Geographic Information System (GIS) Being Used by RJI

The Rural Justice Institute (RJI) has recently collaborated with Justin Grigg, an Adjunct Instructor of Environmental Studies here at Alfred University, to bring the use of geographic information systems (GIS) to RJI. GIS is usually used to represent maps as data layers that can portray various forms of data to be studied and analyzed. GIS utilizes computer software and geographic data, which is information about the shape, location, and description of actual real-world features to visually portray various kinds of data that have been collected. Therefore these interactive programs allow the user to integrate, analyze, and visualize data in order to gain an understanding of relationships, patterns, and trends that are occurring, thus further aiding in the formulation of solutions to various problems. Recently, the National Domestic Violence Hotline began using GIS, and is now able to automatically identify the geographic area of the caller and the locations of service providers in that vicinity upon a call to the hotline. RJI is using ArcGIS Desktop, which is the GIS software that was developed by Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc (ESRI).

RJI will be using GIS in a myriad of ways in order to more accurately and understandably display the data that is collected by the institute. A dataset has been assembled for RJI that includes agency specific information that can be mapped. RJI currently is using GIS to portray the various school districts that have received domestic violence training by RJI, thus, visually portraying the progress made by RJI and where the training needs to be implemented next.

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Above is a map of the Allegany Public Transportation systems in reference to the local area domestic violence service provider locations. As you can see, there are holes in this map, which means that there are a lot of people that do not have access to domestic violence service providers via public transportation. This is the first map made of Allegany County for RJI using the geographic dataset.

Michele Lowry
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Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October was Domestic Violence Awareness month and several events took place in Allegany County. These events were geared toward increasing local knowledge about the prevalence and effects of domestic violence. Due to priorities and time constraints this marked the first year that a “Victim Masks” ceremony did not take place. Instead, emphasis was placed upon the Multidisciplinary Domestic Violence Workshop that was held at Alfred University on October 28th. This training program, which couples the Rural Justice Institute with the ACCORD Corporation and the Allegany County Domestic Violence Consortium Executive Committee, helped to train school personnel, health care providers, faith-based personnel and clergy, elder abuse workers, criminal justice professionals, community service providers, and legal personnel with essential information about helping victims of domestic violence.

The keynote speaker for the event was Judge Sharon Townsend, the Administrative Judge for the Eighth Judicial District. Approximately 115 people from various locations in Western New York attended the workshop.

Aside from the workshop, the Family Development Division Director of ACCORD, Kelly Beil, and the Retired Chief of Police made public service announcements on WZKZ in Wellsville during the month of October. These announcements were an attempt to inform the public, reach out to victims, and provide a hotline number to anyone that may be in need services.

Finally, a request was made to the Allegany County Legislators for the proclamation of October as Domestic Violence Awareness month. The Legislators were presented with a domestic violence profile which was made through the efforts of the Rural Data and Resource Development Initiative (RDRDI). The purpose of the data profile is to provide the community with a non-biased “snapshot” of domestic violence in Allegany County. Members of RDRDI are continuing to gather data to fill in gaps in the profile; however, there has already been a great deal of longitudinal statistical data accumulated.

The Rural Justice Institute was also able to visit several after-school programs to demonstrate the Second Step program developed by the Committee For Children. At these programs Second Step lessons, which center on empathy, problem solving, and emotion management were presented to the students.

Hopefully, through increased awareness and knowledge about domestic violence, there can be a decline in the number of instances of domestic violence.

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SPOTLIGHT

The Rural Justice Institute (RJI) would like to introduce David Slovak, Rural Data and Resource Development Initiative (RDRDI) Coordinator. The RDRDI is a partnership of the Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network, the Institute for Human Services, and the Rural Justice Institute. Dave facilitates activities of the RDRDI, which include development of community-oriented data profiles around core issues in Allegany County, facilitation of training around data and resource development topics, development of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) profiles, and facilitation of multi-agency collaborative resource development projects.

Most recently, the RDRDI group updated a Domestic Violence profile, which was used for a presentation to the County Legislature. The group will continue to develop similar comprehensive, county-wide profiles that can be used by local nonprofit agencies, community leaders, and the general public for project planning, needs assessments, and resource development. After developing the data profiles, Dave and the RDRDI will use them to plan, facilitate, and implement collaborative projects in Allegany County. “That’s when the real fun begins,” he said. “Collecting and disseminating data in the profiles is engaging, but I mostly enjoy the project planning and grant writing. I love taking on projects and seeing them develop from start to finish.”

Dave is currently working with Hannah Young, RJI Director of Operations, on developing and implementing a new RJI website that will contain updated information and be much more functional and easy to use.

