

## Benefits of Deflection (Pre-Arrest Diversion) for Criminal Justice and Communities

There are many benefits to deflection/pre-arrest diversion (PAD) programs and initiatives including improved public safety, greater accountability for deflection program participants, connection to community-based service providers, and avoidance of an arrest record.<sup>1</sup> This approach, a fundamental and long overdue shift in the criminal justice system, provides targeted prevention and intervention, and an array of services to promote positive outcomes.

As deflection is a collaborative effort, each of the partners want to know how it will benefit them and how they can leverage their existing resources. There are overall benefits as well as those that are specific to each of the partnering agencies involved in a deflection program or initiative. Deflection offers cost savings for the criminal justice system through less processing time involved for law enforcement, no jail bookings and incarceration, and no court costs. Community-based service providers connect with participants, and those who engage with the program have an opportunity to explore some of the potential factors associated with their involvement in criminal activity. Reduced recidivism and increased opportunities for success can support long-term cost savings.<sup>2</sup>

For law enforcement agencies, some of the advantages of a deflection program includes less time processing an arrest, allowing them to become more efficient, such as by getting back in the field more quickly. Many programs are designed so that an officer or deputy can immediately determine eligibility by making a call or accessing a database. Participants can then be directly referred to the lead agency for program intake. For example, in many counties throughout Florida in the juvenile justice system, including Leon County, the officer determines if the offense meets internal police policies and state statutes and calls the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) to see if the youth is eligible for the Civil Citation program. With minimal paperwork, the officer drops the eligible youth off at the JAC where the process takes place and the officer is available to respond to additional calls for service.<sup>3</sup>

Another important advantage for law enforcement is improved community relations. Deflection tends to involve a less confrontational approach when compared to traditional arrest practices. Clear communication guided by a better understanding of behavioral health and social service principles can be helpful to this process. Law enforcement officers are viewed more positively for their insight and

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<sup>1</sup> Frost, G. (2015, Sept.) Police Chief Magazine. *Adult Civil Citations: A Practical Tool in the Sea of Reform*. Police Chief Magazine.  
<https://civilcitation.net/assets/research/Tab%2015%20Adult%20Civil%20Citations;%20A%20Practical%20Tool%20in%20the%20Sea%20of%20Reform.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2019, Dec.) *Police Diversion for Low-Severity Offenses (Pre-Arrest)*.  
<https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/726>

<sup>3</sup> Tallahassee Police Department General Orders. *Juvenile Civil Citation Program*. (2018).  
<https://www.talgov.com/uploads/public/documents/tpd/policies/go-71.pdf>

judgement when using a response other than arrest. Additionally, law enforcement can provide program participants a connection to community resources which can assist them with better life choices and opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

The reduced amount of time required to process a deflection participation can allow officers to focus on more serious public safety matters. Partnerships with community organizations introduces the opportunity to address the underlying causes of criminal activity, such as cases of mental health and substance use disorder, through a therapeutic approach. Law enforcement officers can maintain a strong focus and training on public safety, while behavioral health and social service staff concentrate on de-escalation, assessments, resource connection and case management to help prevent recidivism.<sup>5</sup>

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Another benefit is the enhancement of criminal justice and behavioral health services through the integration of these systems as a much needed front-end/zero intercept practice. As corrections administrators struggle to adequately staff their facilities, and maintain safety and facility protocols, deflection provides some relief by reducing the number of people admitted to local jails. Expanding these facilities is also costly, and these front-end practices have the potential to alleviate this expense. Diverting these funds to deflection programs and mental health and substance use disorder treatment makes sense, and is a more effective and efficient way to spend tax-payer dollars.

There are several other cross-representative benefits such as increased community knowledge of one another's resources and collaboration. Oftentimes, communities are not aware of all of their own resources and how they connect and can work together. Deflection provides an opportunity for on-going and inclusive communication, a chance to understand one another's programs better, and a chance to system map community resources for positive change. Collectively identifying gaps in existing services can result in beneficial changes. Working together provides opportunities to leverage resources such as co-locations, reducing duplication of services, partnering on grant-funded projects, accessing technical assistance, and providing individualized services with a better continuum of care.

Benefits for the community also include the potential for increased collaborative opportunities with other community agencies, often using an effective wraparound approach. Deflection allows providers

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<sup>4</sup> Charlier, J. (2017) Deflection: A Powerful Crime-Fighting Tool That Improves Community Relations. <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/deflection-a-powerful-crime-fighting-tool-that-improves-community-relations/>

<sup>5</sup>, Police Chief Magazine. *Spotlight: A New Approach to a Growing Crisis*. (2022, Sept.) <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/spotlight-a-new-approach-to-a-growing-crisis/?ref=fa5914a21b9cb7c2141456422811ec73>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Florida Juvenile Justice. (2016-2017.) <https://www.djj.state.fl.us/content/download/23875/file/public-safety-commission-presentation-%28june-7-2018%29.pdf>

to work with participants by preventing entry or further processing into the overburdened justice system while addressing the risk factors associated with a repeat offense. There are also training opportunities for first responders and other community partners, such as with the National Alliance on Mental Illness's (NAMI) Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) which emphasizes partnerships between stakeholders.

When more individuals are able to obtain employment, education and housing due to not having an arrest record, the community stands to benefit in a number of ways. Local organizations, agencies, businesses and the military can better staff their programs. One successful deflection program participant is currently an attorney working for a state court of appeals. She would most likely not be there now if she had been arrested instead of deflected. When people are gainfully employed and connected to treatment and other resources, there can also be a reduction in homelessness, less hospitalizations, and healthier and safer communities.<sup>7</sup>

Deflection initiatives and programs are growing exponentially both nationally, and more recently, internationally. Law enforcement agencies and communities are realizing the potential of these programs. Although it is limited, there is more data continually being collected and analyzed as the use of deflection grows. Preliminary data has shown positive results for a number of deflection programs, highlighting this approach as a good way of doing business and an excellent alternative to arrest.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2022, Sept.) *Employed and Experiencing Homelessness: What the Numbers Show*. <https://endhomelessness.org/blog/employed-and-experiencing-homelessness-what-the-numbers-show/>

<sup>8</sup> Nadel, M., Bales, W., Pesta, G. (2019, Dec.) *An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Civil Citation as an Alternative to Arrest among Youth Apprehended by Law Enforcement*. National Institute of Justice.