

Youth Referral System

How often does the parent or caregiver of a troubled youth ask,

“What programs are out there to help my child?”



Courtesy Hollywood Police Department

*By Tom Sanchez, Captain,
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Florida*

Law enforcement, social services agencies, community-based organizations, and schools all can play a role in helping a young person to develop and keep from entering the juvenile justice systems. Prevention and intervention programs can address risk factors for troubled youths or provide services that give young people choices other than criminal activity.

To ensure that the school systems and police department personnel are familiar with the array of services that can assist at-risk kids in their own community, police leadership needs to develop and put in place an appropriate referral system providing adequate assistance to the at-risk youth. Law enforcements' contact with troubled youth puts officers in a position to make a difference in a child's life. The availability of law enforcement to respond around-the-clock makes police agencies very attractive to call for just about every problem and create the opportunities for the police to take proactive steps to make referrals to available services. When the officer coming into contact with troubled youth has firsthand knowledge of the youth, his or her surroundings, and the programs available to help, this knowledge plays a crucial role that extends beyond

that of an enforcer. But this prevention and intervention does not happen by magic, it requires planning, communicating, and organizing a referral system and most importantly leadership in using the system.

Leading a police department into a proactive referral system for troubled youth requires conducting a needs assessment in the community, inventorying available programs, developing needed programs, continuously evaluating to ensure the programs work, preparing a formal referral system, and training personnel in the using these systems.

Needs Assessment

In establishing a referral system, the first step is to determine how many at-risk kids the department will be referring. The information obtained can be used as a guide as to whom, when, where and how the services are needed. When conducting the needs assessment, consider these elements:

- How many juveniles live in the jurisdiction?
- How many juvenile arrests?
- What is the most common age of the arrestees?
- What types of criminal charges are most common?
- Are there any geographical trends?
- Are there higher incident rates from youth that attend a particular school?
- Are there any social, racial, gender, or economical similarities?

• How often do officers come into contact with an at-risk youth outside of arrest situations?

• Are there jurisdictional issues (students living outside the jurisdiction or county but attends the local school)?

This information can be used as a baseline for determining the needs in a particular area. For instance, if there were a large number of at-risk Hispanic youth, then an intervention program tailored to Hispanics would have the greatest impact. Gang influence has spread from major cities to smaller towns; where there is a gang presence, gang intervention programs are most beneficial.

Troubled youth who live outside the jurisdiction but frequently have contact with officers present a special challenge. School boundaries and jurisdictional boundaries are rarely the same. The magnet schools concept is an example of drawing in youth that live outside of jurisdictional boundaries but may still require intervention. The two major issues in this situation are qualifying for the service and transportation to receive the service. Often the financial assistance provided for the service limits treatment to residents of the taxable jurisdictional area. Also, since most of these services are provided after school hours, transportation home can become another problem to overcome. When conducting the needs assessment, these unusual factors need to be considered.

Available Programs

The second step in providing a referral system is to identify services that are already available to youth. If a juvenile commits a crime and enters the juvenile justice system, he or she might be handled either with a judicial program or nonjudicial program. Figure 1 charts the different levels of possible actions. The decision about placement of the youth in the juvenile justice continuum must take into account the type of crime, the background of the juvenile, and the available resources at the time.

Usually, prevention and intervention services are divided into three subcategories: (1) school services, (2) county social services, and (3) community-based organizations. Resources need to be gathered from all three categories to develop an appropriate referral system.

Juvenile intervention facilities conduct evaluation, assessment, counseling, and referrals of juveniles that have been arrested to programs that address their needs. When developing a list of possible referrals, this is an ideal place to get acquainted with a number of different types of programs for at-risk kids. The counselors and caseworkers can provide insight into the effectiveness of the programs. However, this listing is not exhaustive, since many of the troubled youth will need services less intense than those provided to the juveniles already arrested. When developing this referral list, look to the community-based service organizations as well as official government agencies.

National organizations that deal with juveniles can furnish a list of referral programs that they use. These organizations also fund numerous other programs that may be available in the community. The grant-funded programs will have information on past programs and reports on their success rate. The local United Way can provide information also. For example, United Way of Broward County, Florida, distributes a brochure called Agency Listing that contains public assisting agencies. Other examples of organizations to seek out are the state office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, the children services board, the federal prosecutor's office, the school board, the YMCA, and the Boys' and Girls' Club. Contact the local prosecutor's office (state attorneys) for programs that are used as part of sentencing.

From these resources a comprehensive list of organizations and services will be developed. Once this is accomplished, there is the likelihood that some gaps will appear in the needs assessment and programs available evaluation. Police leadership is needed to resolve this discrepancy.

