

**CASE STUDY TITLE:**

**Solving Social Problems through Community Partnerships:  
The Mesa County Meth Task Force Model**



**CASE STUDY CATEGORY:** Partnerships  
**JURISDICTION:** Mesa County, Colorado  
**COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR:** Chantal Unfug  
**COMMISSIONER:** Janet Rowland

**WOULD YOU LIKE THE APPLICATION TO BE CONSIDERED FOR AN INNOVATION AWARD?**  
Not at this time as we are not an Alliance member yet.

**WOULD YOU LIKE THE APPLICATION TO BE CONSIDERED FOR OUR RAPID FIRE SESSION?**  
Not sure, would like more information.

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**WAS A PRIVATE CONSULTANT USED?** No

**SOLVING SOCIAL PROBLEMS THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:**

**MESA COUNTY METH TASK FORCE MODEL**



**SYNOPSIS**

**PROJECT INTENT:** In 2004, Mesa County was facing a meth epidemic. 90 percent of the inmates in the county jail reported they had used meth in the past. Nearly 50 percent were in possession of meth when arrested and 67 percent reported that meth was directly or indirectly involved in the current charges against them. Felony property crimes, driven by meth addiction, had grown greater than population growth. Between 2000 and 2004 forgery increased by 190 percent.

During this time a significant number of families involved in the child welfare system were involved with meth. During the first three months of 2005, 45 percent of the children placed in out of home care, such as foster care or kinship care, had some type of meth involvement in their case;

This epidemic affected nearly every agency in the criminal justice system, which drove community leaders to find a solution. This led to a community summit held in 2004 to educate leaders about meth and its impact on the community, and to discuss the discussion about solutions. Following that, in February of 2005, the Mesa County Commissioners officially commissioned the Mesa County Meth Task Force (MTF).



**Setting the Direction**

The MTF conducted research, collected data, and researched best practice, resulting in a logic model based strategic plan. The focus was the implementation of best practices in prevention, enforcement and treatment (the three legged stool) leading to reductions of meth addiction, and its destructive consequences.

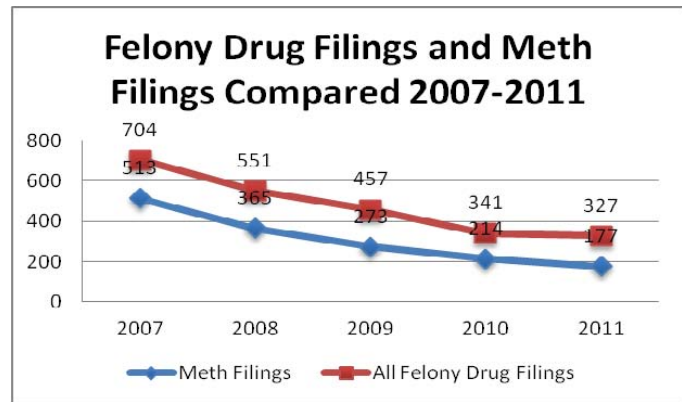


**Structure**

Elected officials and agency leaders in the criminal justice system formed an Executive Committee which gave direction to the Meth Task Force. The work happened in several workgroups which included Enforcement; Treatment; Prevention; Drug Endangered Children; and, Public Outreach and Communication.

## ENFORCEMENT

Local law enforcement agencies partnered with the District Attorney's office to increase prosecution of dealers. The Grand Junction Police Department and the Mesa County Sheriff's Office both created Street Crimes Units focused solely on dismantling drug trafficking organizations and mid-level dealers in our region and local community. Aggressive enforcement efforts that were directed by intelligence data from multiple sources. The results speak for themselves.

