

## Regional jail gets grant for re-entry assessment tool

Samantha Koon | Posted: Monday, September 3, 2012 5:40 pm

The Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail is in the process of purchasing an assessment tool that officials think will help the jail better prepare inmates to reenter society after serving time behind bars.

The COMPAS system — used for offender assessment, classification and case management — is already used throughout the Virginia Department of Corrections, as well as in probation and parole offices across the state, jail Superintendant Ronald Matthews said.

“We can all share the same risk assessment,” said Robert Barnabei, the jail’s reentry coordinator.

Matthews explained that assessment tools are used to determine an inmate’s risk of recidivism, and also to assess the need for programming such as anger management or substance abuse classes.

“This assessment tool will definitely be able to tell us exactly what programs you need,” Barnabei said.

“The main way that we use the tool here is for case planning purposes, and it’s also so that we’re supervising probationers appropriately,” said Wendy Goodman, chief officer at District 9 Probation and Parole. She said District 9 has been using COMPAS since 2007.

Goodman said that inmates or probationers using the COMPAS system start by filling out a lengthy questionnaire. Some questions are answered individually, and others are addressed in an interview with an officer. The officer enters the answers into the computerized system, and then goes over the results with the inmate or probationer to develop a case plan.

District 9’s questionnaire has a total of 142 questions, Goodman said. Probationers are questioned about issues such as their personal relationships, substance abuse history and residential stability. Goodman noted that the questionnaire’s length and specific content can vary based on the organization’s needs.

Matthews said he is currently working out the details of the jail’s COMPAS assessment tool with a consultant. The program will be ready for use 60 days after the contract is signed, he said.

The program’s \$22,800 price tag includes training, annual maintenance and support. The jail will have to cover the cost of integrating COMPAS with its current computer software separately, Matthews said.

“We need something where we can assess everybody that’s staying in jail,” Matthews explained. He said that currently, most inmates only answer about 30 questions when they arrive at jail. “[It] collects information, but it does not tell us anything,” he said.

Currently, only inmates in the Therapeutic Community, an addiction recovery program, use an assessment tool, Matthews said.

Goodman said that she thinks the jail’s decision to adopt the COMPAS system will improve communication between the offices.

“With them using the same programming that we use, we’ll all be speaking the same language,” Goodman said.

Barnabei agreed that the criminal justice system can provide “continuation of care” by using the same assessment tool throughout the system.

“If [inmates] had the assessment while incarcerated at the jail and we have that information when they come to us, we can continue to build on the programming foundation they began while incarcerated,” Goodman explained.

Matthews said that he decided to purchase the COMPAS program as part of an ongoing effort to reduce recidivism rates and lower the jail’s inmate population by better preparing inmates to reenter society.

“Reentry starts when the individual is arrested,” Matthews said.