Working with local organizations there is a possibility that some of these programs will be developed with local resources. Once the local organization re-

sources are exhausted, it may be necessary to apply to the state for additional resources. The state will have an office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention to develop and fund local programs.

Beyond the state office is the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). OJJDP has a state relations and assistance division with funding for targeted community action planning and community prevention grants program along with several funding programs, including the formula grants program supporting state and local delinquency prevention and intervention efforts.¹ Attending local grant meetings can prove resourceful for funding opportunities. For example, the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program grants can be used.² These awards are for use by state and local government to improve the criminal justice system, with emphasis on violent crime and serious offenders. It provides for drug counseling and a variety of juvenile grant opportunities, including new initiatives.

Becoming familiar with what the granting agencies are seeking in the proposals and what areas are being funded can mean the difference between receiving funds and not. In addition attending these meetings can provide information on programs being funded locally. These programs are a resource to agencies dealing with youth. Depending on the funding source, some of these funded programs would be obligated to accept youth referrals within its county at no cost. Typically, federal and state funded programs do not turn away youth, as doing so would hurt their grant statistics.

In Hollywood's experience, the best types of programs are coordinated efforts between police, courts, schools, and juvenile-serving agencies. The Hollywood Police Department incorporates the following elements in its program:

- Community intervention
- Mentoring
- Bullying prevention
- Conflict resolution
- Violence reduction
- Classroom management
- After-school recreation

Some programs will be better suited to the local needs than others and many are specifically tailored to a particular part of the juvenile justice continuum. In this identification process, the programs without the experience or the ability to meet expectations should not be included in the department's referral program.

Selecting Programs

The third step in developing the referral process is to select from the inventory of available programs the ones that meet

the local needs to be included as official departmental referral programs. An evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of the programs needs to be established before they are selected as referral sites. Among the factors that need to be considered are the following:

- Does the program require a fee for the provided service?
- If a fee is required, how is it paid? Is it per youth or a flat rate per year?
- Where will the service be provided?
- If counseling sessions are involved, how many sessions will they provide for the youth or his or her family?
- Does the program conduct home visits? If not, how far away is the facility from the areas with the majority of the referrals?
- Does program involve the parents or legal guardian?
- How soon after receiving the referral does the program contact the youth?
- Will the program furnish the department with monthly or quarterly statistical reports and progress reports?

As part of this selecting process, solicit input from police officers, courts, family services, and others. At some point in time, each has come into contact with these service providers.

Evaluate Programs

Once a program is selected it must be continuously evaluated. Periodical site visits are recommended to monitor the program. Each program should provide monthly reports to the police department. These reports should include the number of students treated, how many sessions, and dates of service. The type of questions to be reviewed in evaluating the programs include the following:

- Are there many repeat referrals?
- How is the program handling repeat referrals?
- Is the agency receiving feedback on referrals?
- What is the feedback from the treated juvenile?
- Have any complaints on the program been received?
- Are financial fees billed correctly?
- Is there input from the juvenile's school resource officer?

The continuous evaluation of the programs ensures that the referral programs are providing the services needed in the community.

The Referral List

An important part of intervention is to ensure that process starts early. The only way an early start is possible is through communication about the various available programs to everyone coming into contact with troubled youth. Many orga-

nizations that deal with juveniles are unaware of all the programs that are available and can fail to find the best fit for each juvenile.

Compile a list of intervention and prevention programs available in the community. The list should contain the program name, description of services provided, acceptance requirements and contact information. The author has found that there is a growing list of organizations and grants available. Every department member should have printed referral lists to hand out when needed. Most programs expire when the grants that fund them end. Therefore, the list needs to be maintained and updated at least yearly.

Most important, every officer on the department should be trained in making referrals and should have copies of the referral list. When officers make contact with troubled youths, they can give the list to the parents or guardians. It is also a resource for official referrals by the police department to programs.

This type of list should be distributed to help inform the community, parents, social service organizations, and schools about available resources. It is highly recommended that every department compile its own list to make available for distribution. Departments that have such lists have received praise from their communities and school administrators. The list becomes a great public service. It may reduce police calls and provide an alternative for parents to help their children without police intervention.

Hollywood's Referral System

The Hollywood, Florida, Police Department refers 45-50 youth per month from its population of 30,000 youth. After encountering a youth who needs assistance, the officer fills out a youth referral form. This referral is delivered to the Youth Services Section. Here, police employees decide which program would benefit the youth. The referral is then faxed to the appropriate program. Contact is made with the family within 72 hours, usually 48 hours. The Hollywood police department has teamed with more than 30 programs offered by government agencies, businesses, and citizen groups to build their referral options. Examples of partnerships include the following:

- The police department funds some programs. For example, the Hollywood Police Referral Outreach Program is given funding yearly to counsel youth referred by the department. There is no cost to the family.