Prior to working with the RDRDI, Dave’s energies were focused on assisting the Institute for Human Services’ Director of Research and Resource Development, Kevin Williams with similar projects in Steuben County. Kevin continues to guide Dave in his efforts for the RDRDI. Dave is currently a student at Alfred University and finishing up his Bachelor’s Degree in English and weighing out graduate school options.

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Youth Court: Kids Helping Kids for a Better Community

Juvenile delinquency has been a problem for as long as there have been juveniles around to commit crimes. In order to receive consequences for their actions, juvenile offenders typically become part of the criminal court system while still minors. However, the fact is that children, despite being aware of or involved in the criminal court system, are still committing offences.

Allegany County has decided to partake in a program known as Youth Court. Youth Court is based on the hypothesis that being judged by peers carries much more weight with children than being “told what to do” by adults. The Youth Court volunteers actually enact a real trial that includes a judge, jury, defending and prosecuting lawyers, and a bailiff, all made up of students. The participants are able to call witnesses and enter evidence. The sentences that are proposed by the lawyers, and decided upon by the judge and jury are real. If the sentences not completed by the offender, with the help of their family, the case will be referred to criminal court. While one is watching a trial, one truly gets the feeling that one is witnessing a true criminal trial, which is important.

Local law enforcement officials, lawyers, judges, and other court officials band together to work with teen volunteers to teach them the ways of the United States court system. These professionals work with the volunteers for 20 hours of formal training before the children are allowed to work on a Youth Court case. After receiving formal training, they are still constantly monitored and guided, through each specific case, to ensure that “justice prevails”.

Sienna Markel is the Allegany County Youth Court Program Coordinator. Her responsibilities include overseeing every trial, working with each child on his or her specific sentence, coordinating trials for defendants, and working with the local officials to keep the court up and running. Sienna reports that more than 60 children have been through the Allegany County Youth Court, with 10 of them joining the team as volunteers. The Allegany County Youth Court is made up of 75 trained members. The children come from a variety of local towns, and are referred by probation, judges, and police officers. Defendants served are between the ages of 7 and 16 and have committed a variety of crimes including criminal mischief, assault, harassment, possession of controlled substances/marijuana/alcohol, and petit and grand larceny, among many others. Statistics show that recidivism of the Youth Court’s offenders is extremely low, proving that there is merit behind this unique idea. Keep it up, Allegany County Youth Court! Kids are truly helping kids to not only maintain a better community, but to help themselves as well.

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Photograph taken by Megan Gray
RJI Undergraduate Research Assistant

Save-the-Date:

Mark your calendars today! Allegany Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (ACASA), Bradford Recovery Systems, and the Rural Justice Institute are collaborating together in order to organize a conference that will be held on Thursday, April 6, 2006 in Corning, NY. Once again, the conference will be held at the Corning Radisson, a hotel located in the heart of Corning’s Gaffer District. Lodging and accommodation information will be forthcoming.

The title of this upcoming year’s conference is “Destructive Decisions: What are our children thinking? How can we as parents and professionals help?” This all day event will include two keynote speakers geared toward individuals from a variety of professional fields and interests.

Dr. James Garbarino will provide the morning session, while the afternoon speaker has yet to be finalized. Dr. Garbarino is an internationally recognized expert in child abuse issues, youth violence, education and families. For attendees of the “Crystal Opportunities” conference last spring, Dr. Garbarino will not be presenting the same topic as he did in his Keynote address last year.

The organizers would like to extend the invitation to all professionals working with youth, including but not limited to criminal justice, human service, education, mental health, and addiction treatment organizations. The conference will be working to offer CASAC, CPP and CPS accreditation as well as CEU credits.

Please check your mail for more information about the 2006 “Destructive Decisions” Conference. We look forward to confirming your reservation!

Morgan Fee
2nd Year Masters Student
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Justin also developed maps that portray poverty levels of area counties, as well as maps of public transportation in Allegany County in reference to the locations of domestic violence service providers in the area.

“From my perspective, the purpose of implementing a GIS is to assist in the understanding of data through its mapping and analysis. The effectiveness of a map to communicate information follows the logic that a picture speaks a thousand words. Just displaying information on a map communicates; however, the real power comes from the analysis of the information in a spatial context. Doing so reveals spatial relationships, patterns, and change over time,” as quoted from Justin Grigg.

Justin Grigg obtained his MS from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design. He has utilized GIS in many of his career endeavors thus far, and is currently teaching AU undergraduate students in the environmental studies program how to utilize many of the GIS programs.