

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/it-takes-a-village-blog-series/collaboration-is-key-when-it-comes-to-keeping-kids-out-of-the-justice-system>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The title of our latest report on diversion strategies [*It Takes a Village*](#) is no accident. School administrators and teachers, law enforcement officials, service providers, and families all play key roles in keeping young people out of the juvenile justice system. Often, however, these groups are not effectively partnering with each other to find pragmatic solutions that will keep at-risk young people out of detention and connect them with the services they need to succeed.

To gain a better understanding of how these groups could collaborate, and to expand on the recommendations provided in the report, we went back and spoke again with stakeholders from organizations the report highlights. These suggestions from juvenile justice professionals and local stakeholders will help communities across the country work effectively with all necessary partners to make diversion programs more effective.

Karli Keator, Division Director, Policy Research Associates (PRA):

PRA runs the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice (highlighted below), which aims to promote systems change and improved outcomes for youth with mental, behavioral health, substance use or co-occurring disorders in contact with the juvenile justice system.

All of the partners really need to be open and willing to listen to each other because everyone plays a different role. And although everyone hopefully wants to work together and wants to achieve positive outcomes for youth and families, they have their own roles and responsibilities to play as part of the system that they're working in. Listening to each other and trying to understand what people can and can't do is an important starting point in order for collaboration to really be effective.

Jacqui Greene, Senior Project Associate, National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice:

.Each of these stakeholder groups is going to probably bring baggage about what they think about the other groups and what they think about diversion in general. When you bring all those stakeholders around the table and you start talking about 'What's our ultimate goal of this?' and you start talking about needs kids have and talk about connecting them to services to support them and address those needs, most people regardless of their role can agree to that. I think establishing a common mission or vision at the outset and keeping that at the forefront as you meet so that your eye is on the ball the whole time is important. That helps a group come together.

Joshua Campbell, Manager, Multi-Agency Resource Center, Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana:

The Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC) was created in 2011 as a drop-in center to provide coordinated evidence-based services to youth under 18. It is accessible to officers encountering youth who need additional support and services and parents and families of youth at risk of getting arrested.

One focus for us is community feedback. When we receive referrals from community providers, school staff, or law enforcement we feel appreciation should be extended. If a new law enforcement officer chooses to use the MARC as a resource versus formally charging the youth, a simple thank you email could go a long way. Something simple that takes only a few minutes can go a long way.

We also let school employees know if a family took the initiative to come in and they want to work on things. It may help the school to be more patient if the youth is having a future bad day. [We also let] our community providers (doctors' offices, community groups, churches, etc.) know we are following through, and the families are better off because of their suggestion to come to the MARC.

Without this feedback our community may become less apt to refer to the MARC. We want to express our appreciation and let them know it is of benefit and we aren't wasting the family's time. A simple thank you creates a bond, knowing we are all in this together.

Chris McKee, Lieutenant, Windsor, Connecticut Police Department, Former School Resource Officer:

The Windsor Police Department is an active participant in the state's Crisis Intervention Training for Youth program to help police officers understand adolescent development and mental health and/or substance use behaviors, and use that information to deescalate confrontation. The Department also participates in the state's Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services crisis response program where police officers and others can request mental health professionals to respond to and divert a crisis situation.

From my perspective what we could do better as an organization is collaborating with families. As a police department we are in a very fortunate relationship with our school partners, especially with our middle school and high school. We have very strong relationships and collaboration with our mental health system. And we also have that relationship with the juvenile court. In those three aspects, we're very solid. There's a lot of information free flowing and a lot of collaboration.

Where I feel that were short is with families. Weve put a lot of effort forward, but families dont understand systems that are in place. Theres a lot of misinformation about what juvenile court looks likeFamilies dont know whats out there. They think the police are only going to bring someone to jail or keep them in jail. But were getting thereI think some type of community event or forum like a job fair or something, where the police department is present to promote awareness with handouts and information so that we can advertise and market what were doing would help. That is something Id like to see done in the community, at the libraries, and through the schools.

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