

Diversion Hub to open June 8, help clients navigate criminal justice system



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Crews set up work stations Wednesday in the new Diversion Hub building located at 220 NW 10. The facility, opening June 8, will act as a multi-agency network to provide needed services for those navigating the criminal justice system. [Chris Landsberger/The Oklahoman]

On June 8, Oklahoma City's Diversion Hub will begin offering services to those navigating the criminal justice system.

Located at 220 NW 10, the Diversion Hub will be a one-stop-shop of agencies offering justice navigation, housing assistance and employment services. In the coming weeks, agencies focused on mental health and substance abuse treatment also will be located in-house.

The project is scheduled to receive \$17 million in MAPS 4 funding for a new building, but that won't arrive for several years, according to city officials.

Instead, over \$20 million in private dollars through the Arnall Family Foundation is being used to renovate the Hub's current space and to fund operations.

“Their work now will help our MAPS 4 project be even more effective when it’s ready,” said Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt. “Also, the sooner they start changing lives, the better for our community. So I’m just excited to think that we don’t have to wait for MAPS 4 for that work to commence.”

By offering easy-to-access, wrap-around services to low-level offenders, advocates say the Hub will be able to relieve pressure on the Oklahoma County jail and provide a clear pathway toward productivity and safety for clients.

“Removing these barriers for folks is going to breed success,” said Meagan Taylor, director of programs for the Diversion Hub. “People inherently want to do better, and they will if they are supported and compassion and empathy is surrounding them.”

In nearly 10,000 square feet, the Diversion Hub houses seven offices, an open-floor workspace for employees, a computer lab and a donation center for food and clothes.

Artwork inside of the building will be from inmates at the Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in McLoud, Taylor said.

When a person is referred for services, they’ll be checked in using iPads connected to a high-capacity database.

An emergency intake will follow to address immediate needs like shelter and food. Warrants and other legal issues also will be taken care of.

Within 48 hours, that person will have a longer assessment with a case manager to develop a service plan aimed at working through their legal case and connecting them to other key services.

Agencies housed in the Diversion Hub will include City Care, the Homeless Alliance, TEEM, Work Ready, the Urban League and NorthCare.

Transportation between the Oklahoma County courthouse, the county jail and the Diversion Hub will be provided.

Services also will be available to those who didn't have an official referral but need simpler fixes like creating a new payment schedule for fines and fees or answering a question about a municipal charge.

"We want to be flexible," said Diversion Hub executive director Byron Kline. "We want to listen to our clients."

Kline previously worked with the Vera Institute of Justice, a nonprofit focused on improving the criminal justice system that headed a 2016 report detailing needed reforms at the Oklahoma County jail.

Collaborative effort

The goal is not to duplicate agency efforts but to create a low-barrier entry point for clients to make their needs known and for case managers to shepherd clients through the system with a personalized action plan, Taylor said.

Taylor also serves as the diversion program supervisor for the Arnall Family Foundation, overseeing justice programs similar to what will be available at the Diversion Hub.

With that existing client base, the Hub will open with roughly 600 individuals already awaiting the full scope of services, said Sue Ann Arnall, director of the Diversion Hub board and president of the Arnall Family Foundation.

Arnall said organizers focused on making sure the Hub was "evidence based and data driven."

"We want to know what we are doing right, and we are going to follow the success of our clients to get feedback and pivot where we need to," Arnall said. "We want to give clients the best outcome, the best quality of life possible so they can be productive members of society."

Projects rooted in collaboration and communication are rare, Kline said.

He pointed to the progress already being made in Oklahoma County — the number of inmates at the county jail has continued to decrease over the last several months — and said he believes the Diversion Hub will serve as a conduit to continue that work.

“One of the hallmarks for Oklahoma City is this was a place that was interested in criminal justice reform, and you didn’t just talk about it, you actually did it,” he said. “In my line of work, you get to see lots of places that talk about making change, but Oklahoma City is actually doing it. I am so honored to be here.”

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Byron Kline, executive director, speaks about the services offered by Diversion Hub. [Chris Landsberger/The Oklahoman]