



ANNUAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

The City of Columbia's DIVERT Program is a collaborative initiative between the City's Police and Fire departments, Office of Neighborhood Services, Animal Control, Environmental Health, MU Community Paramedics and Columbia/Boone County Public Health and Human Services. The program integrates social services into the City's public safety and justice systems to address the underlying health and social needs that often drive repeated system involvement.

Individuals and families are connected to long-term case management, resources and support in areas such as housing, mental health care, substance use treatment and basic needs assistance. Since early 2023, program referrals have increased more than 15 times, and engagement more than 16 times, with engagement in services consistently holding between 83-89%.

Thank you to all our local referral agencies for their continued partnership. Their collaboration ensures faster access to services and strengthens the DIVERT Program's ability to support Columbia residents effectively.

1,512 REFERRALS

Total referrals
(Jan 2023 - Oct 2025)

1,258 ENGAGED

Total referrals successfully
engaged in case management
and supportive services

15-16X GROWTH

In referrals and engagement
(respectively) since early 2023

**60+ REFERRAL
AGENCIES**



"A compassionate approach to justice"

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Background

The DIVERT Program launched on January 1, 2023, with a public media announcement alongside the Homeless Outreach Team Officers on May 8, 2024.



Columbia Daily Tribune, 2024

Program Goals



Connecting referrals to long-term case management, resources and support



Reducing burden on public safety and justice

- Lessen repeat interactions
- Practicing trauma-informed care
- Utilizing data to anticipate higher needs and intercept sooner



Creating just and accessible communities

“By connecting individuals to services, the DIVERT Program lessens the demand a small group of people place on public safety resources. While the citizens served receive the primary benefit, the program has a secondary benefit of improving operational efficiency. It frees officers to provide better service across the city, and reducing these recurring interactions helps limit the frustration that can build when officers are called to the same individuals again and again. Finding ways to lessen those repeated calls supports the Police Department’s long-term retention goals.”

— Mark Fitzgerald, Assistant Police Chief

Program Overview

The DIVERT Program accepts referrals for individuals and families with health and social needs from City public safety agencies.

Typical service areas and populations served include:

- Basic needs
- Homelessness/housing instability
- Unsafe living conditions
- Substance misuse
- Health/medical/mental health
- Family/children
- Veterans
- Elderly/aging/disabled

Watch a quick video about the program using [this link](#) or QR code



The DIVERT Program focuses on **three core initiatives**.

Community Support Docket

DIVERT Case Coordinators act as a liaison between the court system and people with misdemeanors who are unsheltered, at risk for shelter and/or veterans

Public Safety Diversion Program

DIVERT Case Coordinators receive referrals from City public safety agencies regarding individuals or families with health and social needs

Familiar Faces Program

DIVERT Case Coordinators work with high utilizers of public safety agencies and the justice system to provide more intensive case management with the goal of reducing repeat interactions

Community Support Docket

The Community Support Docket is an **alternative court process** within Columbia's Municipal Court designed for people facing homelessness, housing instability, or veterans charged with local misdemeanors. This docket connects participants to the support they need to move forward.

Participants work with a team that includes the judge, prosecutor, police officers and DIVERT Program staff to **set personal goals**. Goals can include:

- ◆ Finding housing
- ◆ Accessing health care
- ◆ Maintaining sobriety

DIVERT Program staff provide ongoing case management, linking participants to community resources and tracking progress toward their goals.

This approach helps people **address the underlying issues** that lead to repeated contact with the justice system.

By replacing fines and jail time with structured support and accountability, the Community Support Docket helps residents **rebuild stability, improve their well-being, and strengthen community safety**.



Columbia Municipal Court building

Community Support Docket Success Story

“Calvin” – Journey to Sobriety

When Calvin first entered the Municipal Court’s Community Support Docket, he faced numerous challenges—legal concerns, lack of a driver’s license, unstable housing, and no consistent support system. Still, he had a vision for a better future and the determination to achieve it.

Working with DIVERT, Calvin created a structured plan centered on three key goals:

1. **Regaining his driver’s license**
2. **Securing safe and affordable housing**
3. **Engaging in Drug Court to maintain sobriety**



With guidance from the municipal court team, DIVERT Case Coordinators, and community partners (Love Columbia, Voluntary Action Center, and Room at the Inn), these goals became his roadmap to stability and independence.