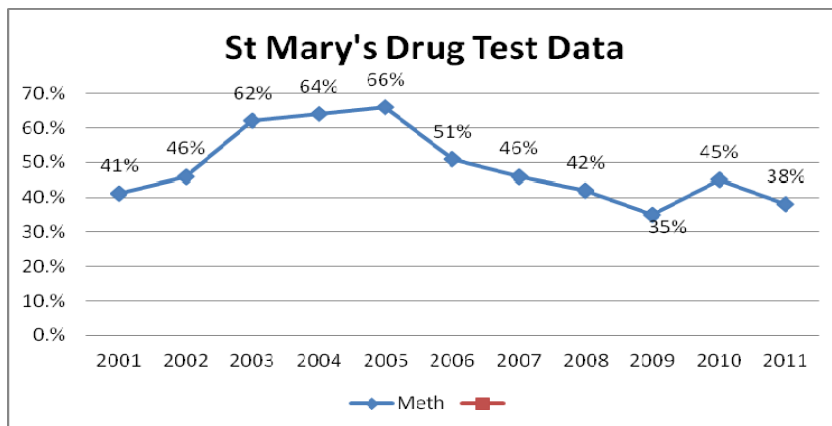


Because of the highly addictive nature of meth, people who were formerly upstanding law abiding citizens, were suddenly in the criminal justice system. Their crimes were typically misdemeanors, for the sole purpose of supporting their meth addiction. This created not only an overcrowded jail but a revolving door. Because of the low nature offenses, individuals would bond out and commit several more crimes before ever going to court on the first offense. The MTF, and in particular the District Attorney, believed the best solution was to aggressively pursue drug trafficking organizations and mid-level dealers, and offer treatment to low level criminals. It was believed that if the latter could kick their drug habit they would cease their criminal behavior. For this purpose the Fast Track program was created. This allowed the DA to offer a deferred judgment to these low level criminals, in exchange for entering, and successfully completing treatment.

## TREATMENT

**Men's Treatment** - The theory behind the Fast Track Program had great promise, but the few inpatient programs that were available generally were limited to 28 days. The nature of a meth addiction was not something that could be resolved in 28 days. At the same time the county jail was 25 percent above capacity due in part the increase in meth related cases and also due to long waiting lists for alternative sentencing programs such as Work Release. In 2007, in lieu of a new jail pod, the county build an alternative sentencing facility with one floor dedicated to drug treatment for men. Since opening in June 2007, 442 clients have been admitted to Summit View and 310 successfully completed, for a 70% successfully completion rate.

**Women's Treatment** - In 2010 an inpatient treatment facility for women was opened. It was designed to allow women to have their children live with them toward the end of their inpatient stay. This allowed moms to readjust to normal life while still in a supportive environment and it often reduced the amount of time children stayed in foster care.



ER patients testing positive for meth have decreased significantly since 2005.

**Family Support** - Many of the individuals that were addicted to meth had no history of criminal behavior or drug use. Therefore many of the families of these new addicts were completely at a loss as to how to help their adult or teen child. Families tended to be misguided in their desire to help their children and as a result would often rescue them from the consequences of their drug use, which only helped them to further use meth. This was particularly true when grandchildren were involved.

In order to provide these families with support and education about meth and how best to help their addicted family member, a Family Support Group was created. It was initially facilitated by two therapists who volunteered their time. The MTF was eventually able to pay one therapist to continue facilitating the group. The group meets weekly and runs for eight weeks at a time, six times a year.

**Obstacles:**

The area where we struggled most to meet our goals was in the area of prevention. Any type of prevention is always difficult to measure, and because of that it is often difficult to fund. An even larger problem for prevention was sustainability. We also learned that in the areas of enforcement and treatment, where the changes were incorporated into an existing agency, sustainability of our efforts was much easier. Law enforcement and the District Attorney found great success in working together. We didn't create a new program that needed staffing and funding, rather we created a new way of doing business, therefore it was much easier to sustain. Conversely, in the area of prevention, where many of our efforts were implemented through community donations and work groups within the task force, these efforts were much more difficult to sustain. I could write volumes on this issue, but the space limitation of this application won't allow me to. However, I believe it is an important lesson that could be shared in the workshop.

**Outcomes:**

Through our enforcement efforts, felony filings for meth dropped from a high of 456 filings in 2007 down to 172 filing in 2011. Through our treatment efforts, in the first two years of opening our new treatment facility we experienced a 70% successfully completion rate.

**COSTS:**

In the spirit of true collaboration we operated under the non-profit umbrella of one of our partner agencies, in lieu of starting a new non-profit; each partner agency contributed between \$2,000 and \$5,000 and the money was used to hire a full time Coordinator. Many of our goals didn't require new funding but rather a prioritization of focus. Other goals were either absorbed by existing entities or were funded through community partnerships and donations.

**SAVINGS:**

Building an alternative sentencing facility, which included a drug treatment component, rather than building a new jail pod, saved Mesa County over \$3 million dollars in capital construction and over \$500,000 in annual operations.

**APPLICABLE RESULTS AND REAL WORLD PRACTICALITY:**

Many lessons learned through our collaboration would be applicable to communities dealing with a myriad of social problems, not just meth or crime related issues. Those include:

1. Decision makers must be at the table; they need to be fully aware and fully committed
2. Initial research to clearly define the problem is critical in establishing direction and goals. Make decisions based on research, data and proven methods.
3. Relationship building must be continuous and vigorous for success, and implementation of systemic changes requires relationship building on all levels (leadership to line staff)
4. For lasting success and sustainability programs should be institutionalized in existing agencies
5. Political and community support is critical
6. Consistent, ongoing and relevant community outreach and media coverage and critical to shaping community support and reaching desired outcomes.

**PRESENTATION STYLE** The presentation Team will use PowerPoint with informative and understandable graphs and charts to emphasize specific points. Time will be allotted for Q & A.