- The largest hospital in the city, Hollywood Memorial Regional Hospital, has a grant that allows it to administer a youth evaluation system. It provides assistance to children ages seven to 17 who may be

facing behavior, social, academic, or family difficulties.

- A former police officer started the Adapt (Adolescent Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment) program through Nova Southeastern University.

- The Aspira organization, based out of New York, has branches in Miami and Fort Lauderdale. They provide counseling and mentoring to Hispanics and others. It is primarily a youth leadership program.

This is only a partial list of the programs available in Hollywood, but it does illustrate the diversity of services available in the community for troubled youth.

Westminster Referral Process

The Westminster, California, Police Department in 1996 initiated the Strategic Home Intervention and Early Leadership Development (Shield) program. In this program law enforcement officers identify at-risk youth and refer them to the appropriate community service. The Shield program asks officers to refer all at-risk youth they come into contact with, when the youth has witnessed a domestic violence incident or a search warrant executed in their home, even if they are not the focus of an investigation.

Police are required to file a referral when they learn of family violence of any type, neglect or abandonment, gang activity, drug sales or usage, arrests made associated with alcohol abuse, or any other call for service where the welfare of a youth is at risk due to the behavior of anybody living in or frequenting the home.

The report is then forwarded through departmental channels to the Shield resource officer (SRO). This position title should not be confused with the same abbreviation commonly used for school resource officers. In this case Shield resource officers did formerly serve as a school resource officers. The SRO then sends the student referral report to the Youth and Family Resource Team, a multidisciplinary unit that includes administrators from the local school district, nurses, drug abuse prevention specialists, social workers, counselors from a community service provider, a recreation supervisor, the SRO, and a second officer with DARE experience. Experience has illustrated that this sharing of information leads to more appropriate treatment recommendations than any single agency could provide alone.

Overview of Programs

Although it is understandable that each jurisdiction has different populations, demographics, socioeconomic levels, and their own particular problems, the following examples show how referral

programs are working across the United States. In compiling this list the National Association of School Resource officers (NASRO) instructors provided the following data from their particular jurisdiction.

Jefferson County, Alabama, Sheriff's Department: This sheriff's department refers 45-50 youth a month to 10 different programs. The most used program is Teen Court. Officers have a referral list to hand out.

Avondale, Arizona, Police Department: This agency refers 15-20 juveniles monthly to five different programs. The one most used is the Avondale City Court Juvenile Intervention program. They have a departmental referral form for officers to use in making referrals.

Redwood, California, Police Department: Redwood refers 200-250 youth yearly. The main goal of their program is to divert at least 50 percent of first-time offenders from the juvenile justice system. They use in-house services, school programs, and other community agencies. The youth served are continually evaluated through direct contact and follow-up with other agencies.

Sarasota County, Florida, Sheriff's Department: This sheriff's department refers an average of 50-60 youth per month. The agency has approximately 30 programs. Child Development Center, a community assessment and intervention center, family counseling center, Jewish Children and Family Counseling Services, Coastal Recovery and Behavioral Healthcare, Hippy/Healthy Start, and their own Camp X-ray are just a few. The most used program by the Sarasota Sheriff's Department is YMCA Family Management. This national program provides counseling, family management, and a youth run-away shelter.

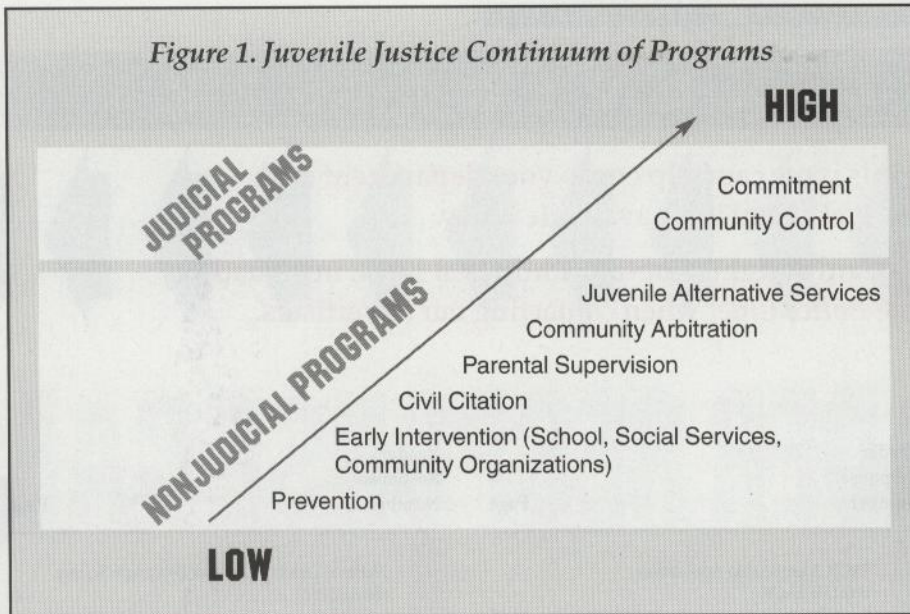
Park Forest, Illinois, Police Department: Park Forest officers refer 3-4 juveniles monthly to two main programs from a population of 25,000. The one most used is the Aunt Martha's Youth Service, which is funded by the United Way and other grants. For substance abuse they refer to the South Suburb Council.

