

Spotlight on Sheriffs

Police Executive Research Forum

July 2018

Innovation in the Polk County, Florida Sheriff's Office

Like many sheriffs' agencies across the country, the Department of Detention of the Polk County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) is faced with a range of challenges, including recruiting, hiring and staffing; efficient management of the jail booking process; quality health care for inmates; preventing the introduction of contraband into jail facilities, and other security issues. In recent years, the PCSO has implemented several innovative policies and programs designed to address these and other concerns. Following is a summary of some of those initiatives.



Career Paths Begin in the Detention Center

The PCSO requires that agency-sponsored deputies are CIT trained and receive both Detention Deputy

and Deputy Sheriff certifications prior to being assigned to a jail or patrol function.

New deputies are scheduled for an assignment of preferably a minimum of two years inside the jails. Among other benefits, this initial assignment

About This Series

As part of its Sheriffs Initiative, PERF researchers are conducting site visits of sheriffs' offices around the country in order to study and document their operations and share innovative practices with the profession.

At the invitation of Sheriff Grady Judd, PERF staff members Dan Alioto and Matt Harman visited the Polk County, FL Sheriff's Office (PCSO) in April 2018. Staff met with Sheriff Judd and Chief of Detention Michael Allen, sat in

on the sheriff's command staff briefing, toured the jail facilities, and observed other operations.

Future editions of *Spotlight on Sheriffs* will report on other agencies across the country.

allows deputies to build their communication skills, gain experience in working with people in crisis, and learn how to de-escalate situations without a service weapon or a readily accessible electronic control weapon. Upon completion of their two-year Detention Deputy assignment, members have the option of transferring to PCSO's Department of Law Enforcement. In patrol assignments, deputies use the communication and de-escalation skills they learned in the jail. Deputies who transfer to the Department of Law Enforcement maintain both Detention Deputy and Deputy Sheriff certifications in the event that they are reassigned to the jails.

For deputies who aspire to rise to supervisory ranks, the PCSO requires that all sergeants possess a bachelor's degree. The ranks of captain and above require a master's degree. To help with the costs of education, PCSO fully reimburses its members' tuition, in addition to providing a stipend for earning their degrees.

Managing a Busy Consolidated 911 Center

The PCSO operates a consolidated 911 Center, under the civilian command of Deputy Director Kurt Lockwood. The dispatch center handles police, fire and rescue, and animal control calls for almost all of Polk County. (The City of Lakeland operates the only other 911 Center in the county.) The Polk County consolidated 911 Center receives between 80,000 and 85,000 calls per month.

All telecommunicators are trained in call-taking and dispatching. They also receive Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training to help them identify and properly assign calls for service involving persons experiencing a mental health crisis.

The PCSO 911 Center will soon be investing in a system that allows for Next Generation 911 capabilities, including the ability to receive

About the Polk County Sheriff's Office

Situated between the cities of Tampa and Orlando, Polk County has approximately 685,000 residents. The population swells at various times throughout the year with the influx of tourists.

The PCSO is a full-service sheriff's office, providing both patrol and jail services. Sheriff Grady Judd began his career with the PCSO in 1972 as a telecommunicator. He rose through the ranks and served as Deputy Sheriff through Colonel before being elected Sheriff in 2004. He has since been reelected in 2008, 2012, and 2016 (www.polksheriff.org/about/sheriff-grady-judd) and is presently the elected President of the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA).

As of March 2018, the PCSO employed approximately 1,720 sworn, certified, and civilian personnel. This total includes approximately 525 detention staff members. The PCSO has an annual operating budget of \$164 million. The jail system holds an average daily population of more than 2,500 inmates. For more information about the sheriff's office:

- Website: www.polksheriff.org/
- Twitter: @PolkCoSheriff
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/polkcountysheriff/

PERF is grateful to Sheriff Judd and his team for their hospitality and cooperation during the site visit. For additional information, Chief of Detention Michael Allen can be reached at (863) 298-6331 or mallen@polksheriff.org.