As resources were mobilized, Calvin remained committed—participating in sobriety services, attending court regularly, and providing consistent progress updates. **Over time, he met each of his goals: he secured housing, reinstated his license, and successfully completed Drug Court.**

This success was made possible through collaboration between the Community Support Docket, DIVERT Program staff, and dedicated local partners, who focused on his strengths and built lasting systems of support. With his case now dismissed, Calvin stands on a foundation of recovery, stability, and renewed independence.

His story reflects the power of community-based justice—proving that when compassion and accountability work hand in hand, individuals can truly rebuild their lives and contribute to a stronger, healthier community for all.

Public Safety Diversion Program

City public safety agencies can refer individuals or families with health and social needs to the DIVERT Program. Agencies making referrals include Police and Fire departments, Office of Neighborhood Services, Animal Control, Environmental Health and MU Community Paramedics.

Agencies use an online referral portal to notify DIVERT Case Coordinators and identify the service areas an individual or family may need.

Service Areas	Examples
Basic Needs	Food, clothing, rental/mortgage/utility assistance
Homelessness / Housing Instability	On the streets, in a car, transitional housing
Unsafe Living Conditions	Hoarding, landlord/tenant issues, access issues
Family and Children	Family/child counseling, parenting resources, education
Veterans	VA benefits, PTSD, spouse/survivor benefits
Elderly/Disabled	Maintaining independence, disability services, social security, Medicare
Substance Misuse	Previous/current addiction, substance misuse counseling, recovery programs
Health/Medical	Healthcare access, dental, health insurance
Mental Health	Anxiety, depression, irrational thoughts

Public Safety Diversion Program Success Story

“Marc” — From Crisis to Care

In December, the Columbia Fire Department responded to a devastating situation involving Marc, an unsheltered individual whose car—his temporary home—caught fire. The Fire Department quickly extinguished the flames, ensured he received immediate emergency medical care and demonstrated their commitment to ongoing support by referring Marc to DIVERT.

DIVERT Case Coordinators promptly followed up, connecting Marc with essential community services. Through this coordinated response, he received medical treatment, mental health support, and assistance with housing.

Today, Marc is working closely with a housing assessment team, attending regular medical appointments, and receiving ongoing mental health care. His resilience, combined with the commitment of the Columbia Fire Department, DIVERT Program staff, and local community partners, highlights the power of collaboration in helping residents rebuild their lives.

This case stands as a strong example of what is possible when compassion, quick action, and partnership come together to transform a crisis into lasting stability.

“ The DIVERT program is one of the most effective examples of collaboration in our community. Every day, our firefighters and paramedics see that emergencies often stem from deeper social or behavioral health challenges. DIVERT helps us connect people to long-term solutions instead of just temporary fixes. It’s a partnership that truly reduces repeat calls for service, improves outcomes, and builds a stronger, healthier Columbia.”

— Brian Schaeffer, Fire Chief, Columbia Fire Department

Familiar Faces Program

This program expands on the Public Safety Diversion Program by identifying and serving frequent utilizers of our public safety agencies and justice system.

Familiar Faces, an initiative from the National Association of Counties (NACo), works to identify people in local health and justice systems who have recurring behavioral health needs. By improving coordination and data sharing between these systems, the program helps interrupt the cycles that many of these individuals experience. While the National Program concluded, many other counties still work to implement a Familiar Faces Program within their jurisdictions.

In Columbia, the DIVERT Program adapts the Familiar Faces initiative by using public safety and justice data instead of health data. Through referrals from city public safety and justice agencies, individuals who meet the Familiar Faces criteria are identified to better connect them with needed services.

To be considered a Familiar Face, a person must meet one of these criteria:

- They have three or more calls for help from the same type of service (like police, fire, or environmental health) within one month.
- They have two or more calls involving different types of services within one month.

DIVERT Program staff provides more intensive case management services for up to 18 months, with the goal of reducing repeat public safety interactions and supporting long-term stability for those identified through the program.

Over the past 18 months ...

104

FAMILIAR FACES IDENTIFIED

On average, participants remain engaged in case management for

~13

MONTHS

91

CURRENTLY ENROLLED

in case management services

Among those enrolled,

82%

REPORT POSITIVE LINKAGE

to needed services and supports

DIVERT Program staff often work with individuals who are unsheltered. To find out more about people experiencing homelessness check out the *2024 State of Homelessness Report* using [this link](#) or QR code.



