

RSAT National Conference: “Empowering Practitioners to Improve Client Outcomes: Employing What Works to Improve RSAT Delivery”

**Denise E. O’Donnell, Director
Bureau of Justice Assistance**

Welcoming Remarks July 20, 2012

Hello, I am Denise O’Donnell, Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and I am pleased to welcome you to our 2012 Residential Substance Abuse Treatment National Conference. We are extremely delighted to have 52 of 56 states and territories represented at this conference.

I want to begin by acknowledging our partners from the Advocates for Human Potential, National TASC, and the AdCare for all their hard work and coordination to ensure the conference is successful. I also want to thank Tim Jeffries and Ruby Qazilbash for their strong leadership of the RSAT Program at BJA.

As a former social worker, I recognize the importance of your work to provide treatment and hope to offenders behind prison walls, and to provide them with the support and tools they need during the critical time when they transitioning back to the community so that they can lead productive and drug-free lives.

This year’s conference theme “Empowering Practitioners to Improve Client Outcomes” reminds us to keep focused on the reason most of us are involved in this work—namely to improve the lives of the people we serve, their families, and their communities. I am incredibly proud of the role BJA has played for over a decade in supporting the RSAT Program, and the important work that all of you do. That support is shared at the highest levels of the Justice Department and the Administration. While funding for RSAT remains a challenge, President Obama has proposed doubling the funding for RSAT in his FY 2013 budget request, and with your help, we at BJA are prepared to continue to put funding appropriated to RSAT to the best possible use. That requires us to fund and operate programs and treatment approaches that evidence show—here’s that phrase again—“improve client outcomes.” Simply put: programs that work.

The good news is, you don’t have to do it alone. As you know, in 2010, BJA funded the first Training and Technical Assistance Program specifically designed for RSAT programs. Since then, Advocates for Human Potential has made more than 22 site visits to train RSAT personnel in dozens of states. Its monthly webinar series is an extraordinary resource for online training on evidence-based practices and covers a variety of relevant and cutting-edge topics.

Over the next 2 days, you will benefit as you hear from expert practitioners who will address key issues such as treatment of offenders with co-occurring disorders, treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and ways RSAT programs can develop effective aftercare programs to provide seamless, continuity of treatment in the community. The best part is that you can share the knowledge and information learned at this conference with your colleagues back home, and introduce them to the teaching resources and tools available on the RSAT web site to spread this knowledge throughout your department or facility.

I am very envious. When I began my career as a substance abuse counselor many years ago, we understood how very difficult recovery is—but we tended to believe that the difficult work had to be done by the clients, and that we, the providers, had little to do with the outcome.

That is why I am so appreciative that the effective evidenced-based practices and tools available today—compared to when I started my career in the field years ago—empower us to be true “change agents” for the people we serve—and that is both the theme and the message that I hope will reverberate throughout this conference for the next 2 days.

In closing I thank you for coming, some of you from very far— to be part of this conference. I apologize for making you work on Saturday, but those of us in corrections and RSAT programs and criminal justice know too well, our jobs have never been 9 to 5. It is but another example of your commitment and dedication, and I thank you for it.