

# Navigating Information Sharing The Role of the District Attorney

Written By | John Rosiak | Thomas Zugibe

## BACKGROUND

THE LEADERS OF ROCKLAND COUNTY, NY—A DIVERSE AMALGAM OF WORKING CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS THAT MAKES UP A BEDROOM COMMUNITY FOR MANY OF NEW YORK CITY'S PUBLIC SERVANTS—HAD A PROBLEM WHEN IT CAME TO YOUNG PEOPLE. THEY KNEW THAT EACH AGENCY THAT SERVED YOUTH—JUVENILE PROBATION, SOCIAL SERVICES, MENTAL HEALTH, AND THE SCHOOLS—HAD INFORMATION ABOUT THE YOUTH INVOLVED IN EACH OF THOSE SYSTEMS. BUT EVERY AGENCY WAS NOT READILY SHARING INFORMATION. WHEN A YOUNG PERSON WAS INVOLVED IN ONE OF THE COUNTY'S SYSTEMS, INFORMATION WAS GATHERED IN A PARTICULAR WAY, GOVERNED BY PARTICULAR FEDERAL OR STATE LAWS, AS WELL AS REQUIREMENTS OF THE STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES. WHETHER AND HOW SUCH INFORMATION COULD BE SHARED LEGALLY WAS NOT CLEAR. CONCERN IN THE COMMUNITY ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY OF A STUDENT'S INFORMATION—FOSTERED BY INCREASED ATTENTION TO THE PRIVACY ISSUE IN A POST-SNOWDEN ERA—WAS PALPABLE. THE COUNTY'S QUANDARY IS COMMON IN COMMUNITIES AROUND THE U.S.

## ACTION

ROCKLAND COUNTY TOOK ACTION. THE APPROACH WAS SIMPLE: THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY, TOM ZUGIBE, RECOGNIZED THAT A BETTER SYSTEM WAS NEEDED. HE DID SOME RESEARCH AND FOUND THAT PRODUCTIVE WORK HAD BEEN DONE BY A NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES THAT GRAPPLED WITH THE COMPLEXITIES OF INFORMATION-SHARING LAWS AND PRACTICES. HE USED HIS CONVENING POWER TO BRING TOGETHER THE HEADS OF VARIOUS ROCKLAND COUNTY AGENCIES (SOCIAL SERVICES, PROBATION, MENTAL HEALTH, AND THE BOARD OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES SERVING THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS), THEIR KEY STAFF MEMBERS, REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD, AND STAFF FROM THE TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENTS OF EACH OF THE AGENCIES.

THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY INVITED JOHN ROSIAK, A NATIONAL ADVISOR WHO LED THE NAVIGATING INFORMATION SHARING EFFORT IN SUPPORT OF THE FEDERAL SAFE SCHOOLS/HEALTHY STUDENTS INITIATIVE, TO PRESENT AN OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED TO CREATE EFFECTIVE INFORMATION SHARING. FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION, THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE ASKED ROSIAK TO WORK WITH THE LEADERSHIP AND STAFF IN ROCKLAND COUNTY TO GUIDE THEM. BASED ON AN ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED BY INTERVIEWING THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY, THE CHIEF OF DETECTIVES, AND OTHER LEADERS IN ROCKLAND COUNTY, AN ACTION PLAN WAS DEVELOPED AND PUT INTO MOTION GUIDED BY REGULAR MEETINGS OF ROCKLAND COUNTY LEADERSHIP AND KEY STAFF MEMBERS.