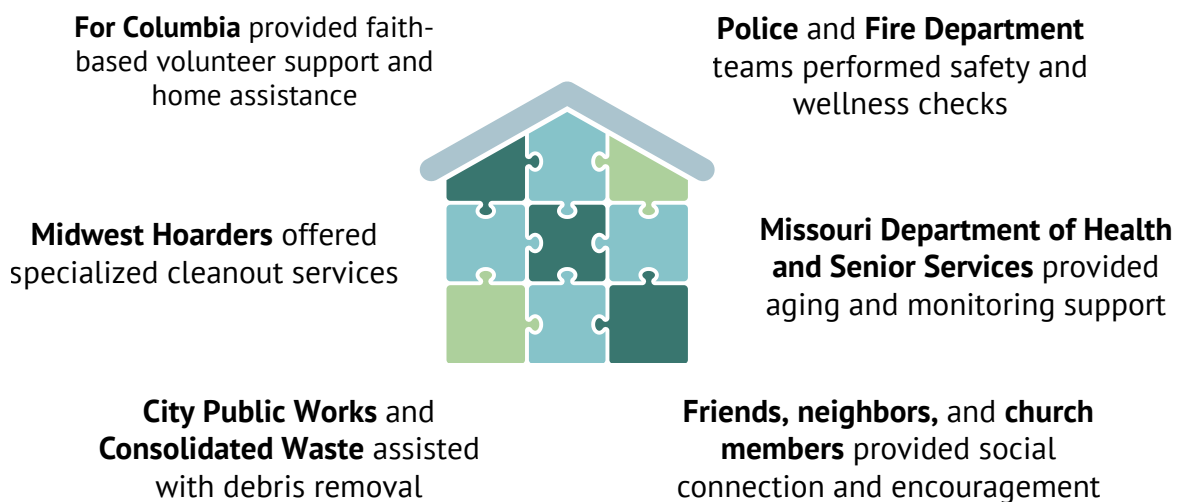
Familiar Faces Program

Success Story

“Ruth” – Aging in Place with Dignity

When the **Office of Neighborhood Services** (ONS) first visited Ruth’s home, the concern appeared simple: outdoor property maintenance. Upon arrival staff quickly realized the issue went far deeper. Their compassion and awareness revealed broader concerns about health, safety, and the ability of an elderly resident to continue living independently in the home she loved.

ONS connected with the DIVERT Program for additional support. Together they identified a range of needs. The response became a true community collaboration.



This network transformed her home into a safe, comfortable space where she could continue living independently. Today, Ruth enjoys a healthier and more secure living environment as well as a strengthened support network that reduces her reliance on emergency services.

Her story demonstrates how city teams, nonprofits, state agencies and neighbors can come together to help residents thrive.

Referral Process

Referral Submission

Public safety teams enter basic information about the individual and their needs into an internal City referral system. DIVERT Case Coordinators are automatically notified via email.

Case Updates and Closure

Progress is documented in the system, keeping the referring agency informed, until the individual's immediate needs are addressed, or they are connected to long-term case management.

Case Assigned

DIVERT Case Coordinators review the referral, reach out to the individual, and begin linking them to housing, health and community resources.



DIVERT team members Josh, Janie, and Jay-Dee



The DIVERT Program is different by design. It fills a critical gap that traditional justice and public safety systems aren't structured to address. By meeting people where they are, DIVERT connects community members who are in need of social services to real solutions. Our growing infrastructure ensures these connections are coordinated and sustainable, and our data systems will continue to demonstrate the long-term value of this work.”

— Janie Ridgwell, DIVERT Public Safety and Justice Case Coordinator

Program Impact

Figure 1: DIVERT referrals by City public safety agency from January 2023 through October 2025

