

Program Evaluation Plan
for the McHenry County
Police Social Worker Program

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

A strategic goal for advancing *Leadership and Governance* in McHenry County is to “create and implement a program evaluation process to determine program effectiveness, efficiency, and potential cost-savings” (McHenry County 2022-2025 Strategic Plan 2021, 2). In the objectives supporting this goal, the county identified the Police Social Worker Program as a key target for developing and implementing evaluation metrics. This report presents a plan for the evaluation of the Police Social Worker Program (hereafter, PSWP). Police-based programs nationwide have been under increasing scrutiny in the wake of the Black Lives Matter and Defund the Police movements (Cummins 2022; Vaughan, et al. 2022). Thus, we are especially attentive in this report to the need for an evaluation strategy that goes beyond the most common type of evaluation, which focuses on the efficiency of program results (shorter-term outcomes or longer-term impacts). This plan instead proposes evaluation of efficiency, economy, effectiveness, *and* equity not only in outcomes and impacts, but also processes. It draws insights from case studies similar to the PSWP on key dimensions to suggest evaluative metrics the county might use. However, we emphasize the importance of including the voices of community members in the selection of these metrics and provide recommendations for truly participatory evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

We recommend that McHenry County adopt a program evaluation plan that is *holistic*, by including evaluation of program processes, outcomes, and impacts.

Recommendation 2:

We recommend that McHenry County adopt a program evaluation plan that is *multidimensional*, by including considerations of program effectiveness, efficiency, economy, and equity.

Recommendation 3:

We recommend that McHenry County adopt a program evaluation plan that is *participatory and inclusive*, by working with stakeholders to collaboratively identify metrics for evaluation.

APPROACHES TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

Many approaches exist to program evaluation. In this section, we define and describe evaluation in general and then summarize some of the alternative approaches to it. In a later section—the *Literature Review*—we present the evidence about these different approaches. Because this is an evaluation plan for a program that reflects existing policy priorities and implementation strategies, we do not discuss here or in other sections the many policy problems addressed through police social worker programs and the variety of forms these can take (Linhorst, et al. 2023).

Although this report has invoked the word *evaluation* repeatedly already, providing a basic definition is useful. Evaluation is the use of “formal methodologies to provide useful empirical evidence about public entities (such as programs, products and performance) in decision-making contexts that are inherently political and involve multiple often-conflicting stakeholders, where resources are seldom sufficient, and where time pressures are salient” (Mertens and Wilson 2018, 5). Evaluation comes in three typical forms, and all have been applied to programs that use police

social workers and more broadly to programmatic efforts at community interventions (Mertens and Wilson 2018, 93-103; Labriola 2023; Blomquist 2003; Uchida, et al. 2000):

1. *Process evaluations* assess whether planned program function is being met. For example, a process evaluation of PSWP might examine how often police calls that involve mental health-related issues are being referred to social workers. Or, it might consider the time needed for follow-up by case managers. A process evaluation would require consulting documents describing strategic goals and objectives, scope of work, and management of the PSWP.
2. *Outcome evaluations* look at short- and medium-term effects on individuals, communities, and organizations. For example, an outcome evaluation of PSWP might compare subsequent need for police intervention in households receiving referral services from a police social worker versus in those that did not. An outcome evaluation is attentive to changes McHenry County would expect to see in those served by the PSWP—in individuals, in households, in organizations, in communities—over a period of typically three to six months.
3. *Impact evaluations* are similar to those based on outcomes, but they are oriented to longer-term effects. For example, an impact evaluation following logically from the outcome evaluation example described above might look at measures of long-term childhood learning since households receiving referral services with a police intervention should, all else being equal, be more stable settings for children. An impact evaluation, again, looks at changes in those served by PSWP but over a longer period, usually at least a year.

While PSWP is already impacting individuals and households in McHenry County, the county has not yet developed an approach to evaluating this impact. The county has an opportunity to craft a *holistic* approach to evaluation that uses all three of the approaches above.

