



Smith County's Chief SIM Officer Sets Goals into Action

Keisha Morris said everyone calls her a unicorn.

As the first and only chief sequential intercept mapping (SIM) officer at the [Andrews Center](#), Morris serves a unique role in ensuring people with behavioral health conditions receive proper care and services by coordinating the many stakeholders that play a role in behavioral health and justice systems.

Morris noted that county priorities had remained nearly the same over the last decade, stressing the need for stronger collaboration between local stakeholders in health care, law enforcement and the judicial system.

"The county lacked a coordinated effort and someone to facilitate accountability," Morris said.

In September 2022, the [Judicial Commission on Mental Health](#) held a workshop in Smith County to identify barriers people with behavioral health conditions experience while navigating the mental health and criminal justice systems. Seventy-five participants – from hospital staff to law enforcement to commissioners and mental health support staff – attended the workshop.

Following the workshop, Andrews Center CEO Lynn Rutland created the chief SIM officer position. This new role would coordinate care and services between the local mental health authority, law enforcement, hospitals, emergency medical services, and the judicial system.

Morris was appointed to this position and now supervises three mental health teams at the Andrews Center: the Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT); the Forensic Services Team, which provides jail-based and outpatient competency restoration; and the Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical and Mental Impairments program ([TCOOMMI](#)).

As chief SIM officer, Morris established quarterly interagency meetings with stakeholders to discuss emergency detention warrant processes. She also organized a team to pursue a future youth SIM workshop for Smith County.

Morris's efforts have already led to positive change. She and her team were able to divert 24 people on the state hospital waitlist into an outpatient competency program through enhanced communication with community partners.

"We've also diverted people from jail to treatment after MCOT was allowed in the jail for screenings before, and at times after, an individual was booked into jail," she said.

"You must have connections, because it truly takes a village."

-Keisha Morris, Chief SIM Officer at Andrews Center

Additionally, the Andrews Center has received roughly \$2.2 million through five grants. Morris said a portion of that funding is being set aside for a respite center, which she expects to open after remodeling and inspections are completed.

The Andrews Center has also secured initial funding to remodel an existing property for a diversion center – a top priority of past SIM workshops.

Smith County has successfully implemented many of the recommendations from the 2022 SIM workshop, including creating a stakeholder planning group and developing diversion options. The county also expanded its network of certified peers and family partners and created a jail-based competency restoration program.

Morris said her job entails identifying obstacles that are at the root of the problem. She often sets up breakout meetings during larger meetings to troubleshoot issues. By talking through the details with the necessary people, she said, teams can chip away at issues incrementally.

“We eliminate barriers this way and find solutions that keep everyone in compliance with their policy and statements of work,” Morris said.

Morris said she is grateful for staff at the Andrews Center who have committed many years of service. Their historical knowledge of the community makes them a living, breathing “Google search.”

“You must have connections, because it truly takes a village,” she said. “I’ve formed a lot of great relationships over the years that I can now call on, and they’re behind me 100%.”

Morris offered several recommendations for communities wanting to create better outcomes for people with mental health and substance use disorders who are involved in the justice system.

She emphasized the importance of interagency meetings, as they ensure everyone identifies their specific goals and sets clear objectives. Also, she said you must set goals and evaluate your progress before moving to a new goal. “Tracking assures accountability and changes conversations to actions,” she said.

The Andrews Center serves approximately 4,409 people annually and provides 82,439 behavioral health services annually. Visit the Andrews Center [website](#) for more information on the organization’s behavioral health care services.



Additional Resources

- [**Using the Sequential Intercept Model to Guide Local Reform.**](#) Urban Institute and Policy Research Associates, 2018.
- [**The Sequential Intercept Model and Criminal Justice: Promoting Community Alternatives for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness.**](#) Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2015.
- [**The Role of Outreach and Engagement in Ending Homelessness: Lessons Learned from SAMHSA's Expert Panel.**](#) U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2016.