



Outagamie County working to be “smart on crime”



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APPLETON, Wis. (WBAY) – Outagamie County is working to be smart on crime, as Wisconsin is the only state selected for a federal initiative through the National Institute of Corrections. The county is one of only eight in the state participating in the program that will use science to determine who is or isn't incarcerated.

Outagamie County Judge John Desjardins always believed if you did the crime, you'd pay the time. And from the bench, he'd send people who were even low risk offenders to jail. But, after seeing social science research on the benefits of treating low risk offenders versus incarcerating them, he learned a valuable lesson.

Judge Desjardins says, “What I didn't realize was that person would go to jail, he's establish some friendships, he'd gain knowledge about things like drugs and other types of activity that people thought were smart in the jail that aren't smart and they'd come out, I've got a new friend, I've got these ideas, I learned a lot about drugs and where to get them and the connections. You now changed a low risk person in to a medium, possibly high risk.”

So, as Outagamie County works to implement evidence-based decision making in its criminal justice system, or more simply put, being smart on crime, it will evaluate each individual as they go through the court system.

Bernie Vetrone is the Director of Outagamie County Criminal Justice Treatment Services. He says, “We do risk and needs assessment on people before they go in front of the court commissioner and then supervising those people pending their trial, which will increase public safety and hopefully reduce recidivism.”

The assessments will help to determine how an individual's case will be handled. No longer will every defendant be locked up, because as Outagamie County expects to prove with this initiative, each case and criminal is different and by taking the time to examine them separately, people will have the opportunity to stay out of jail and out of trouble.

"With all of this happening, the studies have suggested that we could reduce recidivism rates up to about 30 percent," says Judge Desjardins.

It's something that will keep jail populations down and save taxpayers money according to Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson. He says, "We have been so successful in our alternatives to incarceration that we don't have to build a jail so that is going to be a direct savings to the taxpayers of approximately \$70 million."

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