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Reducing Crime through Juvenile Delinquency Intervention

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Some police officers beginning their careers in law enforcement believe that reductions in crime are best achieved by making big arrests involving the dramatic apprehension of dangerous offenders. To these officers, the first-time arrest of a juvenile for a minor violation seems a mundane and unimportant policing activity that does not meet the big-arrest standard. This misconception of what constitutes an important arrest is regularly communicated throughout our culture by way of the evening news, movies, and television programs, which makes it somewhat easier to understand why new officers may not see the significance of a juvenile's first arrest. James Fyfe has noted that the news and entertainment industries generally ignore the implementation of effective crime prevention strategies, choosing instead to "grant police their greatest glory" for making the "cops 'n' robbers" arrests that provide "spectacular headlines and sensational docudrama."[1]

When examining the potential long-term negative impact on the community, the first-time arrest of a juvenile offender is a big arrest that criminal justice professionals cannot afford to treat as trivial. The way law enforcement agencies handle first-time juvenile offenders can affect the juvenile and his or her inclination to continue to violate the law. When treated as an insignificant event by the police, the first arrest represents a missed opportunity at intervention that could lay the foundation for repeated delinquency and perhaps hundreds of criminal acts over a lifetime. When handled proactively and with the appropriate gravity, that first police encounter can be a foundational life experience capable of reversing a juvenile's downward slide into potentially chronic, serious, and violent delinquency, as well as a key opportunity to achieve significant, long-term crime reductions for the community.

The most significant crime reduction effort may be the one that prevents a juvenile's first arrest from leading to a series of costly interactions with the criminal justice system.

Chicago's Juvenile Intervention Project

The opening of Chicago's first juvenile intervention and support center marks a major turning point that builds upon the Juvenile Gang Intervention Partnership Program (JGIPP), which was first introduced in December 1999 by the Chicago Police Department (CPD). JGIPP was initially funded through the federal Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant program, enabling the CPD to establish the Chicago-Cook County Juvenile Crime Enforcement Coalition (JCEC). This coalition includes the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, Juvenile Court, and Juvenile Probation Department; the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; Chicago's Departments of Public Health and Human Services; the Chicago Public Schools; the University of Illinois Institute for Juvenile Research; Chicago Metropolis 2020; and the Allstate Foundation, among other government agencies and civic organizations. The Juvenile Crime Enforcement Coalition provided the police department with an effective advisory board from which to

build a truly comprehensive multiagency partnership to address the issues of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile crime in Chicago. Each of the JCEC's partners shares a commitment to the principles of balanced and restorative justice (BARJ) and is committed to establishing a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach intended to reduce juvenile delinquency levels.

Station Adjusted Juvenile Offenders

During the first phases of Chicago's juvenile project, the police department tested two variations of a juvenile delinquency intervention model by using existing police resources and contracting for the enhanced case management of social services. Both of the earlier program models targeted juvenile offenders who were eligible to be station-adjusted under Illinois law.[2] In Chicago, to be eligible for a station adjustment a juvenile offender must have a limited prior delinquency history and the juvenile cannot currently be under arrest for a felony offense or for the use or possession of a firearm. When a case is station-adjusted, it is diverted from juvenile court by a police youth investigator, and the offender is typically released into the custody of his or her parents.

A powerful component of the station adjustment is the ability of the youth investigator to require the juvenile to meet certain conditions, including adhering to a curfew, attending school, participating in community mediation, staying out of certain areas and away from certain individuals, and participating in social services. Although clearly not all station-adjusted juveniles are in need of social services, for some juveniles such services can be critical to preventing continued delinquency.

Prior to JGIPP, the CPD lacked any reliable mechanism to ensure that station-adjusted juvenile offenders actually engaged in the social services to which they were directed. Without such a capacity, the potential for an effective response to a young offender's first interaction with police was often lost. Anecdotally, experienced youth investigators have estimated in years past that perhaps as few as one out of 10 station-adjusted juvenile offenders fully participated in the social service programs to which they were referred. The adverse effects from this unmonitored system of service delivery were probably minimal for those juvenile offenders that had sufficient protective factors working in their favor. However, for those juveniles who did not have sufficient protective factors, lacked adequate supervision, or were otherwise in need of greater assistance, it is not likely that the prior approach to service delivery and monitoring provided any significant assistance toward reducing the likelihood of recidivism.
In an attempt to address these challenges while searching for a more effective systemic response to juvenile crime, the original JGIPP effort began in 1999 by focusing on juvenile offenders who:

- were age 10 to 16;
- had fewer than four prior arrests;
- were eligible for station-adjustment; and
- had a gang affiliation or were at risk of gang affiliation.

