

“POLICE AGENCIES AS A MEANINGFUL PARTICIPANT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICIES”

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Police officers play a critical role in the development and implementation of effective juvenile justice practices.

Police are the first point of contact with youth and their families.

Critical Role of Police

Police represent the first decision point in the juvenile justice process – handle formally by arrest and submission to the juvenile court or informally by talking with the youth and the youth’s family and supplying them with information and resources.

Critical role of police

Police officers know our youth and have a depth of knowledge which is beneficial as we work to develop a **plan** that will protect the community and assist the youth in being successful.

Include Police as Part of the Decision Making Group

Dispel and do not tolerate common misperceived stereotypes – “all police want to do is lock em up and throw away the key” / “all the juvenile department want to do is reduce the number of kids in detention.”

Include Police as Part of the Decision Making Group

Start by discussing common goals:

1. The right kid in the right place –
detention / alternative program.

Include Police as Part of the Decision Making Group

2. The foundation of a strong juvenile system is a comprehensive and realistic plan that protects the community and assists the youth in his or her own individual success.

Include Police as Part of the Decision Making Body

All system partners have responsibility to provide for community safety.

Include Police as part of the Decision Making Body

Police commit to being a sustained and active participant in these discussions. Command level as well as street officer participation is essential to maintain a grounded and sustained discussion.

Case Study – Tri Met Pilot

Issue: Adolescent behavior on Tri Met, a tri county metropolitan transportation system, that is threatening, violent, intimidating and dangerous. This behavior impacts the entire system and impacts a large number of citizens.

Case Study – Tri Met

Strategy: must operate within the statutory structure of the particular state. Oregon only allows for youth to be held in detention for certain delinquent behavior; however, there is a provision that allows for thirty-six hour hold to develop a safe release plan.

Case Study – Tri Met

Strategy: Development of a clear set of protocols (training bulletin) is essential as is good management of the project. Concerns of all system partners need to be considered. Management level personnel meet weekly at the start to communicate about issues meetings can then be moved to an as needed basis.

Case Study – Tri Met

It is important for managers to be hands on so that there is no conflict between the street officers delivering the youth to the facility and intake staff. Make an agreement that any disputes will be handled at management level – then make sure to handle them and communicate that you have done so.

Case Study – Tri Met

This strategy allows for IMMEDIATE police response to behavior, which is particularly beneficial to youth engaging in delinquent conduct.

Case Study – Tri Met

There is also a secondary benefit in that other youth who see the interaction and the ability of the police to deal with behavior may be persuaded not to engage in the same conduct as it may cost them their night.

Case Study – Tri Met

Juvenile department has an opportunity to interact with the youth and the youth's family to identify needs either or both may have and provide resources to address those needs.

Results

Project started in June 2008 so too early to develop meaningful data. Police Feedback:

1. Less calls for service on the transit system.
2. Marked change in behavior when transit officers board the busses, trains and platforms.

Results

3. Youth are policing themselves.
4. Chronic offenders are laying low. (Note – this is the same impact experienced by the adult system when a similar strategy was used).

Conclusion

- Collaboration does not mean that all parties always agree. Focus is on making system partners meaningful participants in the process and being open to different perspectives. This approach needs to come from the top down but is well worth the effort.