PHOTO OF THE MACSHY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, ROCKLAND COUNTY, NY, TAKEN IN JANUARY, 2014 AFTER SIGNING A WORKING AGREEMENT

THROUGHOUT THE FALL OF 2013 AND SPRING OF 2014, THE AGENCY COMMISSIONERS, ALONG WITH KEY STAFF MEMBERS, CONTINUED TO MEET AT THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S INVITATION. THIS LEADERSHIP GROUP COMMITTED TO MONTHLY MEETINGS, CENTERING ON AGENDAS AND MATERIALS THAT WERE PREPARED WITH AN END IN MIND—MORE EFFICIENT SERVICES FOR THE COUNTY'S YOUTH. A LIVELY, ACTION-ORIENTED AGENDA, ALONG WITH THE PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND THE OTHER AGENCY HEADS, YIELDED HIGH PARTICIPATION RATES AT THE MONTHLY THREE-HOUR MEETINGS. PARTICIPANTS SAW THE VALUE OF THE WORK AND KEPT COMING.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

THE LEADERSHIP GROUP FORMED THE MULTI-AGENCY COLLABORATIVE FOR SAFE AND HEALTHY YOUTH (MACSHY), CONCENTRATING JUST AS MUCH ON COLLABORATION AND SYSTEMS INTEGRATION AMONG THE AGENCIES AS THE TECHNICALITIES OF INFORMATION SHARING. EARLY MEETINGS ADDRESSED THE INGREDIENTS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE INFORMATION SHARING,

# Navigating Information Sharing The Role of the District Attorney

INCLUDING DEFINING THE VISION AND MISSION, IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES AND KEY ISSUES, AND ARTICULATING AN ACTION PLAN AROUND ESSENTIAL STEPS FOR THE INFORMATION SHARING PROCESS. THE GROUP ADDRESSED HEAD ON THE ISSUE OF WHO NEEDS TO BE AT THE TABLE AND REAFFIRMED THE COMMITMENT TO KEEP WORKING TOGETHER. IN JANUARY OF 2014 THE GROUP'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SIGNED A WORKING AGREEMENT (DISCUSSED WITH THE LEGAL ADVISORS IN ROCKLAND COUNTY). [SEE PHOTO.] IN OTHER DISCUSSIONS THE GROUP: EXAMINED THE CASE FLOW AND PROTOCOLS THAT EACH AGENCY USES WHEN YOUTH ARE INVOLVED IN THAT SYSTEM; IDENTIFIED THE LAWS THAT APPLY TO EACH SYSTEM; SPECIFIED WHAT DATA SYSTEM EACH AGENCY USES; AND NAMED ROLES FOR LEADERSHIP AND STAFF. MEETINGS ALSO INCLUDED DISCUSSIONS ABOUT USING TECHNOLOGY TO POSSIBLY CREATE A "FEDERATED SYSTEM" CONNECTING THE DISPARATE INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN THE COUNTY; TOPICS INCLUDED THE PROTOCOLS OF EACH AGENCY'S SYSTEM AND RULES THAT MUST BE ARTICULATED SO THAT GOVERNANCE IS CLEAR TO SET UP TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS.

ONE OF THE GOALS IDENTIFIED BY THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GROUP EARLY ON IN THE PROCESS WAS SETTING UP A "CO-LOCATION CENTER" WHERE STAFF MEMBERS FROM THE DIFFERENT AGENCIES (SCHOOLS, MENTAL HEALTH, PROBATION, AND SOCIAL SERVICES) WERE PHYSICALLY WORKING AT THE SAME LOCATION. THIS PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFE YOUTH CENTER, OPENED IN THE FALL OF 2014, IS HOUSED IN SPACE DONATED BY THE SCHOOL DISTRICT, WITH FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT SUPPLIED BY THE DA'S OFFICE. SHARING A COMMON SPACE ALLOWS STAFF MEMBERS TO MORE EASILY SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT CASES AND SOLVE PROBLEMS OF COORDINATION ON THE SPOT (TACTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING). THE CENTER STAFF MEMBERS—WHO ARE COORDINATED BY A PART-TIME COORDINATOR FUNDED BY THE BOCES SCHOOL DISTRICT DURING THE START-UP PHASE—ARE ALSO TASKED TO IDENTIFY LARGER ISSUES AND TRENDS IN CASES THEY WERE SEEING SO THAT THE COUNTY COULD GET AHEAD OF BIG-PICTURE PROBLEMS (STRATEGIC PROBLEM SOLVING).