Targeting such juvenile offenders for comprehensive intervention services, at the beginning of what could potentially become a continuing pattern of criminal behavior, was intended to redirect these young offenders toward more productive futures. The social services used within the current juvenile project continue to be directed toward reducing the risk of both recidivism and gang membership. They include general counseling, anger management, antigang and antiviolence instruction, substance abuse counseling, educational assistance, leadership development, mentoring, community service projects, and structured recreational activities, among others. As this project progresses, these intervention approaches will be expanded to include, when necessary and appropriate, victim-offender mediation and access to mental health treatment. All these efforts are consistent with the BARJ approach, which focuses on ensuring that juvenile offenders:

- are held accountable for their criminal actions;
- are monitored to ensure public safety;
- seek to repair the harm they have caused to their victims and the community; and
- develop the competencies necessary to become productive citizens.

The 8 Percent Solution

The research has shown that intervention efforts with juvenile offenders are more likely to be effective in reducing recidivism when those interventions are attempted at the time of their first few arrests. This approach has been effectively applied by the Orange County, California, Probation Department in their early intervention program, known as the 8 Percent Solution. There, 8 percent of juvenile offenders were rearrested four or more times within three years, accounting for 55 percent of all repeat cases. Most notably, the 8 percent group of repeat offenders had characteristics that were identifiable at the time of their first arrest. These characteristics distinguished them from juveniles who were arrested only once in three years. In general terms, the 8 percent group of repeat juvenile offenders began their offending at an early age and were found to have what was termed a multiproblem profile. These profiles showed multiple problems involving:

- the family or home setting (including abuse, neglect, criminal family members, history of running away, lack of parental supervision);
- school (including truancy, failing more than one course, recent suspension or expulsion);

- drug or alcohol abuse; and
- gang involvement.[3]

Consistent with this research, Chicago's juvenile project has continued to place a heavy focus on station-adjusted juveniles. Under the project, social workers have been assigned as case managers and perform three particularly key functions with respect to those juvenile offenders diverted from court and identified for intervention services by the youth investigator. First, the caseworkers help youth investigators communicate, to both the juveniles and their parents, the seriousness of the situation and the value of social services. Second, they prepare individualized service plans for each offender assigned to case management. Third, these workers engage in regular monitoring and follow-up to ensure that participation in the identified intervention services is actually occurring as mandated. These efforts are intended to both break the immediate pattern of delinquency and contribute to long-term crime prevention by reducing the number of emerging career criminals.

Gangs and Serious Delinquency

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been focused on juvenile crime and gang-involvement-and for good reason. Nationwide, serious crime has been on the decline, but juvenile involvement in crime and gangs increased significantly during the 1980s and 1990s. The 1998 National Youth Gang Survey reported that there were approximately 780,200 active gang members in the United States. Arlen Egley and Mehala Arjunan estimated that in 2000 there were more than 24,500 different youth gangs around the country, with more than 772,500 juvenile and young adult members.[4] In the 1970s, gangs were active in less than half the states, but now every state reports gang activity. The number of cities reporting gang problems increased from fewer than 300 in the 1970s to more than 2,500 in 1998.[5] Furthermore, there is general agreement that gang violence has become more serious since the 1970s. By comparison, the relativity mild label of juvenile delinquency is no longer applied to gang-related activity. Although some of the increases in violent behavior are thought to be due to increased participation in the drug trade and resulting territorial disputes, James Howell and Scott Decker believe that the increased availability of weapons and the increased use of cars in attacks on other gangs (drive-bys) have also contributed to the increase in gang-related homicides.[6]

Limited Window of Opportunity

- **More than two-thirds of Chicago's juveniles arrested for murder were just two years removed from their first arrest.**
- **81 percent were first arrested for a nonviolent offense**

From its inception, the Chicago project has made specific note of the connection between serious juvenile crime and gang membership. It has been well documented that gang membership has a direct impact on both the prevalence and severity of juvenile offending, and the likelihood of continued offending is increased for gang-affiliated juveniles. As compared to other juveniles from the same socioeconomic backgrounds, juveniles who are gang members become involved in crime at a younger age, are involved in more serious criminal behaviors,[7] and continue to be involved in crime at a higher rate throughout the time they are gang-affiliated.[8] Although juvenile gang membership in Chicago is in the thousands, their percentage of Chicago's 277,614 juveniles ages 10 to 16, is still relatively small, perhaps 3 to 7 percent.[9] Yet, of the 139 identified juvenile homicide offenders in Chicago from 1999 through 2003, more than 45 percent of those murders were determined to have been gang-motivated.

