

FAST 2011 DRUGS AND CRIME ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

THE PROBLEM: 70% of arrests in Pinellas County are re-arrests. The revolving door of the jail means that the same individuals come back again and again, caught in a cycle of crime and drugs. FAST congregations have shared testimony after testimony about lives that were saved because of a former program in the jail called Smart Choices. This comprehensive program had drug rehabilitation, education, life skills, drug counseling, employment services, aftercare, and more. It effectively reduced the recidivism rate from 70% to 40% among its participants, drastically changing many individuals' lives so that they were able to become self-reliant citizens of our communities again.

In August 2010, Sheriff Coats eliminated Smart Choices from the Pinellas County jail. This came after he made a commitment at the 2010 Nehemiah Action to reinstate services for women. FAST congregations have heard testimonies about individuals who wanted and desperately needed this program, but did not receive the services they needed because it was eliminated and, as a result, are now in prison.

RESEARCH WE HAVE DONE: Because of the urgent need to stop the revolving door of the jails by helping individuals, the FAST Drugs and Crime Committee researched how to bring those services back to Pinellas County's jail. From drug rehabilitation services Operation PAR, the committee learned that there is no substitute for in-jail rehabilitation. Those who begin a program in jail are 90% likely to finish a post-jail program. By their estimates, Smart Choices would cost only approximately \$300,000 per year. From employment services Stars/Strive, the committee heard that in-jail programs are crucial because they allow an individual to start changing his or her criminal mentality before he or she is tempted by familiar surroundings outside the jail. The committee also visited the Pinellas County Drug Court, where individuals are given the opportunity to complete rehabilitation instead of going to jail. The Judge told committee members that Smart Choices was a last resort for many people, and since its elimination, those individuals have been sent to prison.

Knowing that there is no substitute for a comprehensive in-jail program, the Drugs and Crime Committee turned its attention to how to fund such a program. It called other jails in Florida for funding ideas, as well as met with Pinellas County Commissioners for their suggestions. Three Commissioners agreed to help Sheriff Coats look for funding by being on a task force.

THE SOLUTION: In a meeting with Sheriff Coats on March 18th, the committee discussed possible federal funds he could use to reinstate a life skills program in the jail. We also asked the Sheriff to form a task force to come up with a plan to fund a comprehensive rehabilitation program in the jail. Tonight we celebrate the Sheriff's commitment to create a task force to find funding to reinstate a program like Smart Choices, and ask the following:

WHAT WE WANT SCORECARD:

SHERIFF COATS	YES	NO
Will you form a task force to help you find funding to restart a comprehensive rehabilitation program in the jail, with this task force having its first meeting within the next month, and completing a preliminary report by June 20 th and a final report by October 1 st ?		
Who at this time has formally agreed to be on your task force?		
Will you allow a FAST representative to be an observer during task force meetings?		
Will you pursue the federal funds of the Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section of the Department of Justice to pay for any start-up costs relating to restarting a comprehensive rehabilitation program in the jail?		