Evaluations must also take care to be truly *multidimensional* by addressing all pillars of public administration—efficiency, economy, effectiveness, *and* equity (Berry-James et al. 2021; Norman-Major 2011). In evaluation, each requires distinct measures: “[o]bjectives of effectiveness, efficiency, and equity are often considered together as if they were mutually reinforcing, or at least mutually compatible. Such assumptions must be questioned” (Reichert 1994, 61). In our case studies (*Data collection and analysis*), we distinguish among these. *Efficiency* measures are simply those that relate a unit of output to the input of resources needed to produce it (Mertens and Wilson 2018, 335-346). Measures of *economy* are similar but focus on the dollar value of costs against the dollar value of benefits. A more efficient program, then, is one that needs fewer inputs to produce a given amount of outputs, while a more economic one sees an increase in benefits relative to costs. *Effectiveness* measures must tie directly to program outcomes and or impacts; thus, these are only found in outcome or impact evaluations, as described above. *Equity* measures are about the distribution of costs and benefits fairly across those who are the recipients or users of a program, where fairness can include considerations of past patterns of inequity or injustice (*Ibid.*; Martin and Lewis 2019).

An example can be helpful in distinguishing among these dimensions of program evaluation. A common goal in a police social worker program is referral of those involved in police

interactions to essential social services. Because a formal recording of a referral usually occurs, data about them should be readily available. McHenry County could reasonably expect as an outcome of the PSWP an increase in volume of referrals to social services in the county. A measure of effectiveness, then, would be *number of referrals per year*. A measure of efficiency tied to this would be *number of referrals per full time equivalent police social worker*. To consider the PSWP's economy, the county would need a way to value the benefit of each referral to the recipient to then weigh it against the cost in terms of staff time in the PSWP and in the social service agency. And, finally, an equity measure could be the *number of referrals per social worker* across demographic subgroups in the population of those involved in police interactions.

Lastly, we emphasize the importance of a fully *participatory and inclusive* approach to evaluation (Nichols 2002). The increased scrutiny of all policing programs, noted earlier, positions the PSPW evaluation as an opportunity for transparency and accountability that can foster public trust (Kochel and Skogan 2021). In addition to these benefits (King et al. 2007), participatory evaluation can promote organizational learning (Cousins and Earl 1992). A variety of tools and techniques exist for informing the public, generating and obtaining their input, and building consensus (US EPA 2022). These include public workshops, world cafes, electronic democracy, consensus workshops, and advisory boards, and choosing from among these will depend on the unique knowledge McHenry County would have based on past engagement efforts.¹

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The PSWP provides access to trained and certified social workers both to police departments in McHenry County and in participating municipalities. The Police Social Worker can play many roles for members of the public: (1) providing crisis intervention or de-escalation services; (2) connecting people to social service providers in McHenry County; (3) assisting deputies on calls where mental illness is a factor; (4) supporting crime victims or families during fatal events; and (5) providing short-term counseling for stabilization. These staff can also facilitate trainings on officer wellness and provide general support to officers. Prior to the launch of this innovative county-wide program, McHenry County Sheriff's Office employed a social services case manager to bridge the gap between law enforcement and social services. To connect more citizens of McHenry County with appropriate resources and long-term resolutions, municipal and county police departments and social service agencies—a total of eighteen partner organizations—were asked to share resources to launch the PSWP. In January 2022, the McHenry County Board approved a resolution to create a division within the Sheriff's Office to fund and manage the PSWP, which is housed at the Community Foundation of McHenry County. McHenry County Mental Health Board and participating law enforcement agencies also contributed significantly to this pilot program that kicked off officially in June 2022. That same month, the county hired case managers to provide case and client follow-up and consult with participating agencies throughout the county. Six on-call social workers are now available 24/7 to handle calls that are referred by law enforcement. Each social worker is assigned a grouping of participating municipal police departments.