Two striking facts show up in the records of many of the 139 juveniles arrested for murder in Chicago from 1999 to 2003: gang involvement, and the swiftness with which these juveniles became involved in such severe offending. This swiftness is evidenced both in the limited number of prior arrests for these offenders and the limited length of time from their first arrests to their arrests for murder. In fact, 12 of the 139 juveniles (or 8.6 percent) had no prior Chicago arrests at all. Of the remaining 127 juveniles with at least one prior arrest, 26 (or 28.3 percent) had only one arrest. Nearly half (59, or 46.5 percent) had only one or two arrests, and surprisingly only about one-third (41, or 32.3 percent) had five or more prior arrests. Furthermore, for the 127 juveniles who had at least one arrest, more than one-third (49, or 38.6 percent) were arrested for murder within one year of their first arrest, and more than two-thirds (86, or 67.7 percent) were arrested for murder within two years of their first arrest.

Although the numbers show how quickly a juvenile can move from a nonviolent first offense to a more serious one, they also reveal an opportunity: the identified juvenile homicide offenders had been arrested a combined total of 516 times before they were arrested for murder. Particularly since 81.1 percent of these prior arrests were for nonviolent offenses, police and others clearly have opportunities to intervene before a juvenile's offending has escalated to serious violence. But many juveniles arrested for murder have few prior arrests. Consequently, reducing the likelihood that juveniles will continue to offend or become involved in increasingly serious crime requires that comprehensive intervention options are applied at the earliest stages of juvenile delinquency-especially at the time of a juvenile's first arrest.

Lessons Learned and Future Direction

Since the implementation of the initial pilot project, the CPD has been able to make several important observations. Some of these points have been long understood and accepted, even if then-existing processes did not adequately address them. For others, the project has allowed for both new meaning and emphasis. This is particularly true with respect to the practical potential that the delivery of effective intervention services, at the very earliest points of a juvenile offender's contact with the criminal justice system, has in helping a law enforcement agency meet its crime reduction mandate from the community.

First, effectively addressing gang-related crime and violence requires the development and implementation of an effective juvenile crime prevention model. Although only a small percentage of Chicago's youth are gang affiliated, on an organizational level, juveniles are the lifeblood that significantly strengthens the criminal gang enterprises to which they belong. For Chicago's major gangs, juveniles are a key resource used to help run street-level narcotics operations and to carry out acts of violence and intimidation. Through their participation in key criminal activities, juveniles provide their gang's much older adult leaders with a valuable shield from law enforcement. Unfortunately, there are far too many juveniles who are willing to place themselves in risky positions in order to reap the elusive benefits they imagine they will receive as a result of gang-involvement. However, as gang researcher George Knox and others have noted, stemming the flow of new juvenile members is critical to combating and hopefully dismantling these criminal organizations.[10]

Second, the initial JGIPP program design was limited by the Chicago Police Department's organizational design and the physical constraints of facilities. The vast majority of juvenile offenders continued to be processed within the confined spaces and adult-centered environments of the district police stations. These facilities are, at best, minimally suited for effective juvenile intervention, particularly since neither the youth investigators nor the project's case workers were assigned to work directly out of the district stations, having instead to travel to these stations when called to assist in handling a juvenile arrest. This initial design was somewhat inefficient with respect to both program coordination and costs. As such, the project provided further support for centralizing the police intake and processing functions. Centralization will provide opportunities to both decrease the length of time patrol officers are off the street waiting for youth investigators and social workers, and it will also reduce the length of time juvenile offenders are held in police custody merely waiting for the arrival of key personnel. In this manner, the center will allow the police department to recognize savings in terms of police resources, as well as provide juveniles with a much more immediate and directed response to their behavior.

Third, the introduction of a social worker to help the youth investigator handle a station adjustment provides an enhanced opportunity for a successful outcome by increasing the likelihood of parental involvement. The presence of the caseworker on the night of arrest seems to raise the perception levels among parents that the arrest of their child is a serious life event. Once raised, this increased parental awareness, coupled with regular follow-up by the caseworker, dramatically increases the likelihood that juvenile offenders will participate as directed in intervention and social services. Obviously, juvenile participation is an absolutely essential prerequisite for these services to have any benefit. Increasing the level of awareness and insisting on parental involvement will increase juvenile participation in intervention services and will ultimately lead to fewer repeat juvenile offenders.

Fourth, and most importantly, the introduction of a specialized juvenile center enhances the CPD's potential for establishing the desired multidisciplinary partnership necessary to have a significant impact on juvenile recidivism. During the remainder of 2004, Chicago's first Juvenile Intervention and Support Center will operate as a prototype facility in advance of two or three additional facilities across the city. Operating this first facility as a prototype will allow the CPD and its JCEC partners to evaluate and adjust the underlying program operations as needed until the final operational design is fully identified. Located on Chicago's Near Southside, the first center will provide juvenile arrestee processing, as well as intervention and support services for six of the Chicago Police Department's 25 police districts. During 2003 these six districts had a combined total of more than 8,800 juvenile arrests, more than 31 percent of all juvenile arrests in Chicago that year. In these districts, only those arrests of a juvenile for a felony offense requiring the immediate follow-up investigation by detectives (typically for serious violent crimes) will be processed outside the center. While the first phase of implementation will address the police department's need for enhanced juvenile arrestee processing, improving this necessary activity merely provides a foundation upon which the project's more comprehensive initiatives can be built. Among these is the introduction of a redesigned case management approach, which will begin a collaborative partnership involving the police and the city's social service agencies.