ONE MAJOR TASK WAS UNDERTAKEN TO FACILITATE INFORMATION SHARING FOR INDIVIDUALS IN MULTIPLE SYSTEMS. THIS INVOLVED TAKING THE MULTIPLE CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION FORMS USED IN THE COUNTY AND GETTING THEM DOWN TO ONE FORM. EACH AGENCY SUPPLIED THE DIFFERENT FORMS USED, WHICH IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFIED HOW MOST FORMS ASK FOR MUCH OF THE SAME INFORMATION. A LEGAL ANALYSIS WAS MADE TO ENSURE THAT THE INFORMATION AGENCIES WERE REQUIRED TO HAVE WAS INCLUDED ON THE NEW DRAFT. DRAFTS OF THE UNIFORM CONSENT FORM WERE DISTRIBUTED AND REVIEWED BY ATTORNEYS AND STAFF TO ENSURE BOTH LEGALITY AND EASE OF USE. THE GROUP DECIDED TO DEVELOP ONE CONSENT FORM THAT COVERED THE FOUR AGENCIES STAFFING THE CO-LOCATION CENTER, WITH ADDITIONAL SPACES FOR CLIENTS TO ADD OTHER AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THE CASE. COMMENTING ON THE EFFICIENCY OF WORKING WITH STAFF CO-LOCATED IN ONE CENTER, ALONG WITH USING A UNIFORM CONSENT FORM, ONE PROVIDER RECENTLY NOTED THAT "WE CAN NOW

ACCOMPLISH IN ONE HOUR WHAT WOULD HAVE TAKEN THREE MONTHS IN THE PAST!"

## LESSONS LEARNED

THE ROCKLAND COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND THE REST OF THE AGENCY LEADERSHIP RECOGNIZED EARLY IN THE PROCESS THAT THE TASK OF NAVIGATING INFORMATION SHARING IS REALLY A TASK OF CREATING MORE INTEGRATED SYSTEMS. THE FOUNDATION OF THIS WORK IS BUILT ON THE LEADERSHIP THAT CONVENES THE RIGHT PEOPLE, AND IN RELATIONSHIPS BUILT ON TRUST. ROCKLAND COUNTY HAS SUCH A FOUNDATION, AND ITS MULTI-AGENCY COLLABORATIVE FOR SAFE AND HEALTHY YOUTH IS COMMITTED TO CONTINUING THE WORK OF CREATING MORE EFFICIENT SYSTEMS. THE LESSONS LEARNED BY THE COUNTY'S COLLABORATIVE APPLY TO ANY JURISDICTION WANTING TO WORK TOGETHER MORE EFFICIENTLY TO NAVIGATE INFORMATION SHARING TO HELP YOUTH IN MULTIPLE SYSTEMS. LESSONS FOR LEADERS INCLUDE:

- ▮ MAKE SURE THE RIGHT PEOPLE ARE REPRESENTED BY EXAMINING WHICH LEADERS AND STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO BE INVOLVED AND WHAT ROLES THEY CAN CARRY OUT.
- ▮ USE THE POWER OF WHAT SOCIAL LEARNING EXPERT ETIENNE WENGER CALLS "LEADING BY CONVENING" TO HELP NURTURE THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT CAN OVERCOME THE BARRIERS THAT COMMUNITIES FACE. DISTRICT ATTORNEYS OR PROSECUTORS WHO WANT TO EFFECTIVELY NAVIGATE INFORMATION SHARING LAWS AND PRACTICES TO INCREASE THEIR COMMUNITY'S EFFICIENCY IN SERVING YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN MULTIPLE SYSTEMS CAN PLAY THE CRITICAL ROLE OF CONVENER.
- ▮ BUILD TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PARTNERS. FOR EXAMPLE, IN ROCKLAND COUNTY, NY INTER-AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS ARE A CORNERSTONE OF ROCKLAND COUNTY'S INITIATIVE ON INTELLIGENCE LED POLICING THROUGH COMMUNITY POLICING, COMMUNITY PROSECUTION, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (IL3CP).
- ▮ TAKE THE TIME FOR EACH AGENCY TO MAP OUT THE PROCESS THEY USE FOR CASES INVOLVING YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES. HAVE AGENCY STAFF SHARE THESE PROCESSES WITH THEIR COLLEAGUES FROM DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS, WHICH WILL REVEAL DUPLICATION AND POSSIBILITIES FOR GREATER EFFICIENCIES.
- ▮ DEFINE THE ROLES FOR STAFF THAT DEAL WITH SERVICES, THOSE WHO DEAL WITH DATA, AND LEADERSHIP; AND FORCE PARTNERS TO IDENTIFY KEY QUESTIONS, E.G. WHO WANTS WHAT INFORMATION FOR WHAT PURPOSE. THESE QUESTIONS MUST BE ANSWERED TO BETTER DEFINE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, AS WELL AS TO DEVELOP ANY TECHNOLOGY THAT MIGHT BE USED.

