

# Monroe County's corrections programs receive high grade

By Rachel Bunn 812-331-4357 | rbunn@heraldt.com | Posted: Monday, May 12, 2014 12:00 am

Monroe County's Community Corrections Department now has even more proof it's one of the best in the state.

For the second year in a row, the corrections department has earned a grade above 90 in a programming audit by the Indiana Department of Correction. This year, the department earned a near-perfect 98.8 percent on the audit, which measured evidence-based practices, or using programs proven to reduce the number of re-offenders, at the department.

"I don't see how we could have done any better," said Monroe County Chief Probation Officer Linda Brady.

The audit changed slightly from the previous year, when community corrections scored a 94, adding more Indiana-centric standards and also focusing on whether the department had implemented plans and observe those plans in practice.

"They stepped up the ante," Brady said. "It's not enough to use evidence-based programs; you have to be one yourself."

One of the things that helped push the department's score up this year is an integrated department, meaning that community corrections and all probation programs are housed under the same umbrella. There are only 10 other community corrections programs in the state that are part of probation, and Monroe County is the only one that also includes all services in the same department, Brady said.

Having a single department creates benefits for the county, such as avoiding a duplication of services.

"We handle cases in the way that makes the most sense," Brady said. "(Offenders) do better. You don't play 'Mommy versus Daddy,' telling one officer one story and a different story to another officer. You have one officer handling the case."

Brady said the department also has worked with Indiana University's functional family therapy program and is studying risk tools that could help get more results and keep the department innovative. They also implemented a new computer program that will help track the department's progress.

Judge Kenneth Todd said that for 20 years, community corrections has worked to create and execute programs that are evidence-based.

"Some other counties across the state, the community corrections and probation departments are

totally separate entities, which creates barriers to effectiveness,” Todd said, adding that Monroe County’s program has become a model to the state. “It facilitates a coordinated approach, so we’re all on the same page working toward the same goal.”

With changes to Indiana’s criminal code coming, the county will have more offenders to deal with, meaning scores like this will become more important.

A high score on the report keeps the department competitive for incentive money from the Indiana Department of Correction, rewarding programs that are making a difference, Brady said.

“When you walk in the door, you can tell what the mission is and what it’s about,” Brady said. “We’re an organization that believes change is possible.”

Though Brady said the department’s score was almost perfect, assistant chief probation officer/community corrections director Tom Rhodes wants to see the department get a perfect 100 in 2015.

“We’ve got to continue to keep growing,” Brady said. “We can’t rest on our laurels.”