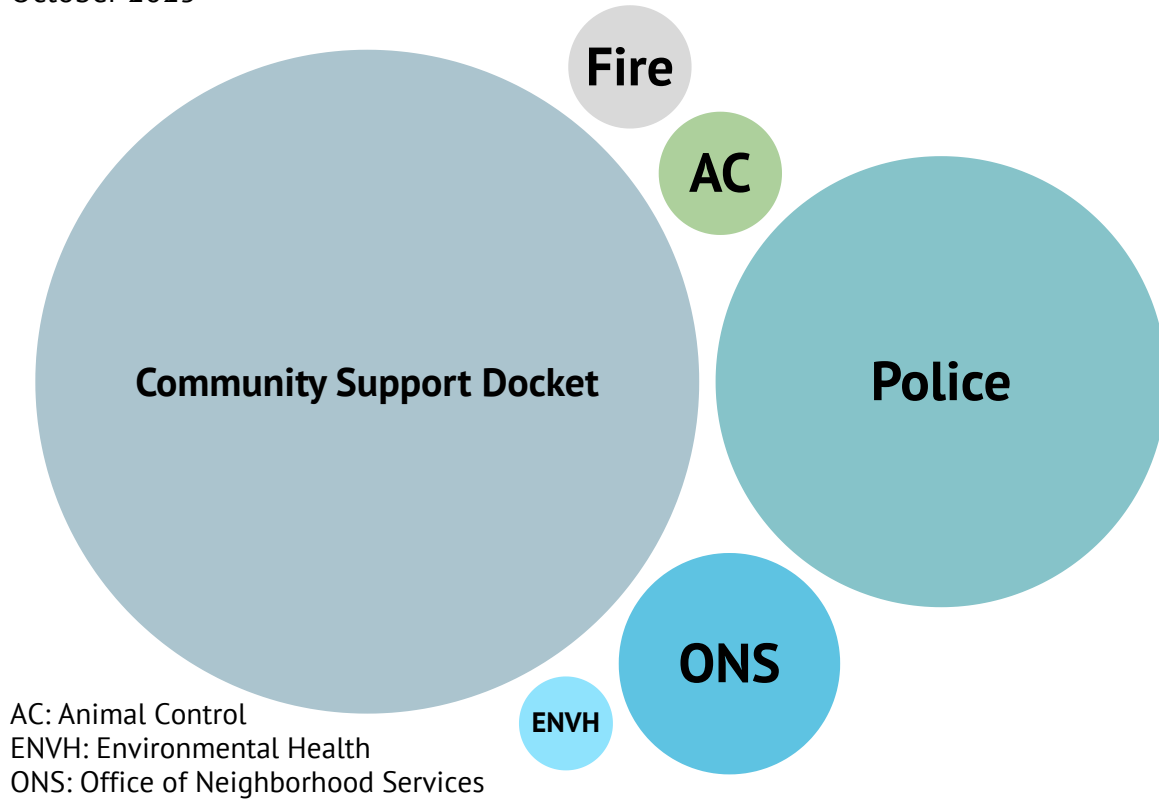


Figure 1 shows the majority of referrals originating from the Community Support Docket and Police Department, reflecting strong collaboration between justice and public safety partners in identifying residents who would benefit from the DIVERT Program.