¹ The most helpful guide the study team has found is produced by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The toolkit can be directly accessed at <https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-tools>.

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

The PSWP at its core is a collaborative effort among the county and seventeen municipal police departments. Funding primarily comes from the Sheriff's Office, the McHenry County Board, and the McHenry County Mental Health Board. Individual stakeholders involved in the administration of the program include County Administrator Peter Austin, PSW Program Director Sergeant Aimee Knop, County Chairman Michael Buehler, County Coordinator Chalen Daigle, PSW Program Clinical Supervisor Alana Bak, and Sheriff Bill Prim. The Police Social Work Division of the McHenry County Sheriff's Office houses the program.

Because we are proposing participatory program evaluation, the public is also a stakeholder. This form of evaluation is not simply a tool used by the county but is a public good—something produced when “citizens...work with other citizens to...make life better for everyone.” (Matthews 2020, 8). Participatory evaluation finds its footing in reciprocity, both between the county and members of the public and among members of the public through facilitation by the county (Matthews 2020, 9). It also acknowledges that members of the public are not merely consumers or clients of PSWP, but are also co-producers in the evaluative enterprise with police, social workers, and supportive staff (Matthews 2020, 10, citing Ostrom). Associations of members of the public—from community-based organizations to civic groups—can also function as important stakeholders in mitigating power imbalances between government actors and members of the public, especially those traditionally excluded from public processes (Matthews 2020, 36).

The aim in involving so many stakeholders, and in regarding them as more than just clients of the PSWP, is to help mitigate any inclination to approach evaluation as a bureaucratized, professionalized exercise—an approach in which the county “sees like a state” rather than as a partner of the public (Matthews 2020, 28). This plan encourages a conversation between the county and the public it serves, rather than a set of narrow prescriptions about which metrics are best. In the next section we review several case studies that inform our recommendations about developing a holistic, multidimensional, participatory evaluation.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The study team was unable to find any examples of systematic study of police social worker programs, by which we mean the regular collection of evaluative data from a sample or panel of such programs. Evaluation that is holistic, multidimensional, and/or participatory with regard to such programs is also rare despite the potential benefits. However, we can still draw insights from police social work programs in other communities with similarity in basic features, which we refer to as paradigmatic case studies (Yin 2011). In selecting case studies, we used the following criteria to determine whether a program was sufficiently similar to the PSWP: (1) delivery by a public service organization; (2) location in the United States, to ensure some similarity in basic institutional features; (3) leadership by a police department in the program; and (4) general goal of improving the quality of police-public encounters. We did not require that the program be a collaborative effort across municipalities and counties, as this proved too limiting. While location in Illinois was not a criterion, all but one of the programs are located in municipalities in the state.

We collected data using review of secondary sources (e.g., webpages, reports) and interviews with key staff.² We briefly summarize several of these case studies below. Interviewees were only able to identify evaluation metrics in two of the case studies, and these measures were only of effectiveness using data on incident referral counts. Therefore, after summarizing the cases we offer commentary on potential evaluation metrics for efficiency, economy, and equity.

City of Naperville

The Naperville Police Department's Social Service Unit develops strategies to address unmet needs within the community, particularly those related to domestic violence, mental illness, child/elder abuse, sexual abuse, substance abuse, and youth and family concerns. The Social Services Unit includes three full-time police social workers and one full-time police counselor who provide a variety of services to the department and community. These include crisis intervention in situations requiring immediate assistance, short-term counseling and referrals, assistance with mental health assessments, court advocacy for Orders of Protection, assistance with death notifications and grief counseling, victim/witness support, and follow-up for police-reported incidents requiring additional assistance. The Social Services Unit also maintains a directory of community resources that offer residents additional assistance and services. Commander Matt Egan, in the Investigations Division, was our interview contact in Naperville.

