



The Washington Rural Jails Project: Lessons from Rural Places and People

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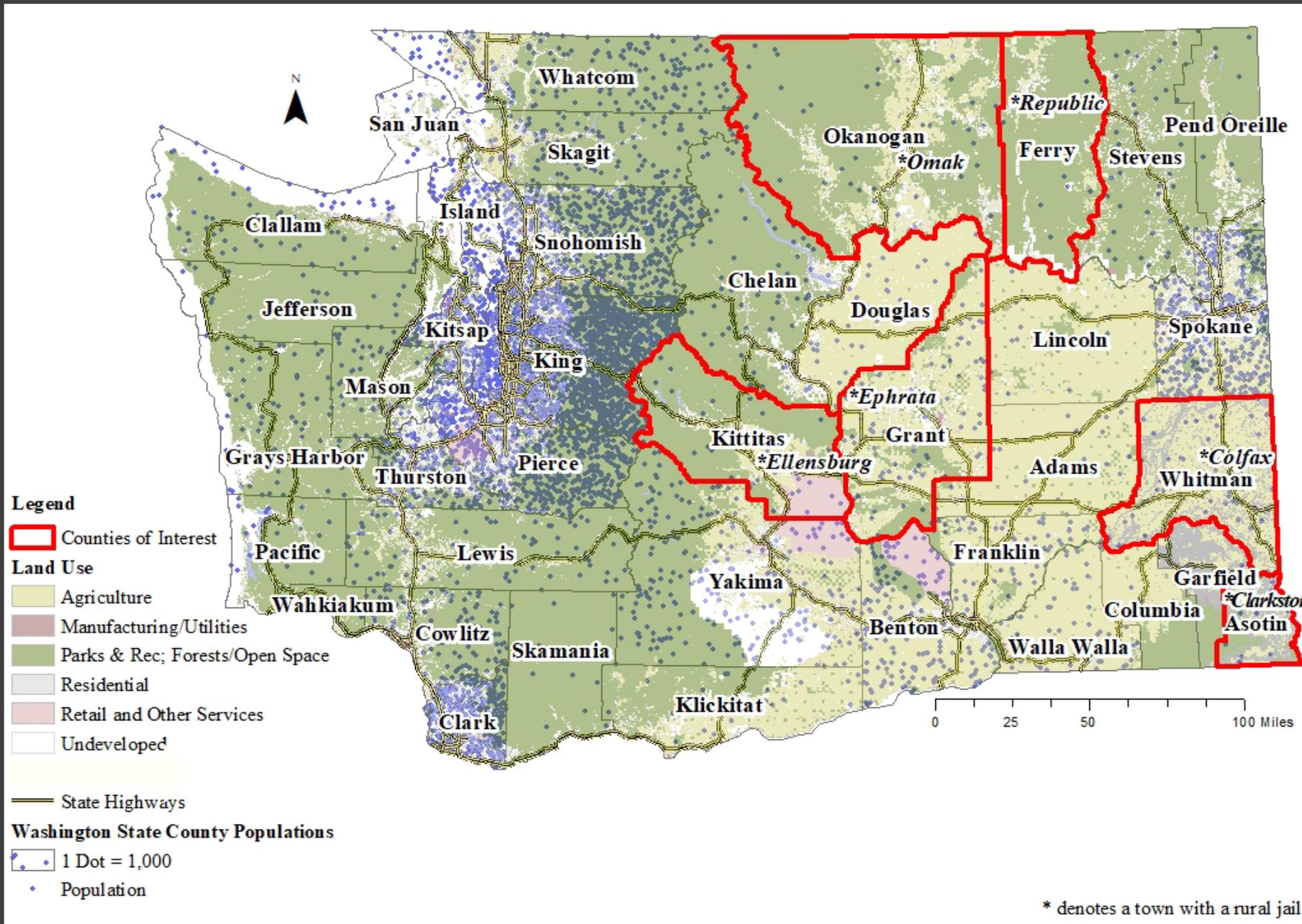
Introduction: The Washington Rural Jails Project History

- Begun in summer 2019 in answer to grant call for proposals to study the rise in rural jail incarceration nationwide.
- Rural jail incarceration rates were 2.4x higher than urban jails.



The Washington Rural Jails Project History

- Team of Jennifer Sherman and Jennifer Schwartz brings different substantive expertise as well as methodological skills.
- Designed project that combined statistical analysis of jail booking/release data + in-depth interviews and focus groups.
- Reached out to sheriff's departments across rural Eastern/Central Washington.
- Traveled across region to meet them in person at jails, WASPC, etc. and make in-person connections.