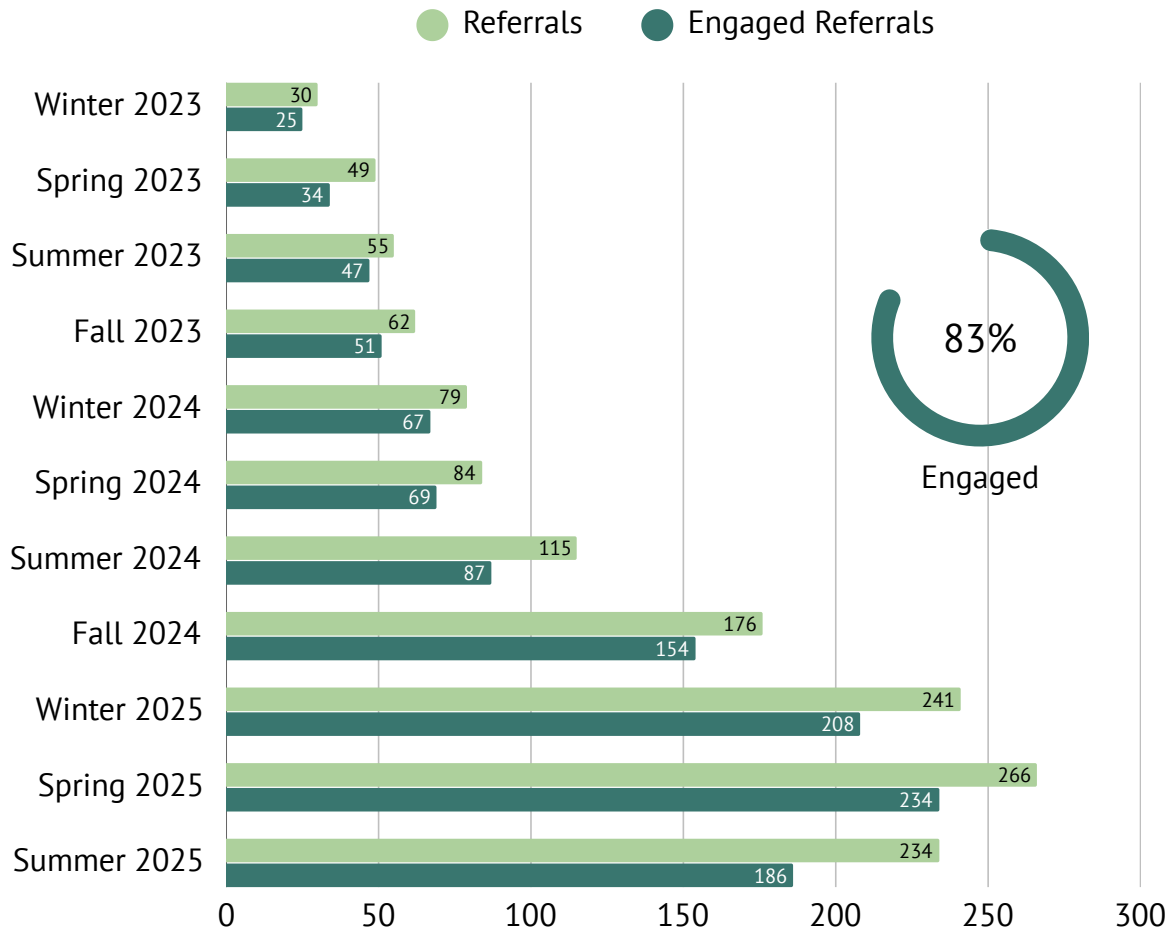
Office of Neighborhood Services, Fire (ONS), Animal Control (AC), Environmental Health (ENVH) and the City Manager's Office also continue to provide valuable referrals, ensuring that residents across a range of needs are connected to the program.

1,512

**DIVERT Referrals
from January 2023 to
October 2025**

Program Impact

Figure 2: Number of DIVERT Referrals and Engaged Referrals



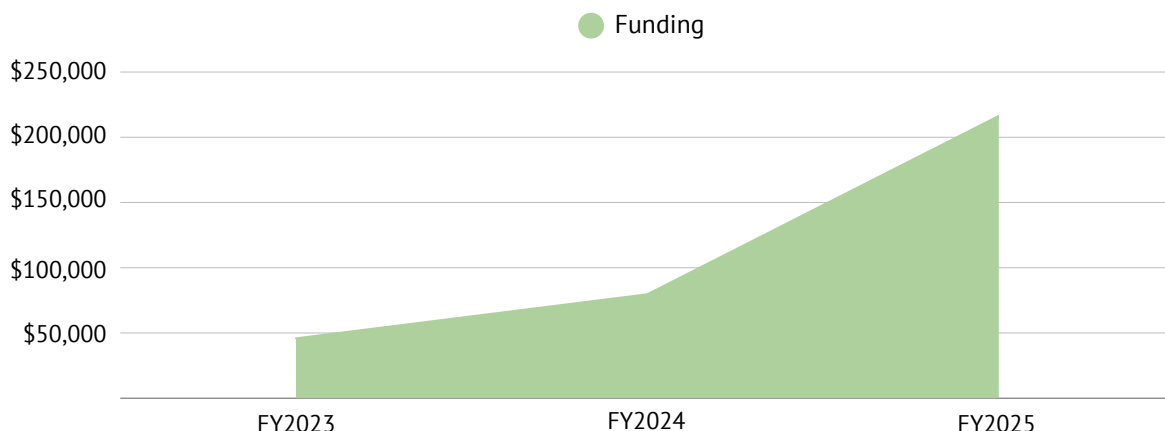
Referral: an unduplicated individual or family who has been referred once in the last month

Engaged Referral: an individual working with DIVERT staff or long-term case worker communicating on their behalf to DIVERT staff

Referrals and engaged referrals have grown steadily over time, with a significant increase beginning in Fall 2024 when the Columbia Police Department became the first City agency to pilot the online referral portal. Throughout this period, 83% of referrals resulted in engagement with DIVERT Case Coordinators, demonstrating strong connection and follow-through. Most recently, October 2025 data show continued upward momentum, with 121 referrals and 84 engaged referrals.