Sheriff Grady Judd



Polk County's consolidated Emergency Communications Center is preparing for implementation of Next Generation 911 capabilities. **(left)** The Booking Automated Tracking System streamlines the booking process by tracking an arrestee's progression in real-time. **(right)**

emergency 911 requests via text message. The 911 Center plans to have its NextGen911 system equipment by the summer of 2018.

Streamlining the Booking Process

The PCSO has taken a number of steps to streamline the inmate booking process and make it more secure and efficient.

Booking Automated Tracking System (BATS): To help facilitate the inmate booking process, the PCSO created and installed the Booking Automated Tracking System (BATS), an innovative system that tracks an arrestee's progression through the booking process in real-time. Making the booking process as smooth and seamless as possible is important because the PCSO booking facility is not spacious.

The BATS program tracks individuals from the time they are deemed under arrest on the scene through the point of status determination. There is a BATS status screen on display in the booking area, so deputies, booking staff members, and supervisors can easily view the progress of inmates through the booking process in real time. This system allows supervisors to monitor arrests that have yet to make it to the booking facility, and re-allocate resources as needed.

The information displayed includes the arrestee's name, sex, arrest time, and booking time.

The system tracks the arrestee's progress through several stages of the booking process, including:

- Digital body scan (this shows whether an arrestee is carrying weapons or contraband not found during a field search, and can provide probable cause for a strip search),
- Digital photographs and fingerprints taken of the arrestee,
- Medical and psychological check conducted by contracted medical personnel,
- Pretrial interview and clearance,
- DNA swab completed, and
- Total time in the booking process.

The BATS displays are color-coded to indicate a 4-6 hour window (yellow) and a 6-8 hour window (red). This helps to ensure that arrestees are not at the booking center for longer than the allotted 8 hours without written documentation.

The BATS system can also be accessed and viewed on Sheriff's Office computers. This feature allows supervisors to monitor the status of the booking process from their offices or in the field. Supervisors can also query caution codes and view an arrestee's photos, criminal history, and current charges through hyperlinks contained within the name of the individual displayed.

Remote Interviews with Pretrial Personnel:

Due to space constraints in the PCSO booking center, court pretrial personnel now work from a remote location. Instead of holding face-to-face interviews with persons under arrest, they now use video technology to conduct interviews from their offices. Thus, working remotely and utilizing technology are increasing efficiency in the booking process.

“Guiding” Arrestees through the Booking Process: Once inside the booking area, an arrestee who is compliant moves from stage to stage through the booking process by being “guided,” as opposed to being handled. Arrestees are given an ID card that they are required to scan upon entering and leaving the different stages of the booking process. This lessens the physical contact that inmates have with deputies and other booking personnel, which in turn lessens the likelihood of confrontations or use-of-force situations. “Guiding” is not used for all arrestees, but is utilized for those who are compliant.

Processing Sex Offenders: The PCSO completes nearly 18,000 Sexual Offender registrations a year. Those offenders must respond to the booking center to comply with their annual registry requirements. The booking center staff has streamlined the process, so sex offender groups move through the process of fingerprints, photographs, and other required administrative tasks in approximately one hour.

Planning a New Sheriff’s Processing Center: A new, more spacious processing center is being planned to handle the large number of new arrestees and registered sex offenders coming into the jail facility. The PCSO hopes to break ground on the proposed \$8.4-million dollar processing center within the next year. The new layout of the building will allow for easier use of the ID tracking technology, which will support a smoother flow of individuals through the booking process.

Reducing Contraband By Digitizing Mail

Contraband is always on the minds of staff at a detention facility. Jails across the country have experienced the negative effects of prohibited items entering their facilities. Drug overdoses are

a particular concern of the PCSO, because the drug epidemic is prevalent in Florida. Contraband can enter jail facilities through several routes, including the mail, during visitation sessions, work release programs, and items missed during booking process searches.

