 in 2018.

Its Indiana Department of Corrections base grant has remained at \$682,840 for several years. Rhodes gave credit to county officials for their purchase of the Johnson Hardware Building at the corner of West Seventh and North Madison streets — which has housed community corrections since 1996.

"The bottom line is, we're saving approximately \$85,000 on rent and another approximate \$15,000 in connected expenses with the building," Rhodes told The Herald-Times. "Then we just tightened the belt on supplies and services that we have," he said.

From July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013, Monroe County Community Corrections had 1,865 adult participants in its programs, which include work release, home detention, day reporting, a community transition program, road crew work, public restitution and a problem-solving substance abuse course. That number reflects some offenders who participated in multiple services, and is down 19 percent from the previous year.

In that same period of time, 711 adult offenders were diverted from jail or prison and placed in the Community Alternative Supervision Program of community corrections. That's down from 858 the previous year. The target population for alternative supervision is people convicted of Class D felonies and some Class A misdemeanors who are considered medium- to high-risk offenders. They participate in programs in lieu of serving jail time. Alcohol and substance abuse offenders receive treatment services

that are coordinated by a case manager. Alternative supervision participants are also eligible for day reporting and home detention. The alternative program has different levels of supervision, and participants are charged daily fees depending on their level of supervision.

Those 711 offenders that were placed on home detention or day reporting avoided 16,058 days of potential incarceration, saving taxpayers \$598,321 a year, according to the annual report. State data estimates incarceration costs \$52.89 a day per person. The alternative program's home detention and day reporting programs cost \$15.63 a day.

From July 2012 to June 2013, more than 30,700 community service hours were completed by those who were assigned to serve on the community corrections road crew and public restitution programs. Low-to moderate-risk offenders worked for more than 40 county agencies. At \$7.25 an hour, the road crew's impact on the community was \$223,200. The road crew and public restitution programs cost \$3.34 a day per person.