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## Treatment intervention works

But it's getting harder to provide in Volusia and Flagler

In this community, local providers of addiction treatment, mental health counseling or services for juvenile delinquents have learned how to make their case.

They can pull out charts showing how early intervention saves money -- and lives. They can demonstrate, in dollars and in case numbers, how the public benefits from having these services in the community. They can estimate -- with surprising accuracy -- the anguish saved by victims of crimes that never happened, the jail cells that don't have to be constructed, the emergency commitments that never take place and the young lives that stay on track because people have access to services that help fend off disaster.

And for years, that meticulous accounting has helped attract state and federal support for services in Volusia and Flagler counties -- far beyond what communities of this size might otherwise have.

But lately, it hasn't been enough. Crushing funding cuts have forced Act Corp., the largest local provider of mental-health services, to close facilities. Stewart Marchman Center is building a Flagler County facility but now is unsure it will get enough funding to operate all the beds. Juvenile services across both counties have dwindled as state funding has lagged behind the cost of living.

Recognizing the benefits of intervention, local leaders are already stepping up their efforts. Volusia County has put money toward two jail alternative programs, including one intended for a facility Act vacated last year. Meanwhile, Flagler County is looking toward investing in measures intended to prevent families from becoming homeless. Local child-welfare advocates announced a program, beginning in July, that will attempt to bolster struggling families and keep children out of foster care.

In each of these instances, local leaders have already made the commitment to take up slack left when state and federal funding sources shriveled. They recognized that -- left ignored -- untreated mental illness, addiction, family violence and juvenile delinquency have the potential to make life miserable for the entire community. And they acknowledged that these problems are often intertwined.

But the property-tax amendment passed last week by voters will make it difficult for local leaders to do more -- or even keep up current efforts -- from their existing budgets. Without a better source of revenue, Volusia and Flagler counties stand to lose all the ground they've gained. And we will all be the poorer for it.

## In their own words

Joseph Will

The judiciary does not actually provide social services, but we are extremely dependent upon them in the day to day operation of our family, juvenile and criminal courtrooms. When social services are inadequate or unavailable in our community, the courts are left with little in the way of restorative or rehabilitative solutions. The alternatives to social services are truly unacceptable -- our children, poor, elderly, mentally ill and addicted are left to be either ignored or incarcerated. It simply is not reasonable to expect a legal system to deliver acceptable results with an unacceptable array of services for those appearing daily in our courts. Many are in desperate need of a helping hand and our answer is to offer jail or prison.

At the root of our problem is the current method of funding these services. Each year the service agencies spend entirely too much of their limited resources fighting for table scraps in the form of grants, and then begging and currying favor from legislators to continue their existence. It is absolutely insane to try to sustain social services with inconsistent funding sources.

*Will, a circuit judge, oversees Drug Court in Volusia County, a program that helps people charged with drug-related offenses stay out of trouble. The program has posted a 75 percent success rate over 10 years.*

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