Network Partners
East Asotin, Whitman
North Ferry, Okanogan
Central Grant, Kittitas

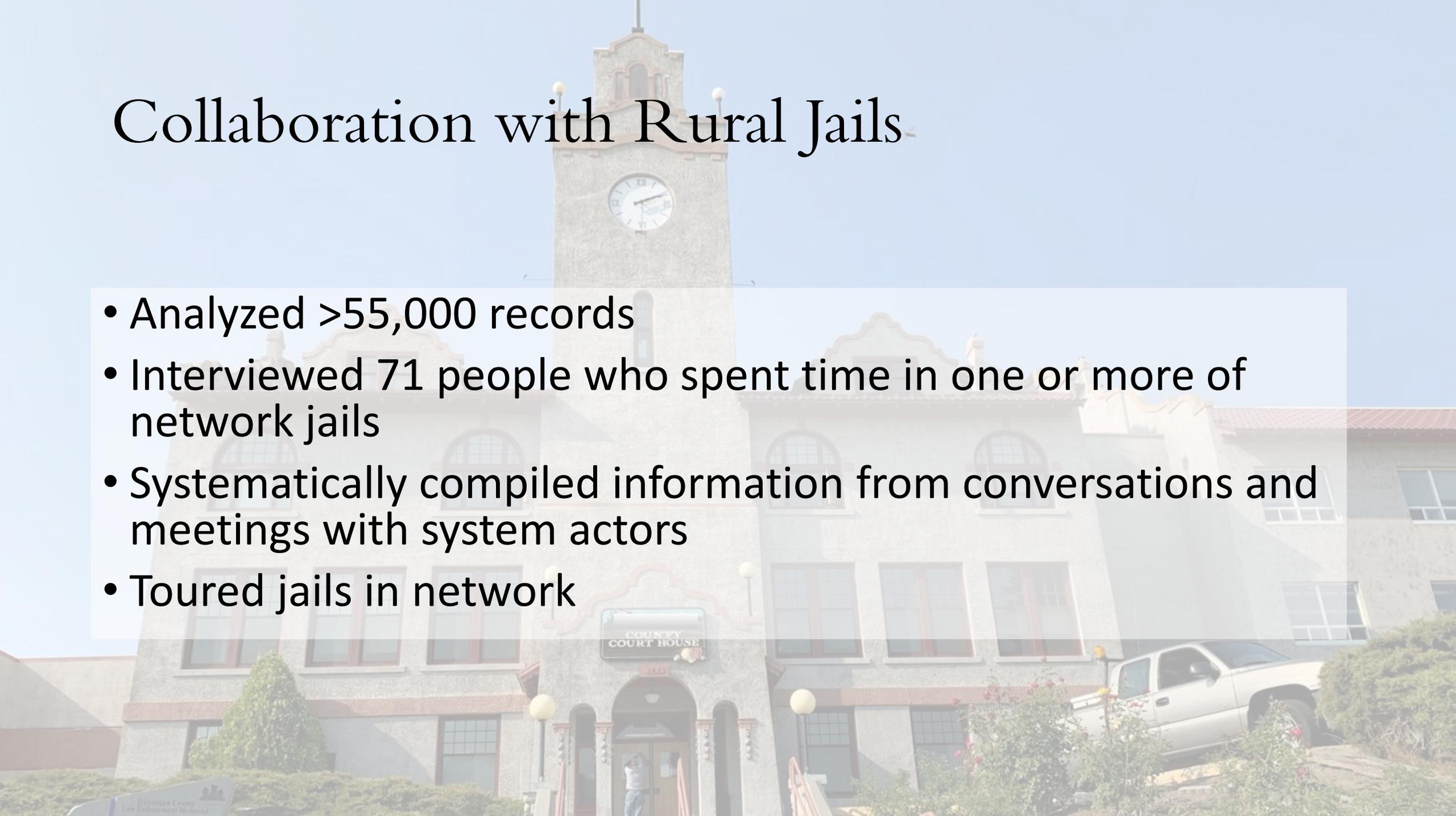
County	Jail Capacity
Asotin	46
Colville	36
Ferry	45
Grant	185
Kittitas	209
Okanogan	185
Whitman	40
TOTAL	746

Collaboration with Rural Jails

- Data use agreements with five sheriff's departments
 - Provided jail booking and release records for five previous years
- Six participated in virtual meetings
- Learned from each other and own data
 - Shared challenges related to rurality
 - Highlighted what was happening in jails and communities



Collaboration with Rural Jails

The background of the slide is a photograph of a large, multi-story building with a prominent clock tower. The building has a light-colored facade with arched windows and a central entrance. A sign above the entrance reads "COUNTY COURT HOUSE". A white pickup truck is parked on the right side of the building. The sky is clear and blue.