According to Egan, the objectives of the program are to provide adults, juveniles, and families with short-term crisis stabilization, to provide assessment interventions and referrals for the resolution of individuals and families in the community with such problems. However, Naperville does not measure these as outcomes or impacts. The main evaluation metrics used by Naperville relate to incident referrals, a measure of outcome effectiveness. The city also gathers data on the volume of work per social worker, a measure of process efficiency. Commander Egan stated that the Naperville program does not evaluate on the basis of equity, including deflection or diversion rates among different demographic groups.

Village of Carol Stream

The Social Service Division of the Carol Stream Police Department has been funding a police social worker program from its general fund since the 1970s. It includes three full-time licensed clinical social workers (Village of Carol Stream Website, 2023). The social workers are available 24/7 to assist the Patrol Division by providing comprehensive services to residents and crime victims, such as crisis intervention, counseling, court advocacy, victim assistance, case management, restorative justice, neighbor mediation, disaster response coordination, and social services referrals. While a separate program, Public Action to Deliver Shelter (PADS), deals specifically with problems facing those who are homeless, communication regularly occurs between PADS staff and social workers. The study team interviewed Ms. Kathleen McNamara, a Police Social Worker who oversees police social services.

Evaluation metrics for the Carol Stream program mostly target outcome effectiveness: counts of various interventions and referrals (attempts to contact, on-duty crisis interventions, off-duty crisis interventions, officer referrals, fire department referrals). The program also looks at recidivism (youth and adult), which is an impact effectiveness measure because it is a longer-term

² We provide contact information for the interviewees in Appendix B.

phenomenon. The program also tracks the number of open cases and the hosting of community outreach events, which are measures of process efficiency. McNamara noted that diversion from jail is not a measure of success because all outreach occurs before a situation gets to that point.

Village of Hanover Park

The study team interviewed Tricia Rossi, a police social worker. According to Rossi, for at least three decades Hanover Park has employed a full-time social worker to provide services upon referral from the Police Department (Hanover Park, 2023), due to a concern that residents may need assistance during a crisis but may not know where to find appropriate services. These services include advocacy, clinical assessments, referrals, crisis intervention, and short-term counseling. Per Rossi, the primary program objective is to reduce recidivism, with a more general secondary goal of providing support and resources to those in need.

Rossi confirmed the program uses no formal metrics to ascertain if the program is achieving its goals. She was the only interviewee who expressed concerns about any such evaluation effort being inherently subjective and noted that confidentiality limited the ability to gather data about long-term behaviors after program interventions. However, she confirmed that the program has been effective, efficient, and equitable based on first-hand, oral, ad hoc accounts of positive changes for individuals and households. She acknowledged based on her own record-keeping that she is confident a reduction in repeat incidents has occurred. Rossi also noted the value in educating the public on the role of mental health workers and what confidentiality means.

The study team notes that a police social work program can readily collect anonymized data that would not violate privacy laws, and that Naperville and Carol Stream are both examples of how this can be done. In the case of Hanover Park, this could include the number of incident referrals, number of repeat calls for the same incident type, repeat criminal behaviors as a measure of recidivism (given that this is part of the public record), and the number of residents receiving educational interventions.

City of Erlanger, Kentucky

The Erlanger program has only been operating five years. The primary program objective is to reduce recidivism. Rebecca Strouse, our interviewee, is the only police social worker and started the program. In 2021, the Police Social Worker Program had 664 contacts and served 314 families or individuals. Most contacts are from the senior citizen population and from households dealing with child abuse and neglect. Others are about homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence. Strouse mentioned that the effectiveness of the program is measured by success in outcomes for her clients, which are “always in the 90th percentile.”

Similar to Hanover Park’s interviewee, Strouse highlighted the reduction in repeat calls from families involved in the program. She enters data into a database system, which shows the types of call that she deals with the most and if her efforts towards those calls are successful or unsuccessful. She stated that there are no metrics to show specifically whether emergency (911) calls are decreasing because her system does not integrate with the police system. By pulling data from both, Strouse can gain before-and-after insights—the kind essential to evaluation. Overall, this database would readily allow for metrics regarding efficiency and effectiveness across

evaluation types (process, outcome, and impact). Strouse’s insights about outcomes across different population groups also suggests a capacity for equity metrics.