To limit contraband entering the jail through inmates’ mail, the PCSO has implemented a mail system, called SmartJailMail.com, that allows inmates to access and send mail electronically via a kiosk. Incoming mail is reviewed and electronically scanned into the system by a private company off-site. Inmates can view their mail and respond using kiosks located inside of their housing pods. In addition to written messages, inmates can receive appropriate photos. Their responses to friends and family via the kiosk are immediate. Each message generally costs the inmate 50 cents (which is less than the cost of a postage stamp and envelope), and there is no cost to the agency. Because the mail never physically enters the facility, inmates’ chances of obtaining contraband via the mail are all but eliminated.

Chief Michael Allen explained why PCSO moved to the automated system. “We started to see an increased number of incidents of inmates receiving what we believed to be synthetic marijuana or liquid



Examples of the types of contraband the PCSO is working to prevent from entering the jail. One component of that effort is digitizing mail.



Kiosks allow inmates to access their mail and submit requests and complaints to jail staff.

methamphetamine and unknown chemicals sprayed on paper in the mail. The inmates would receive the mail and eat the paper. As soon as we started the SmartJailMail program, there was a reduction of these incidents, because the inmates don't actually touch their mail anymore."

The same kiosk that inmates can use to access their mail also allows them to submit requests and grievances to the jail staff. A separate system allows inmates to conduct "video visitations" with family, friends, and loved ones.

Managing Persons With Severe Mental Illness

The South County jail facility is the main male holding facility in Polk County. South County is also the only location where the Sheriff's Office holds males with severe mental illness in specialized housing.

Specially Selected Detention Deputies:

Inside a pod for inmates with mental illness, approximately 60 inmates with diagnoses including PTSD, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia are housed and supervised by detention deputies and a detention support specialist each shift. While every sworn or certified member of the Polk County Sheriff's Office is trained in CIT, jail administrators wanted the deputies working in the mental health unit to be specially selected by their supervisors

because of the unique challenges working with this population. Sheriff's Office leaders asked jail supervisors to identify deputies who are skilled at building rapport, communicating, problem-solving, and de-escalating tense situations with members of the general jail population. These specially selected detention deputies are expected to use these skills to build trust with the mentally ill inmates in the segregated pod.

PERF researchers spoke with Chief Allen and a detention deputy in the mental health unit. Chief Allen and Deputy Darren Powe emphasized that interpersonal skills are critical for detention deputies who work with mentally ill jail inmates. Persons with severe mental illness are often uncooperative and wary of authority. It can be a challenge for jail staff members to get the inmates to consistently take their medications and accept mental health services. In order to safely accommodate these inmates, detention deputies must build rapport with the inmates and patiently work with them during their time housed in the pod. Some rules, like strict showering times, can be modified in this pod to accommodate those struggling and in crisis.

Helping HANDS: To more effectively serve this specialized population, the PCSO recently partnered with the Polk County Board of County Commissioners to start the Helping HANDS (Health, Access, Navigation, Deliver, Services) program. Helping HANDS links non-jail affiliated mental health services with mentally ill inmates who are nearing their release date. Helping HANDS' goal is to identify inmates with multiple arrests for minor offenses within the last year who struggle with mental illness and take psychotropic medication, and to connect them to peer specialists and service providers. The Sheriff's Office invites these service providers into the jail, prior to an inmate's release date, so they have time to build rapport with mentally ill inmates who are re-entering society. Experience has shown that building rapport is critical for ensuring continuity of care upon an inmate's release.

The Helping HANDS program provides treatment and medication, health care benefits, housing, and other support for re-entering inmates with mental

