

## **Strengthening Communities through Deflection and Pre-Arrest Diversion**

There are many benefits to deflection and pre-arrest diversion (D/DPAD) initiatives, and strengthening the community is one of them. Increased and enhanced communication, relationship building, understanding and sharing of resources and information take place in those D/DPAD initiatives and programs that are implemented with fidelity.<sup>1</sup> There is strengthening even in the efforts to develop and implement D/DPAD as relationships are built.

How do we get there and how do we continue to grow and strengthen our communities? As D/DPAD is a community-based program, that is where it should start. Involve community partners from the beginning and always look to add more partners as the program or initiative grows and the players change. Take stock and keep an inventory of what resources come and go.

As many deflection initiatives and pre-arrest diversion programs are also intricately based on law enforcement participation, a great opportunity is presented to strengthen relationships between law enforcement and the community, building trust. In particular, law enforcement relationships with youth and families can be fostered, with activities developed and implemented such as holiday “Shop with a Cop,” Police Athletic Leagues (PAL) and violence prevention programs.<sup>2</sup>

Be inclusive. Invite the entire community including behavioral health service providers, elected officials, justice agencies, employment agencies, faith-based groups, business owners, consumer voices, non-profit organizations and others to participate in the effort. Have one-on-one conversations meeting people where they are at, and regular, ongoing team meetings. Bring in expert trainers, do some research and provide ongoing joint training. Work together to get legislation and or local ordinances enacted that support the work being done.

Get to know one another and learn about each other’s responsibilities, legal requirements and processes. Focus on the similarities in mission statements and visions; you may be

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan, P. (2023) Benefits of Deflection (Pre-Arrest Diversion) for Criminal Justice and Communities. <https://civilcitation.com/uploads/resources/Benefits-of-Deflection-Final-7.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Collier County, FL. Sheriff’s Office. Police Youth Programs: Much More than Fun and Games. (2020) [https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/03-2020/youth\\_programs.html](https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/03-2020/youth_programs.html)

surprised how closely they are aligned. Keep the program mission, vision and shared purpose at the forefront. Determine how agencies and individuals can complement and support each other as well as the limitations they may have regarding how they are able to respond. With a solution-oriented focus, figure out collectively how to find ways to make things work, and understand that change takes time.

Is transportation a barrier like it is in most communities? Invite the bus leadership to the conversation and think about ride-sharing partnerships. Is grant writing a need? Reach out to the local library, schools and colleges. Maybe there's an intern program or a librarian who could be of assistance. Consider creative partnering with an agency who has a grant writer. Is lack of knowledge about community resources a challenge? Conduct system mapping together and determine strengths, gaps and opportunities.

Write opinion pieces with success stories for local newspapers and community blogs and release joint media releases together. Present in front of community groups, including Q&A sessions. Hold community town halls to help get the word out. Engage and motivate others, especially as to what benefits are in it for them.

Educate the community that deflection and pre-arrest diversion initiatives and programs are a critical front-end piece of the justice and behavioral health systems for both youth and adults that integrates justice and behavioral health, takes a preventative, wraparound approach, is more cost-effective than traditional arrest processing and provides public safety.<sup>3</sup> Deflection and Pre-Arrest Diversion have several positive outcomes for individuals and families that support communities including expanding access to education, providing treatment as indicated, and helping secure employment and housing.

Support preventative programs and activities for children and families, as prevention and early intervention provide short and long term, positive results for communities.<sup>4</sup> Establish and maintain community events, educational opportunities and resources like "Little Libraries." Provide safe living environments that encourage strengths and reduce risk factors in a collective way with community, regional and state partners.

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<sup>3</sup> Civil Citation Network. What is Pre-Arrest Diversion? (2022). <https://civilcitation.com/pre-arrest-diversion>

<sup>4</sup> Early Intervention Foundation. (n.d.) What is early intervention? <https://www.eif.org.uk/why-it-matters/what-is-early-intervention>

Publish program data in quarterly reports on webpages and newsletters and make program improvements as the data and community input and needs dictate. Be transparent and communicative with all partners. Get their ideas and input in processes and procedures. Include them on an active advisory board that was established early on.<sup>5</sup> Seek ways to partner together to leverage and gain new resources, such as through grants, other funding opportunities and technical assistance.

Monitor processes and outcomes as you go and work collaboratively to address challenges as they arise instead of waiting for them to turn into a bigger problem. Realize that changes will be made along the way and can include modifications to the program eligibility list, operations, policy updates, partner updates and more.

Recognize and promote positive outcomes and accomplishments. Celebrating earned successes together builds upon the established foundation, program growth and community relationships. Appreciating the hard work, efforts and outcomes creates community pride, resilience and camaraderie.

Remember a pre-arrest program is a work in progress and adapt and evolve together.<sup>6</sup> Go back to the core of the missions and remember why working together on deflection and pre-arrest diversion strengthens communities and is a critical piece of a successful justice/behavioral health continuum.

-Peria Duncan (July 2023)

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<sup>5</sup> Duncan, P, Kopak, A. (2022). Barriers, Solutions and Outcomes to Implementation of Pre-Arrest Diversion Programs.

[https://civilcitation.com/uploads/resources/Barriers-Solutions\\_AK-pd3.pdf](https://civilcitation.com/uploads/resources/Barriers-Solutions_AK-pd3.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Brower, T. How To Build Community and Why It Matters So Much. (2020).

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2020/10/25/how-to-build-community-and-why-it-matters-so-much/?sh=55d52f37751b>