Village of Woodridge

Our interviewee in Woodridge was Chief Brian Cunningham. Since the 1970s, police-based social service initiatives have existed in the village. Initially, the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission and other sponsors provided funding for local programs, but funding sources dwindled and a few communities in the region began financing social service programs with municipal funds. He shared that in the 1990s, Woodridge utilized a contracted social worker service but transitioned to a part-time “in-house” position in the early 2000s. The staff of the Community Resource Center assisted with social service referrals and coordination.

Currently, there is only one social worker at the Woodridge Police Department. This person helps with resource referrals, counseling services, and case management. Cunningham, revealed that the top two social issues facing Woodridge currently are mental health and substance abuse. He shared that enhancing the ability of social services allows for support and involvement in incidents related to domestic abuse, crimes against children, substance abuse, suicide, and homelessness. While Cunningham believed the program had positive results, Woodridge has no formal efforts at program evaluation presently. Unlike the other cases, they do not even use informal, ad hoc information. This may be due to the under-resourcing of the program, which is an issue not faced by McHenry County.

CHOOSING AMONG ALTERNATIVES

The case study summaries in the previous section suggest some metrics McHenry County might use to evaluate the PSWP, and the matrix in Appendix A draws from the Naperville, Erlanger, and Carol Stream cases. Much of what is occurring in these communities relies simply on keeping basic data throughout moments in the intervention process that can be readily anonymized as needed: interactions with the police, formal referrals to the many social services in the county and in participating municipalities, and follow-up interactions. Combining these data with publicly available health and education outcomes data could be highly beneficial for transitioning from shorter term outcome evaluation measures to longer term impact evaluation measures—especially those that relate to equity across demographic subpopulations. An advantage of the PSWP is that it involves many agencies in a collaborative network that collect data on individuals and households as their clients, and that are highly cognizant of existing privacy laws. We do note that no case gathered data on economic measures. While program cost data are presumably readily available, valuing the benefits of a program like the PSWP to members of the public is difficult. Before engaging in any cost-benefit analysis, we encourage careful thought about how such valuation occurs.

As we have discussed already, the primary method for choosing among metrics should be through robust engagement with members of the public. The timeline we sketch below shows how this could be incorporated into an overall evaluation scheme over a six-month period. A second key consideration beyond the interests of the public is feasibility. All metrics require data collection that uses organizational human and material resources, and some may not be feasible.

Beyond these considerations, the county could scope its evaluation by committing to a focus on one or two of the policy objectives to simplify evaluation. It could also choose to only do process evaluation in the first year, with gathering of only the baseline data for outcome evaluation and impact evaluation. We do note the importance of baseline data gathering on the most important metrics as soon as possible, as purely post-intervention evaluation is much less useful.

CHALLENGES

As noted earlier, the PSWP has many individual and organizational stakeholders. For evaluation planning, this can create some potential challenges. First, McHenry County may discover that efforts to collect and analyze data are restricted. For instance, the county's Mental Health Board requires clinical data points that align with the client-based performance metrics that are expected for its grant deliverables. Therefore, requests for other metrics may not be a high priority. A benefit of involving all stakeholders early in the selection of evaluation metrics is that each organization or individual can assess feasibility and reconcile the selection of metrics with their own priorities.

A second challenge is that engaging the public in a participatory evaluation will necessarily involve ideological and political tensions that will prove insurmountable, with some feeling their voices were not heard. However, a well-mediated engagement session in a neutral setting can encourage a crucial conversation that helps assuage divisiveness (Matthews 2020, 12-13). Moreover, the question *What does success look like?* and variants on that question can help ensure the dialogue is forward-looking. Deliberative process are meant to work through values-driven tensions by acknowledging a shared problem (*Ibid.* at 17). We have afforded multiple weeks in the timeline below for engagement processes, recognizing that they are iterative and circular rather than linear (*Ibid.* at 19).

