

Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants: Making a Difference in Arizona

The Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) is responsible for coordinating a statewide strategy on drug control and related gang and violent crime activity. To accomplish the goals set out in the *2004-2007 Strategy: Arizona Drug, Gang and Violent Crime Control*, ACJC awards grants to 16 task forces around the state and 15 tandem prosecution projects. Much of this grant funding to local law enforcement and prosecution is derived from federal dollars awarded through the Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) program.

Byrne/JAG is the result of a consolidation of two former programs: the Edward J. Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Formula Grant program and the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant programs. In November 2004, Congress consolidated these two programs and significantly reduced funding for FFY 05. The program is administered at the federal level through the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) within the Justice Department. The new JAG program not only consolidated the programs and reduced funding, but the program added a new wrinkle: the Bureau of Justice Assistance administered 40 percent of the state funds directly to larger local units of government, while 60 percent of the funding is administered at the state level by ACJC. Given this requirement, the amount of funding directed toward the state strategy was reduced by 37 percent from the previous federal fiscal year.

States struggled to make the necessary changes to their programs to conform to the new guidelines and to figure out how to sustain program service levels while facing reduced federal funding. State administering agencies, such as ACJC, had to work with locals to prepare them for the possibility of further cuts. This possibility became reality when Congress further cut Byrne/JAG funding for FFY 06.

Arizona, as a southwest border state, faces challenges with respect to international drug trafficking from Mexico. At a time when the state has realized an increase in methamphetamine smuggling across its borders with Mexico and California, a reduction in federal funding targeting drug smugglers is a hardship for law enforcement.

The Byrne/JAG-funded task forces have had proven results. Millions of dollars worth of narcotics have been removed from Arizona highways; much of the drugs trafficked through Arizona are destined for markets in other states. Marijuana fields have been eradicated. Methamphetamine labs have been shut down. Drug addicts have successfully completed Byrne-funded drug courts and remained clean. Drug traffickers have been successfully prosecuted and their non-drug assets have been seized. ACJC publishes these results in its Annual Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants status report, available online at www.azcjc.gov.

Following are brief profiles of several success stories resulting from efforts funded by the Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants program. While the quantitative data is available in the above-named annual report, the following success stories illustrate first-hand the accomplishments of the task forces, prosecution projects and drug courts funded under the Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants program.



MARIJUANA FARM IN THE COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST

The danger of marijuana in Arizona's backcountry is not smoking it, but



stumbling across it. If a hiker had stumbled upon the marijuana farm that the Gila County Narcotics Task Force shut down in the Calf Pen Canyon area of the Coconino National Forest in August 2005, there may have been a tragedy. The task force, funded through the Byrne/JAG program, had observed people patrolling the area with assault rifles. The task force kept it under surveillance, then moved in and made four arrests. The backcountry marijuana groves most often are placed in rough, hard-to-access wilderness areas that have a water supply. This was one of the largest growing operations found in Arizona; the task force removed 102,439 marijuana plants valued at \$84 million from a six-mile area.



Marijuana growing among trees in the Coconino National Forest.

152 KILOS OF COCAINE DISCOVERED BURIED UNDER CABLE WIRE

Interstate 40 runs across the United States from North Carolina to California. Running through northern Arizona, this is one of the nation's longest drug smuggling corridors. The Apache County Narcotics Task Force, funded through the Byrne/JAG program, routinely monitors this corridor for drug smuggling activities. In October 2005, a police officer stopped a Ford utility van for not having a visible license plate. The van was marked with a legitimate cable company logo. The driver and the passenger were questioned; they informed the officer that they were contractors based in California on their way to install cable in New Mexico. The officer's suspicions were aroused. He was granted permission to search the vehicle. The task force's narcotics dog Axa was brought in; she indicated an odor in the vehicle. Buried under 195 spools of cable wire, the officer found 152 kilos of cocaine with an Arizona market value of \$1.8 million (more if the contraband had arrived to its Chicago destination). The temporary California license plate the driver produced was fraudulent, as was the insurance documents and the cable company address.



Axa, her handler and 336 lb. (152.72 kg) of cocaine destined for the Chicago market.

MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL COOPERATION HELPS WITH METH LAB SEIZURE



Aerial view of meth lab in Mohave County, Arizona

Cooperative efforts among multi-jurisdictional law enforcement agencies cross state boundaries. Detectives from the Mohave Area General Narcotics Enforcement Team (MAGNET), funded through the Byrne/JAG program, were contacted and informed by the Las Vegas Metro Police Department that they had arrested two individuals from the Kingman area. The people arrested in Las Vegas were in possession of a half an ounce of methamphetamine, \$20,000 cash and had sales receipts for chemicals used in the production of methamphetamine. Search warrants were issued for the suspects' residences, several manufactured homes on a 47-acre parcel of land in Kingman, Arizona. Law enforcement officers found an operational methamphetamine lab. MAGNET seized a large quantity of crystal methamphetamine, pseudoephedrine and other pre-cursor chemicals.

This investigation required the multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency cooperation of 30 narcotics agents from eight law enforcement agencies. This cooperation is what makes the multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency approach so successful. Property seized during this investigation included \$140,000 in cash, three vehicles, two trailers, and miscellaneous

items totaling more than \$200,000 in value. Four suspects were arrested for producing large amounts of methamphetamine in Mohave County, Arizona, which was being transported and sold in Las Vegas, Nevada. Further investigations revealed this operation was tied to a similar operation uncovered by MAGNET one year prior, which also involved multiple arrests.

On a related note, four months later MAGNET was notified by Las Vegas Metro Police Department that some of the subjects involved in the original case were planning to break the meth cook out of the Mohave County Jail. The conspirators planned to kill the transport officer while on the way to the courthouse for sentencing. MAGNET, in cooperation with the FBI, Mohave County Sheriff's Office, Kingman Police Department, and the Arizona Department of Public Safety, conducted surveillance during the transport. They arrested six individuals for attempting to break the meth cook out of jail.



Crystal methamphetamine removed from the lab by officers in protective clothing.

METH ADDICTED COUPLE MEET AND
MARRY WHILE COMPLETING
DRUG COURT

Theirs is an unlikely love story. A little over three years ago, both Jennifer and Clurral “Bucky” Buckingham were both homeless, unemployed and addicted to methamphetamine. Bucky was a hardcore addict who had violated both supervised and intensive probation when he was accepted into the Yuma County Drug Court in December 2002; Yuma County Drug Court receives Byrne/JAG funding. Initially ordered to four months of residential treatment, Bucky had relapsed again and again. The judge finally put him on sink-or-swim status, which meant no more chances. After more than 90 drug tests, 185 Alcoholic and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and many court sessions, he graduated Drug Court in August 2004.

Jennifer, a courtesy Drug Court case from Maricopa County, was eight months pregnant and had two children with her when she reported to the Yuma County Drug Court in February 2003. After more than a year of counseling, 123 Alcoholic and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, 80 urinalysis tests and constant court sessions, she graduated Drug Court in May 2004.



Jennifer and Clurral Buckingham met and married while attending Yuma County Drug Court. Both have remained clean for three years since graduation.

This young couple met while attending Drug Court and was married shortly before Jennifer’s graduation. Bucky is currently working as a construction foreman and Jennifer is a stay-at-home mom raising three children. Both have been clean and sober for three years and are an inspiration to the community.

These success stories are possible because of the federal funding that has been provided under the Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants Program (and prior, the Edward J. Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Formula Grant program and the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant programs). Without the continued federal support, the future of these programs—and the positive results stemming from these programs—are in question.