- Analyzed >55,000 records
- Interviewed 71 people who spent time in one or more of network jails
- Systematically compiled information from conversations and meetings with system actors
- Toured jails in network

Sharing Information

- Presented findings to state audiences:
 - Office of Public Defenders
 - Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) task force
 - WA State Attorney General's Jail Standards Task Force
 - Office of Forensic Mental Health Services (DSHS) / JTA
- Presented to Academic Audiences:
 - Deason Center
 - American Society of Criminology
 - Law and Society Association
 - Rural Sociological Society

Research Findings: SNPs

- Quantitative findings showed importance of System Navigation Problems (SNPs) including FTA, inability to pay fines, non-compliance with court orders, DWLS
 - Over 40% of jail admissions due to SNPs during 2015-2019
 - Used 247,949 bed days (34%); drugs used 65,842 (9%); assault used 59,573 (8%)
 - More than half of jail re-entries were due to SNPs
 - See: <https://labs.wsu.edu/wrjn/washington-state-jail-trends/>

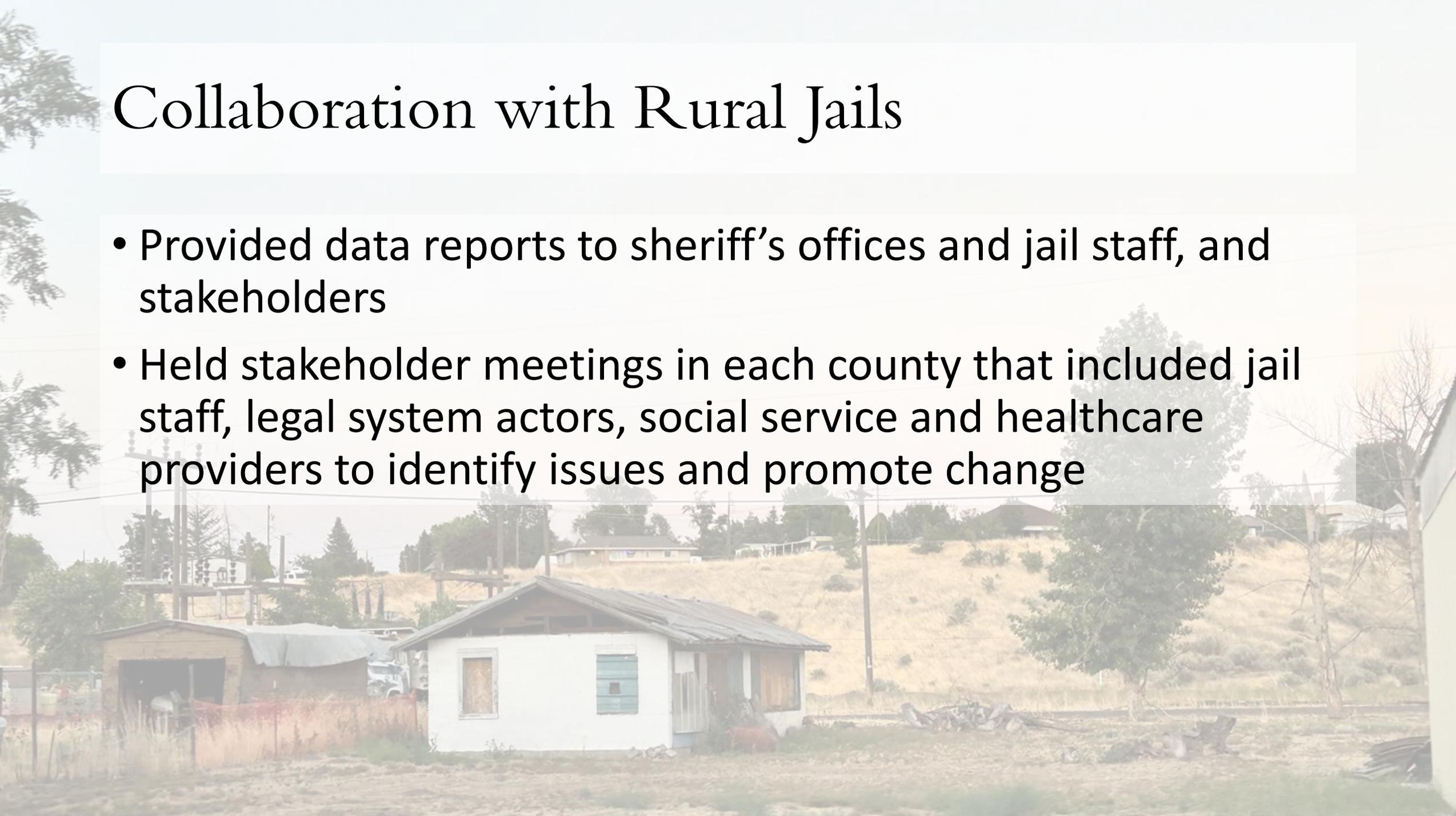
Research Findings: FTA Issues

- Qualitative findings showed why people struggled to get to court:
 - Court notices sent to old address (moved, homeless, etc.)
 - Transportation difficulties (suspended license, no vehicle)
 - Communication failures regarding court dates (continuances, lack of communication with public defenders)
 - Mental health struggles