# Navigating Information Sharing The Role of the District Attorney

|| CONDUCT A LEGAL ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATION SHARING LAWS GOVERNING EACH AGENCY, WITH AN EYE TOWARD FIGURING OUT HOW INFORMATION CAN BE LEGALLY SHARED, RATHER THAN THE HISTORICAL VIEW THAT THE LAW IS AN INSURMOUNTABLE ROADBLOCK. ENGAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIFORM AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION THAT MEETS LEGAL REQUIREMENTS.

|| CONDUCT AN INVENTORY OF EXISTING DATA SOURCES THAT EACH AGENCY PRESENTLY MAINTAINS. SHARE THESE DATA WITH LEADERSHIP/STAFF FROM OTHER AGENCIES, WHICH WILL HELP CREATE A SENSE OF “COLLECTIVE IMPACT” AS THE GROUP ATTENDS TO EVALUATION OF THE COORDINATED EFFORTS.

|| DEVELOP WAYS TO TRAIN STAKEHOLDERS IN CROSS-DISCIPLINARY SETTINGS SO THAT STAFF MEMBERS UNDERSTAND THE LEGALITIES AND PRACTICALITIES OF HOW INFORMATION CAN BE SHARED TO GET YOUTH IN MULTIPLE SYSTEMS THE HELP THEY NEED.

ROCKLAND COUNTY MAY HAVE HAD A PROBLEM WITH YOUNG PEOPLE. BUT THE VISION OF ITS DISTRICT ATTORNEY, ALONG WITH THE LEADERSHIP OF THE AGENCIES IN THE COUNTY, HAS CHARTED A COURSE TO STRENGTHEN THEIR COLLABORATION AND NAVIGATE THE INFORMATION SHARING PROCESS AND CREATE THE SYSTEMS CHANGE NEEDED TO BETTER SERVE YOUTH IN MULTIPLE SYSTEMS.

ANY COMMUNITY THAT WANTS TO MORE EFFICIENTLY SERVE ITS YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MAY BE IN MULTIPLE SYSTEMS CAN ENGAGE IN THE ESSENTIAL STEPS OUTLINED ABOVE. THIS COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY INCLUDES BUILDING ON WHATEVER A COMMUNITY HAS ACCOMPLISHED IN THIS PROCESS, THEN EMPLOYING A FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO CREATE MORE INTEGRATED SYSTEMS THAT SERVE YOUTH MORE EFFICIENTLY.

