

Electronic Monitoring Program Provides Flexible Solution for Unique Challenges



Photo Courtesy of Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The program provides an alternative to detention and a safe, effective strategy for juveniles reintegrating into the community after a period of institutionalization.
- The program supports the philosophy and practice of restorative justice.
- The program is consistent with a best practices approach to detain only those youth who present the greatest risk of injury to others.

THE PROGRAM

The mission of the Alaska Division of Juvenile

Justice is to hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior, promote the safety and restoration of victims and communities, and assist offenders and their families in developing skills to prevent crime.



The division uses a variety of graduated incentives and responses with the expectation that juveniles must personally take part in restoring and repairing the harm caused to victims and communities as a result of their behavior. This balanced and restorative justice approach to services and programming benefits the community by holding juvenile offenders accountable and teaching them to take personal responsibility for repairing the harm caused to victims and communities by their delinquent behavior.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) electronic monitoring program is one of these graduated incentives and responses. The electronic monitoring program provides a necessary graduated response, which helps ensure compliance to conditions of release for Alaska's youthful

offenders. Juveniles are carefully screened to participate in the program.

Alaska presents several challenges for monitoring juvenile offenders, including extreme weather, sheer distance and diverse geographical terrain. This is further compounded in rural areas where basic community resources can be lacking, residential non-secure youth shelters may be full and traditional sentencing alternatives do not exist.

The DJJ oversees juvenile justice services across four regions of the state covering 586,412 square miles. This includes eight secure youth facilities and 16 juvenile probation offices statewide. The DJJ receives referrals on approximately 3,000 to 4,000 offenders between the ages of 12 and 18 years old.

The need to continue developing community-based resources in the state prompted the DJJ to develop a statewide electronic monitoring program in 2004. The DJJ selected BI Incorporated for supervision technology and support services. Electronic monitoring units are located in seven communities. From Fiscal Year 2007 through FY 2009, an average of 38 youth were placed on electronic monitoring. Juveniles are typically involved in the electronic monitoring program for about a month.

Two statistically validated assessment tools are used to assess offenders on both ends of the justice system and ensure youth are appropriately placed in the EM program. Youth are placed in the program in two ways. First, it is used as an alternative to detention for moderate- to high-risk youth; and second, it is used for moderate- to high-risk juveniles who are reintegrating into the community after a period of institutionalization. The DJJ currently uses over 30 BI HomeGuard® 200 units for its program. HomeGuard is a relatively low cost but reliable way for the agency to monitor for compliance to curfews and schedules. The DJJ also uses BI's HomeCell® to obtain the same information when clients rely solely on cellular phone service. The agency also uses BI Drive-BI®, a handheld device that allows supervising officers to be outside a residence and check on an individual's presence.

The DJJ uses both BI GuardCenter®, the company's 24/7 monitoring center, for support, or supervising officers can log directly into the BI TotalAccess® software to make changes to offender data such as schedules and alerts. The agency determines how it would like to receive alert notifications, using methods such as email, text, page or phone call.

THE RESULTS

The electronic monitoring program helps the DJJ achieve two goals. First, it provides an alternative to detention for appropriate youth while maintaining public safety; and second, it provides a safe and effective strategy for juveniles transitioning from the institution. By combining the electronic monitoring program with the offender reentry initiative, the department is able to release youth to community supervision earlier, thereby freeing up valuable detention center beds for more serious offenders.

Consistent with best practices and research, the DJJ is using technology to maximize results, help reduce recidivism and detain only those youth who present the greatest risk of injury

to others. The DJJ annually reviews its electronic monitoring program to maximize the use of the equipment to meet the needs of DJJ staff and the youth who fit the criteria for its use. BI has provided technology to the department for almost a decade.

TECHNOLOGY:

- BI HomeGuard® 200
- BI HomeCell®
- BI Drive-BI®
- BI GuardCenter®
- BI TotalAccess®



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