In addition, with the assistance of approximately 50 to 100 community volunteers and with financial support from the Allstate Foundation, this first phase will establish the police department's largest victim-offender mediation program to date. Furthermore, this phase will also include the introduction of the police department's most comprehensive collaboration with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office and Juvenile Probation Department. Both agencies will provide on-site personnel to coordinate their court diversion programs with the expanding operations at the center. Although station adjustments will remain the greatest proportion of cases handled outside of juvenile court, the center's coordination with the diversion efforts of the state's attorney's office and probation department is yet another dramatic step toward improving the overall effectiveness of Chicago's juvenile justice system.

The Changing Role

From the traditional policing perspective, there was no higher priority for a law enforcement agency than arresting offenders, and if crime prevention occurred in connection with these arrests, it was, at best, a secondary consideration. Law enforcement agencies that could reliably investigate and solve criminal incidents were generally judged by their communities as successful. However, while meeting this traditional standard was no small achievement, since the advent of the community-oriented policing model, law enforcement agencies across the United States and elsewhere have been under increasing pressure to engage in anticrime measures that extend well beyond merely catching the bad guy. Without question there is now a clear community expectation that police departments will actively foster true and lasting crime deterrence and prevention.

Although theorists continue to debate the underlying causes of crime, there is broad acceptance that crime prevention in general requires a multidisciplinary approach. Additionally, when considering the myriad of complications that come into play when attempting to effectively intervene with juvenile offenders, the need for a coordinated and multifaceted approach to crime prevention is even more clear. As juvenile delinquency expert James C. Howell notes, the best practices in juvenile delinquency intervention involve the use of multiple services from a variety of providers, including "prevention agencies, schools, mental health agencies, social service agencies, youth development programs, child protection agencies, religious institutions, and the juvenile justice system."[11]

In considering whether or not a law enforcement agency can successfully establish the multidisciplinary approaches necessary to reduce juvenile recidivism, police executives need look no further than their experiences with community policing. Those experiences strongly indicate that when the police work in partnership with the community and civic groups, as well as other criminal justice, social service, and governmental agencies, it is possible to prevent or reduce victimization.

From a long-term perspective, the single most significant crime reduction effort may be the one that prevents a juvenile's first arrest from becoming one that leads to a long line of costly interactions with the criminal justice system. While it is fair to say that helping juveniles to become healthy and productive citizens is a lofty goal for a law enforcement agency, it is one that police departments can attain through a very practical approach to juvenile delinquency. Through the early intervention possible when police officers work in collaboration with an effective social service system, real crime reductions are attainable each time a young offender is diverted away from a life of crime.

[1] James Fye, "Good Policing," in The Administration and Management of Criminal Justice Organizations: A Book of Readings, 3rd ed., edited by Stan Stojkovic, John Klofas, and David Kalinich (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1999), 121.
[2] Illinois Juvenile Court Act, 705 ILCS 405/5-301.
[3] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, The 8% Solution, an OJJDP Fact Sheet (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2001).
[4] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Highlights of the 2000 National Youth Gang Survey, an OJJDP Fact Sheet, by Arlen Egley and Mehala Arjunan (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002).
[5] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, The Growth of Youth Gang Problems in the United States: 1970-98, by Walter Miller (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001).
[6] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, The Youth Gangs, Drugs, and Violence Connection, a Juvenile Justice Bulletin, by James Howell and Scott Decker (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1999).
[7] U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, Comparing the Criminal Behavior of Youth Gangs and At-Risk Youths, an NIJ Research in Brief document, by C. Ronald Huff (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1998), 1-2; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Gang Membership, Delinquent Peers, and Delinquent Behavior, a Juvenile Justice Bulletin, by Sara Battin-Pearson, Terence Thornberry, J. David Hawkins, and Marvin Krohn (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1998), 1, 8-9.
[8] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Report to Congress on Juvenile Violence Research, by Shay Bilchik (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1999), 27.
[9] Under Illinois law, juveniles are those persons under age 17. Population figure based upon the 2000 U.S. Census.
[10] George Knox, An Introduction to Gangs, revised ed. (Bristol, Ind.: Wyndham Hall Press, 1995), 557-558.
[11] James C. Howell, Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Comprehensive Framework (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003), 194.