AUTHORS: THOMAS P. ZUGIBE HAS BEEN THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY FOR ROCKLAND COUNTY, NY FOR SEVEN YEARS. HE IS A MEMBER OF APA'S PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL. JOHN ROSIAK IS FOUNDER OF PREVENTION PARTNERSHIPS, ROSIAK ASSOCIATES, LLC, AND HAS A BACKGROUND THAT SPANS EDUCATION, LAW ENFORCEMENT, JUVENILE JUSTICE, AND MENTAL HEALTH. ROCKLAND COUNTY ASKED JOHN TO LEAD THE MACSHY COLLABORATIVE PROCESS.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN ROSIAK IS AN EDUCATOR/FACILITATOR/TRAINER WHO WORKS AS A “BOUNDARY SPANNER” USING HIS EXTENSIVE CROSS-SECTOR EXPERIENCE TO HELP SCHOOL, LAW ENFORCEMENT, JUSTICE, MENTAL HEALTH, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS BREAK OUT OF THEIR SILOS TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AROUND SAFE AND HEALTHY YOUTH. HE HAS WORKED IN A VARIETY OF EDUCATION POSITIONS FOR OVER 30 YEARS, INCLUDING DIRECTING SUBSTANCE ABUSE, CRIME, AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORTS. JOHN HAS CREATED AND MANAGED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EFFORTS, MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION PROJECTS, AND OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS THAT HAVE SERVED THE LOCAL, STATE, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS. JOHN LED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NAVIGATING INFORMATION SHARING EFFORT FOR THE FEDERAL SAFE SCHOOLS/HEALTHY STUDENTS INITIATIVE. CURRENTLY, JOHN IS PRINCIPAL OF ROSIAK ASSOCIATES, LLC, AND CAN BE REACHED AT: [JOHN@ROSIKASSOCIATES.COM](mailto:JOHN@ROSIKASSOCIATES.COM)

**ASSOCIATION OF PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS**

1615 L STREET NW, SUITE 1100  
WASHINGTON, DC 20036  
202-861-2480 • [www.APAInc.org](http://www.APAInc.org)

**BOARD MEMBERS**

JOHN T. CHISHOLM, CHAIRMAN  
PAUL L. HOWARD, VICE CHAIRMAN  
DAVID LABAHN, PRESIDENT  
THOMAS CARR, SECRETARY  
STEVEN NAUGLE, TREASURER  
RISA VETRI FERMAN, DIRECTOR  
MIKE FEUER, DIRECTOR  
ROD UNDERHILL, DIRECTOR  
DAN SATTERBERG, DIRECTOR  
SETH WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR  
CYRUS R. VANCE, JR., DIRECTOR

**STAFF**

DAVID LABAHN, PRESIDENT/CEO  
STEVEN JANSEN, VICE-PRESIDENT/COO  
ROBERT HOOD, COMMUNITY PROSECUTION DIRECTOR  
MELISSA BOROFSKY, COUNSEL  
D. NICHOLE THOMPSON, DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL  
ERICA MCWHORTER, DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL  
BIANCA WILLIAMS, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

**MISSION**

SUPPORT AND ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF  
PROSECUTORS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO CREATE SAFER  
COMMUNITIES.

INTERESTED IN FUTURE NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS  
OR WANT TO HELP HIGHLIGHT AN INNOVATIVE  
PROGRAM? PLEASE CONTACT STEVEN JANSEN AT  
[STEVEN.JANSEN@APAINC.ORG](mailto:STEVEN.JANSEN@APAINC.ORG).

FOR OTHER TRAININGS AND WEBINARS PLEASE REFER  
TO THE APA WEBSITE  
[APAINC.ORG](http://APAINC.ORG)

**FACEBOOK**

CONNECT WITH US THROUGH OUR FACEBOOK  
FANPAGE AT: [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/APAINC](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/APAINC)

**TWITTER**

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER FOR NEWS AND OTHER  
UPDATES: [WWW.TWITTER.COM/APAINC](http://WWW.TWITTER.COM/APAINC)

THIS PROJECT WAS SUPPORTED BY GRANT No. 2012-DP-BX-K012 AWARDED BY THE BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE. THE BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE IS A COMPONENT OF THE OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS, WHICH ALSO INCLUDES THE BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE, THE OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION, THE SMART OFFICE, AND THE OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR AND DO NOT REPRESENT THE OFFICIAL POSITION OR POLICIES OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE.