5 Ways Law Enforcement Agencies Can Use Data on Juveniles

Law enforcement agencies are a valuable, and often overlooked, partner in the juvenile justice system. Law enforcement officers have an important job in keeping the public safe, which involves exercising discretion in how they deal with youth alleged to have committed a crime. Law enforcement officers weigh factors such as community safety, offense seriousness, and a prior offense record to decide whether to arrest or if diversion is suitable. Data summarizing crimes that come to the attention of law enforcement and law enforcement responses to criminal behavior can help plan operations, monitor performance of our justice system, and provide a starting place for understanding the front door of the juvenile justice process. Here are five important ways that law enforcement agencies can use data on juveniles.

01 Understand juvenile crime in the community

Law enforcement officers collect data on specific crimes in the community for investigative and prosecution purposes by the very nature of their job; however, law enforcement agencies are increasingly embracing a data-informed approach in their overall crime-reduction strategy (Bahney, et al., 2014). There is a movement to become more rigorous about using data to identify crime trends and neighborhood hot-spots (Roberts & Lissey, 2013). Advances in automation have supported law enforcement's ability to understand crime in their communities by demographics such as age and offense (Roberts, 2013). Understanding patterns of juvenile crime in a community can support the law enforcement agency's strategic plan and tactics and also help community partners develop and support targeted prevention strategies.

02 Improve information sharing

Collaboration between law enforcement and juvenile justice agencies is critical to successfully address the risk level and criminogenic needs of justice-involved youth. Information sharing is one of the primary ways that law enforcement contributes to public safety and efficient use of community resources (OJJDP & IACP, 2008). Formal information sharing agreements that allow for a two-way exchange of information between law enforcement and the juvenile justice system support both the primary responsibilities of law enforcement and the mission of juvenile justice. Juvenile justice agencies can share information with law enforcement to inform charging decisions and investigations while law enforcement can provide information that assists juvenile justice system case planning (OJJDP & IACP, 2008).

03 Manage deployment of scarce resources

Law enforcement officers want to respond to youth law violating behavior in a timely and efficient manner, and data is integral to informing responses. In recent years, some communities have developed structured decision making tools to inform officer discretion when addressing a juvenile's behavior. The officer enters data, such as offense and prior arrests, and the tool provides guidance on the most appropriate response. Some jurisdictions have developed assessment centers where law enforcement can take juveniles alleged to have committed an offense to be assessed by juvenile justice professionals. The data collected through those assessments helps the juvenile justice professional match the juvenile to the appropriate response or service. Such processes are examples of coordinated methods to address juvenile crime and strategically invest resources.

04 Identify risk factors for youth victimization

There is evidence that exposure to traumatizing experiences, like community and domestic violence, can have negative lifelong effects on a child. Police are often the first responders to family conflicts or intra-familial violence, and protecting youth from victimization is a fundamental obligation of law enforcement agencies (IACP, 2015). The federal government is investing in improving systems for law enforcement data collections and allowing for more details related to the elements of reported crime, victims, and social context of the crime (Roberts, 2013). Understanding this information and how it relates to youth as victims, offenders, and bystanders can assist law enforcement agencies in identifying training issues relevant to preventing and addressing juvenile victimization in their communities.

> The Scottsdale Police Department is a proponent for supporting safe communities through the use of data collection and analysis. We are rich in data and have highly skilled staff that provide information allowing us to make evidence-based decisions, enabling us to be responsible to our community. A year ago we implemented a pre-arrest and court record diversion program, Restorative Justice Intervention Program, as an alternative to arrest for first-time offenders who met the program criteria. Our intention is to reduce recidivism through this early intervention away from the juvenile justice system and offer a lasting positive impact to our young people. Data allow us to be intentional in how we intervene with youth based on trending patterns of juvenile offenses. As this program grows we plan to evaluate recidivism of those youth that participate in the program, using analysis to determine the impact this has had as they move into adulthood."

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The OJJDP Juvenile Justice Model Data Project aims to enhance the quality and consistency of juvenile justice information and to increase its appropriate use in policy and practice decisions by providing guidance to states and jurisdictions on data improvements. The Model Data Project is a collaboration between the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National Center for Juvenile Justice, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA), the Performance-based Standards Learning Institute (PbS), and researchers from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FLDJJ).

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JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES
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NCJJ
NATIONAL CENTER
FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE
WWW.NCJJ.ORG

OJJDP
Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention
Office of Justice Programs ♦ U.S. Department of Justice

05 Inform public opinion on crime and safety

When law enforcement agencies demonstrate transparency and accountability by making their data public, either in annual reports or online, it enhances relationships with the public (www.policedatainitiative.org). Seeing the volume and types of crime law enforcement handles in the community contributes to increasing community confidence in their police. Data on juvenile crime specifically can help community organizations identify and address emerging local needs. The impact of transparent law enforcement data is not limited to the local community. Data collected by local law enforcement agencies contributes to the nation's understanding of juvenile crime and helps policymakers evaluate the needs of their community and guide government policy and investments (Roberts & Lissy, 2013).

> The Metropolitan Nashville Police Department supports a specialized Youth Services Division (YSD) that works with communities to identify what works in preventing youth crime and diverting youth from the juvenile justice system. The YSD uses data to foster trust through transparency and by leading with principles that value diversity. The YSD contributes to addressing public safety and better outcomes for youth by regularly collaborating with a variety of community stakeholders and metro-government agencies to identify underserved populations, promote school engagement, support prevention and police-led diversion strategies and to use crime data to identify community needs."

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