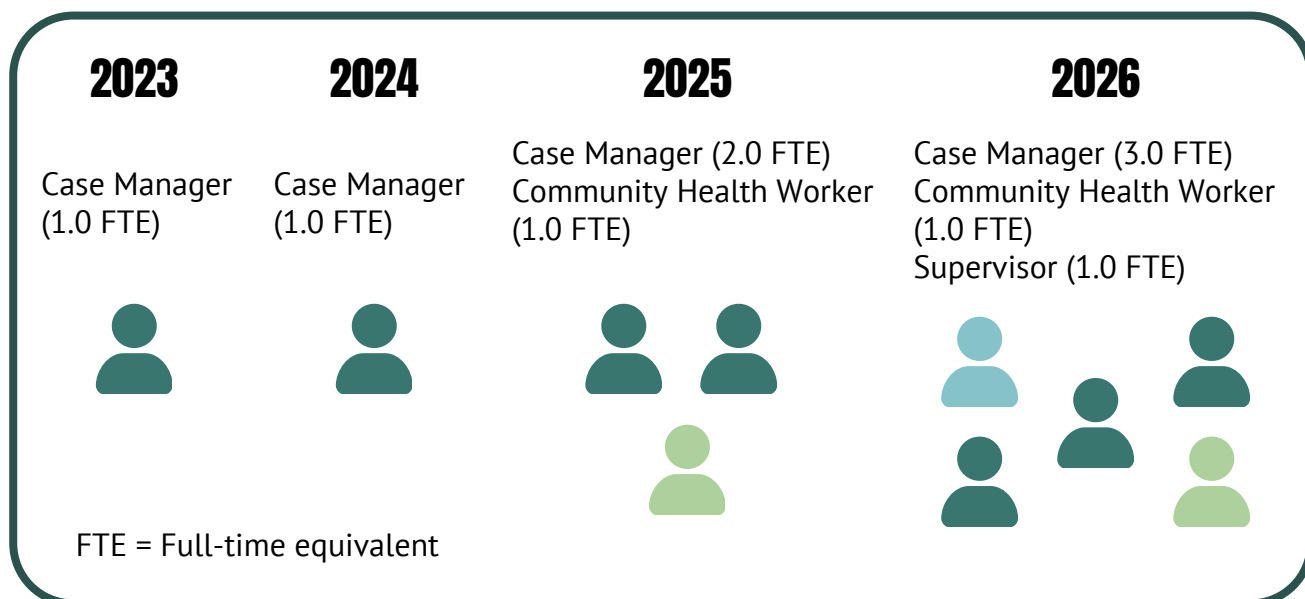
Program Growth

Figure 3: City Budget for DIVERT Program



Includes salary and fringe covering all intergovernmental fees. The City fiscal year restarts every October.

Figure 4: DIVERT Program Staffing



Figures 3 and 4 show continued growth and reach of the program. Increases in client referrals, funding, and staffing reflect both the community's need for these services and the program's proven effectiveness in reducing repeated public safety contacts and improving outcomes for residents.

Referral Agencies - Thank You!

The DIVERT Program extends sincere gratitude to the many referral agencies who make this work possible. By providing timely access to essential services, these agencies help ensure that clients are connected to support quickly and effectively.

Their partnership not only improves outcomes for the individuals and families served but also allows DIVERT Program staff to dedicate more time and attention to the Familiar Faces program, providing intensive case management to those with the most complex needs.