Collaboration with Rural Jails

- Provided data reports to sheriff's offices and jail staff, and stakeholders
- Held stakeholder meetings in each county that included jail staff, legal system actors, social service and healthcare providers to identify issues and promote change



Collaboration with Rural Jails

- Learned about challenges jails faced
 - Population with drug/alcohol and mental health issues
 - Lack of medical staff and capacity
 - Lack of ability to implement MOUD
 - Lack of knowledge/time to successfully apply for grant funding

Learning from Local Actors

- Reached out to those who work with jail-exposed populations, including social services, health, mental health, and victim's support
 - How do communities support people after jail?
 - What challenges do they face?
 - Discovered communication gaps between jail staff and local service actors

Learning from Local Actors

- Gaps in service provision:
 - Lack of post-release support, need for outreach prior to release
 - Desire for more opportunities for warm handoffs
 - Need for improved communication between actors
- Lack of resources, need to share across services/sectors
 - Staffing shortages in all areas
 - Lack of local housing, high housing costs, remoteness, low salaries
- Need for communication and cooperation across sectors inspired next phase of project, where we facilitate stakeholder meetings focused on identifying needs and collaborative solutions

Learning from Local Actors

- Stakeholder group meetings held in all six counties
- Identified common challenges:
 - Housing services
 - Employment and job training
 - Public defense and aid navigating the system
 - Anger management and family counseling
 - Mental health care
 - Sober living and recovery
 - Training in talking about CL experiences to prospective landlords and employers

Learning from Local Actors

- Stigma around low-income and post-release housing makes it hard to site in rural communities
- Need for education and outreach around social problems intertwined with CL involvement
- Structural lacks challenge people getting to court:
 - Lack of transportation
 - Lack of reliable internet service
 - Lack of court notification services
 - Lack of post-release support

Strengths of Rural Community Coalitions

- Deep commitment to communities
- Longstanding personal connections
 - High trust
 - Streamlined communication
 - Possibility of efficiencies
- Fewer gatekeepers and less bureaucracy for new community members
- Need dedicated time focused on brainstorming new ideas and connections

Strengths of Rural Community Coalitions

- Creativity in solving local problems, sharing space, people, and resources
- Single individuals can make big change
- Efficacy of local leadership
- Ability to collaborate for “small wins” and to make incremental changes toward addressing problems



“Small Wins”

- Agreement to update online jail rosters more frequently
- Plan to use social media and community groups to highlight success stories of those who had been in jail and recovered from addiction
- Agreement to provide office space for traveling clinician
- Sharing information to prevent FTA warrants issued in other counties when someone was incarcerated
- Adding local social services information to jail-issued tablets
- Developing guide for post-release steps and services
- Circulating information on second-chance employers to local organizations
- Offering focused services to jail “frequent fliers”

Strengths and Potential of RNP

- Recovery Navigator Program (RNP) provides peers trained in addiction recovery and social services to offer support to those in or recently out of jail
- Help connect them with treatment, housing, support, and other needs (clothes, food, etc.)
- Provide understanding and inspiration
- Recovery Navigators have made huge differences in many communities



Strengths and Potential of RNP

- Can make connections while people are in jail and intervention is most useful
- Provide transportation to treatment, including peer conversation during rides
- Help people make court dates
- Need for more navigation help, for those without addiction issues but may face other challenges

Strengths of RNP

- “Well, [the Recovery Navigator] was [visiting me in jail] and she -- you know, she talked to me a little bit... So the day I got out of jail, she was going to help me get a ride or whatever and try -- I was worried about coming back home to a house full of drug addicts. You know? But instead, when I got out of jail, instead of walking anywhere else, I walked to [her office]. Which may not seem like that big of a deal, but I could easily have made a left and walked to the drug dealer's house who is right down the road too. But instead, I walked straight into [the office] and I talked to them. And I was like, well, fuck it, I'll go to inpatient today right now. And she took me at my word. And the next thing you know, she was on the phone and found a place that took my insurance, and she drove me to [the city 3 hours away] that day.” (Ezrah Cooper, 41-year-old white man)

Conclusion: Future Directions

- Expanding Network into additional rural communities in Eastern/Central Washington
- Adding tribal jails and communities into the Network
- Focusing on under-recognized social problems that drive jail admissions, including Domestic Violence
- Working with stakeholder groups to sustain coalitions
- Learning more about:
 - Trends in rural jail populations
 - Impacts of programs like RNP
 - Effectiveness of new policies and initiatives at state and/or county levels

Thank you!!!

For more information, visit the project website:

<https://labs.wsu.edu/wrjn/>

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