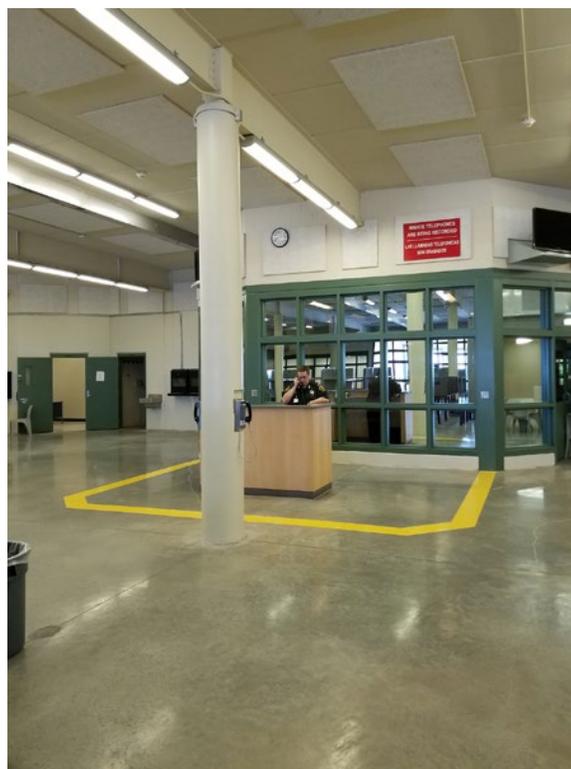
illness. The goal is to reduce recidivism by helping inmates overcome challenges that many face when re-entering society.

Direct Observation Unit: The South County jail facility also has a direct observation unit that can hold approximately 512 inmates. The open-concept design allows detention deputies to easily observe inmates, who are able to freely walk about the unit and interact with others. These units are equipped with toilets, sinks, showers, and a fenced-in outdoor recreation porch.

In these units, one detention deputy is stationed at a raised desk in the front of the room. A wide yellow line painted on the floor, which inmates are not allowed to cross, separates the deputy from the inmates housed in the unit. An additional deputy and a detention support specialist are stationed in a control room directly behind the raised observation desk. They are responsible for monitoring the activity in the room by line-of-sight from a higher vantage point and using security cameras. These deputies also control multiple doors limiting inmate access to the rest of the facility.

Direct observation units allow the PCSO to house large groups of low-level and low-risk inmates in one housing unit. These units are less restrictive than traditional pod-style housing. While correctional supervision is required, inmates in the direct observation units are cooperative and can usually regulate themselves. This allows the PCSO to house a significant portion of its inmate population in a handful of units, with only a modest number correctional deputies needed to provide supervision. Housing these inmates in traditional pod-style housing would require more personnel and expense. According to Chief Allen, both the detention deputies who work in the direct observation units and the inmates housed there have lower levels of stress, and the overall environment is more positive than in the traditional pod-style housing.

The South County jail facility utilizes four direct supervision units that house approximately 20% of the jail's population. Two additional units are currently empty, one of which may be used to house inmates who are in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.



Direct observation units allow the PCSO to safely house large groups of low-level and low-risk inmates in a single housing unit.

Other Takeaways

Mobileye in PCSO Vehicles: PCSO installed Mobileye Units in approximately 600 department vehicles with the goal of reducing on-duty vehicle accidents. Mounted on the windshield of a vehicle, Mobileye units will sound an alert when deputies are driving over the posted speed limit, when the patrol car is running the risk of rear-ending another vehicle stopped in front of it, or when the patrol car is veering out of its lane. These units require approximately 2-2.5 hours to install and cost approximately \$700 each. Chief Allen believes the investment has paid off because there has been a significant reduction in on-duty accidents in department vehicles. This has reduced repair costs and increased the safety of PCSO deputies and members of the public.

Drones: PCSO is looking to increase its use of drones in the near future. PCSO is using drones to search for missing or fleeing suspects, to conduct perimeter inspections of its jail facilities, and to

supplement the agency’s helicopter by providing additional visual support during barricade situations, missing persons, and other search and rescue missions. Deputies are able to observe drone footage in their patrol vehicles if they need an aerial view of a crime scene or canvass area.

Conclusion

The Polk County Sheriff’s Office is on the forefront of confronting difficult issues associated with mental illness in jails by ensuring that all inmates under

their control remain safe, receive vital mental health services, and re-enter society with access to resources and services designed to reduce recidivism. The agency also is using technology to streamline the booking process and keep contraband out of its jails. And PCSO is focused on keeping its deputies safe and providing them with access to education and training.

PCSO shows leadership in continually looking to improve existing systems and standards in order to improve services, increase safety, reduce costs, and increase efficiency.



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