TIMELINE

Table 1 on the following page presents a suggested timeline for the implementation of the evaluation activities we described above. We organize these activities across two quarters or six months. The scheme works with any start date the county may decide.

CONCLUSION

The McHenry County Police Social Worker Program represents the kind of innovation and collaboration that can only benefit from evaluative measures designed to evolve and adapt to shifts in public policy. Our program evaluation plan is intended to assist the county with meeting its strategic goal by considering effectiveness, efficiency, economy, and equity at every stage of evaluation. The included case studies, matrix, and timeline provide a foundation for holistic, multidimensional evaluation that encourages participation and inclusion. We look forward to seeing what the future holds for this vital alliance and the essential services it provides.

TABLE 1. SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Activity	Week #																							
	Quarter 1												Quarter 2											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Receive Program Evaluation Plan from NIU Study Team																								
Participatory process evaluation meetings: determining functional metrics for PSWP																								
Finalize data collection strategy for process evaluation																								
Gathering baseline data for process evaluation																								
Participatory outcome / impact evaluation meetings: determining metrics for those served by PSWP																								
Finalize data collection strategy for outcome / impact evaluation																								
Gathering baseline data for outcome / impact evaluation																								
Reporting back on baseline conditions to stakeholders, including public																								
Additions and revision to evaluation strategy																								
Gathering data on process/outcome / impact metrics to determine change over time																								

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APPENDIX A. MATRIX OF SELECT CASE STUDIES

Evaluation type	Policy Objective			
	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Economy	Equity
Process	<i>Not applicable</i>	Naperville Carol Stream Erlanger, KY		
Outcome	Naperville Carol Stream	Erlanger, KY		
Impact	<i>Naperville Carol Stream</i>	<i>Erlanger, KY</i>		<i>Erlanger, KY</i>
Quick guide (full discussion in body of report): Effectiveness measures: relate directly to program outcomes and or impacts and are not used in process evaluation. Efficiency measures: relate a unit of output to the input of resources needed to produce it. Economy measures: relate to the dollar value of costs against the dollar value of benefits. Equity measures: relate to the distribution of costs and benefits fairly across those who are the recipients or users of a program, where fairness can include considerations of past patterns of inequity or injustice. <i>Italics</i> are used when it was indeterminate whether a program measured on an evaluation type and policy objective. Usually this was because an outcome measure can readily translate into an impact measure with the passage of time.				

APPENDIX B. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PROGRAMS

Program	Contact Information
Carol Stream, Illinois: Social Service Division in Police Department https://www.carolstream.org/departments/police-department/police-divisions/social-service	Kathleen R. McNamara Social Services Supervisor, LCSW, MPA kmcnamara@carolstream.org Phone: 630-871-6280
Erlanger, Kentucky: Police Social Worker Program https://erlangerky.gov/city-operations/police/police-administration/	Rebecca Strouse Police Social Services Coordinator, Police Social Worker rebecca.strouse@erlangerpd.com Phone: 859-727-7968
Hanover Park, Illinois: Social Services Unit in Police Department https://www.hpil.org/229/Social-Services-Resources	Tricia Rossi Police Social Worker trossi@hpil.org Phone: 630-823-5579
Naperville, Illinois: Social Service Unit in Police Department https://www.naperville.il.us/services/naperville-police-department/investigations-division/social-services/	Commander Matt Egan Social Services Supervisor, Investigations Division eganm@naperville.il.us Phone: 630-305-4068
Woodridge, Illinois: Embedded Social Worker in Police Department https://www.woodridgeil.gov/my_government/police_department/social_worker_-_resources.php	Chief Brian Cunningham Woodridge Police Department bcunningham@woodridgeil.gov Phone: 630-719-4736