Clinton, Iowa, Police Department: This department refers youth to 10 different programs that are state-, county-, and private nonprofit-operated. The police department tracks each referral. The one most used is a substance abuse program that is grant funded.

Golden Valley, Minnesota, Police Department: Golden Valley officers refer 15 juveniles per month to three different city programs. The truancy prevention program is the one most used. Periodic checks are performed to evaluate the programs' effectiveness.

Seattle Police Department: The Seattle police refer approximately 40 youth

Figure 1. Juvenile Justice Continuum of Programs



monthly to three different programs. Representative from the programs will periodically provide information about their services along with handouts at roll calls. The program most used is the Spruce Street Crisis Center, which provides drug and alcohol and family counseling.

¹For more information about the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, visit <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>.

²For more information about the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program, visit www.ncjrs.org/html/bja/edbyrne.

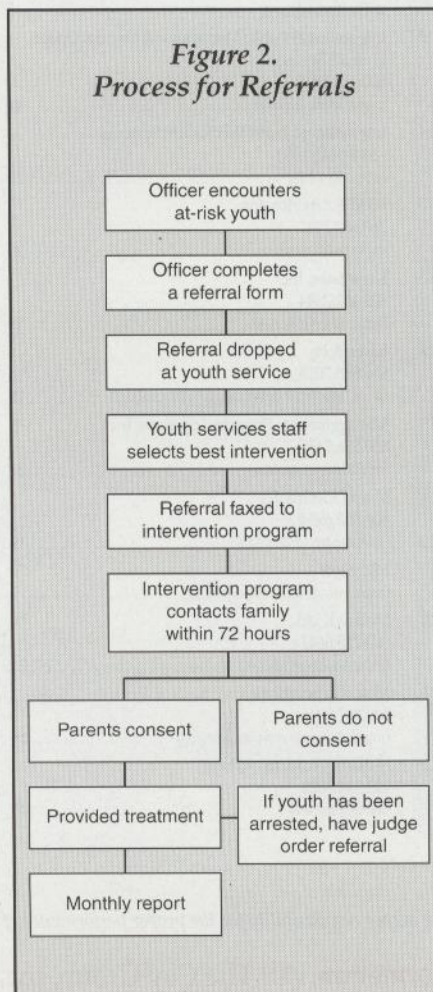
Determining the Future

It is well established in criminal studies that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Youth referred to the courts before the age of 13 are far more likely to become chronic offenders than youth whose initial contact occurs at a later age. Research suggests that juvenile offenders start committing crimes as early as age seven, which is much earlier than their first court contact. Therefore, the need for early intervention is crucial.

Prevention programs offer the best chances for success. Preventive interventions that focus on juvenile delinquency will benefit communities the most. The first step toward obtaining effective treatment is to provide families with access to juvenile programs and other services. A system should be established using graduated sanctions that hold each juvenile offender accountable, protects public safety, and provides programs and services that meet the needs of the community.

Using the contacts between officers and juveniles to refer at-risk youths to appropriate intervention program is a step forward in preventing delinquency. The more juvenile-serving agencies police can identify, the better the chances of finding a program that can help each juvenile. This, coupled with a well structured and well advertised referral process, is essential for every community to maximize the opportunity to save at-risk youth. ❖

Figure 2. Process for Referrals



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(First Review date September 17, 2004)

The City of Cottonwood is seeking to fill the Police Chief, exempt, at-will, full-time position. The compensation range is \$50,223 to \$72,823 with an entry level of \$4,185 per month plus a \$70 monthly uniform allowance. Actual starting salary for full time position will depend on experience. Submission of a completed City Application and the Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training Board forms are required prior to closing date. Applications and a complete job description are available at the City of Cottonwood Human Resources Office, 816 N. Main St., Cottonwood, AZ 86326. Phone 928-634-0060. The applications may also be obtained off the City's web site (www.ci.cottonwoodpd.org/employment.htm). The City of Cottonwood is an EOE/ADA Employer. The position is open until filled with the first review date of applications on September 17, 2004 at 3:00 P.M.