AAAA-Change, LLC	Lutheran Family and Children's Services
Aging Best	Meals on Wheels Columbia, MO
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri	MedZou Community Health Clinic
Boone County Family Resources	Memorial Baptist Church
Boys and Girls Clubs of Columbia	Mid-Missouri Legal Services
Burrell Behavioral Health	Missouri Connections for Health
Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri	Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
Central Missouri Community Action	MU Family Impact Center
Central Missouri Humane Society	My Life Clinic
City of Refuge	New Horizons Community Support Services, Inc.
Clarity Healthcare	OATS Transit
Columbia Housing Authority	Planned Parenthood
Columbia Public Schools	Race Matters, Friends
CoMo Mobile Aid Collective	Reentry Opportunity Center (The ROC)
Compass Health	Room at the Inn COMO
Connections to Success	Safe Families for Children- Bethany Christian
Daniel Boone Regional Library	Services for Independent Living
DeafLEAD	Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Inc.
Family Access Center of Excellence (FACE)	Spectrum Healthcare - Missouri
First/Last Mile Valet Transportation Services	St. Vincent de Paul
First Chance for Children	The Food Bank Market
Flourish Initiative	The Loveseat
For Columbia	The Salvation Army Columbia
Fresh Start Sober Living Programs	The Wardrobe
Good Dads Columbia	Turning Point
Habitat for Humanity	True North of Columbia
Impact Support Services	Unchained Melodies Dog Rescue
Job Point	University of Missouri School of Law
Loaves & Fishes	Veteran's Affairs- Healthcare for Homeless Veterans
Love Columbia	Voluntary Action Center



Thank you to our City Public Safety and Justice Agencies including the Columbia Police Department, Columbia Fire Department, Office of Neighborhood Services, Animal Control, Environmental Health, and the Municipal Court's Community Support Docket. Your dedication, compassion, and consistent collaboration make it possible for the DIVERT Program to connect residents with the care and support they need. We are deeply grateful for your partnership and commitment to improving community well-being.



DIVERT has quickly become one of our community's most impactful tools for addressing complex behavioral and social issues. By pairing emergency responders and court systems with a caseworker who can identify the underlying social and health needs, we're able to support residents in a more meaningful and sustainable way. This program doesn't just reduce calls for service—it strengthens stability, safety, and overall well-being for individuals and for Columbia as a whole. **DIVERT is a powerful reminder that when we meet people where they are, we can change the trajectory of their lives."**

Rebecca Roesslet, Columbia/Boone County
Public Health and Human Services Director

Questions about this report?



Reach out to the DIVERT Program: **DIVERT@como.gov**

Appendix

Additional Success Stories

“James” – Building Stability Through Connection

When James was first referred to the DIVERT Program, he was experiencing homelessness and lacked basic needs resources, including identification documents essential to move forward. His frequent interactions with public safety and the justice system led to his enrollment in DIVERT’s **Familiar Faces Program** – an 18-month program providing follow-up and resource connection. His referral came through both the **Community Support Docket** and the **Columbia Police Department**, underscoring the power of cross-system collaboration.

From the start, James was eager to engage. With support from his DIVERT Community Health Worker, he connected with **Love Columbia** to meet basic needs and **Bike to the Future** through **Local Motion** to secure transportation. Having a bike transformed his daily life, allowing him to attend appointments, access services, and build independence.

Since enrollment, James has achieved major milestones:

- Obtaining his birth certificate
- Caring for his companions
- Maintaining steady employment
- Joining a local church community where he has built meaningful support

His dedication was recognized in the Community Support Docket, where **his case was ultimately dismissed** due to his consistent progress and engagement. Now, as he continues through his 18-month program, James’s story reflects resilience and the impact of strong community partnerships in creating lasting change.




“Sarah” – A Journey of Resilience and Recovery

In early January 2025, the DIVERT Program was connected with Sarah, a woman in her 30s, through a referral from the **Columbia Police Department** and the **Municipal Court’s Community Support Docket**. At the time, she was experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, and substance use, all compounded by the recent loss of a loved one facing similar struggles.

DIVERT staff began by addressing her most immediate needs—food, warm clothing, and emotional support as she navigated profound grief. Over time she engaged more fully with the program. DIVERT connected Sarah to counseling and grief support, addiction treatment at **Burrell Phoenix Clinic**, and healthcare services, while providing consistent case management to guide her through each step. Collaboration with **Burrell Behavioral Health** played a key role in supporting her ongoing mental health recovery.

As a familiar face within the system, Sarah will remain enrolled in DIVERT’s 18-month case management program to ensure continued support and stability.

Today, her life looks remarkably different. She has completed her sobriety program, is working with her case manager toward stable housing and employment, and is surrounded by supportive family and friends who help her maintain her progress. Reflecting on her journey, Sarah shared:



“This help was so important at this point in my life when I was at my lowest and couldn’t find sobriety on my own.”

Sarah’s story is a powerful reminder that every step forward matters. It highlights the strength of community-based care and DIVERT’s commitment to meeting people where they are.