

REDEPLOY

Success of juvenile 'redeploy' program for felons sparks an adult form



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BLOOMINGTON — Mention the word redeployment and most people think of troops being assigned to another combat zone.

But nine years ago, Illinois lawmakers used the term to define Redeploy Illinois, a program designed to divert youths from the juvenile justice system and home circumstances that, for many young offenders, were a combat zone of another kind. The program's success motivated legislators to approve Adult Redeploy Illinois a year later.

Since 2006, Redeploy Illinois has reduced by half the number of youths entering the state's juvenile prison network in the 28 counties participating in the program, according to a recent report from the Redeploy Illinois Oversight Board.

In McLean County, Redeploy Illinois has cut the number of minors sent to juvenile prison from 72 between 2006 and 2009 to 22 between 2010 and 2012. The state estimated that in 2011, McLean County taxpayers saved almost \$600,000 in costs associated with putting youths in state custody where an overburdened system struggles to provide the services needed to put them on the right track.

Randy Masak, supervisor of the county's youth program, said the benefits go beyond the cost savings.

"Research has shown that kids do better when they receive services in their own community. This allows them to repay their debt to victims and their community and makes their integration to the community easier," he said.

At the state level, Adult Redeploy boasts savings of about \$18,000 per person — the difference between the \$2,200, on average, required to provide community-based services and the minimum estimate of \$21,000 to house an inmate in an Illinois prison.

During its first year, the McLean County adult program provided services to 20 adults in 2012. Of that number, two were sent to prison on technical violations of their probation and one person was charged with a new criminal offense.

Four years ago, data showing that 80 percent of those on intensive probation were failing caused Mike Donovan, deputy director of adult probation services in McLean County, to shift his thinking about the program that monitors the toughest cases.

"Intensive probation was a stepping stone to prison. Now we look at it as a failure when someone goes

to prison. It's a refreshing change," said Donovan, who helped draft new policies that give court services more authority over the level of supervision a person should receive.

Like the youth program, Adult Redeploy offers another, better option to keeping some offenders in the community, said Donovan.

"Very rarely does someone come out of prison better off. Prison is a warehouse that should be reserved for people who are a threat to others," he said.

Ken Williams, of Bloomington, was placed on Adult Redeploy Illinois after traditional probation proved ineffective.

The increased level of monitoring that includes random checks by probation officers day or night has helped Williams meet the terms of his 30 months of probation that he expects to complete in November.

"I actually like it. I know they're liable to stop by any time and that's encouraged me not to get in trouble," said Williams, whose run-in with the law involved taking groceries in 2010 to feed his family of six.

Twenty-nine-year-old Crystal Priester also is grateful for the structure the program has brought to her once chaotic life.

"Probation is a long process and sometimes people mess it up. Being in this program is way better than going to jail. They keep you on the right track by helping you get organized and meet goals," said Priester, who has been in Adult Redeploy Illinois for seven months of her 30-month term related to a theft charge.

What may seem like small things to most people — securing bus passes, getting a new pair of work shoes or a meal at Chuck E. Cheese for her son — have made the road back to a productive life less stressful for Priester.

Adult Redeploy also links participants with counseling, family support and monitoring for alcohol and substance abuse. The staff coordinates its efforts with the county's Drug Court and Recovery Court to provide people with substance abuse and mental health issues with another option when they have problems.