



Juvenile Probation Department Denver Juvenile Court

Shawn Cohn, Chief Probation Officer

Serving the needs of our young adult population

Young adulthood (18-24 years old) can be a time of growth and opportunity. Many young adults go to college, the military or enter the workforce, however, for some young adults; criminal justice involvement casts a shadow over their future.

Young adults are overrepresented in many categories of justice involvement. Although they make up about ten percent of the total population, this age group accounts for over 29 percent of arrests. Currently 1/3 of the youth supervised by Denver Juvenile Probation are over the age of 18.

Reducing the number of young adults who become involved in the justice system and improving the outcomes for those who do would have tremendous economic and social benefits.

Research shows the adolescent brain does not fully mature until mid-20's, in particular, risk-taking and self-regulation.

It can be difficult for young adults to escape negative influence in their life. The problems that many of them faced at 17 do not disappear at the age of 18. The lack of positive role models, past systems involvement, lack of education or employment are often the same barriers they face entering adulthood. Many 18- and 19-year olds are still in high school or college and living at home. Incorporating family engagement is crucial for this population. Placing these young adults in groups and services with an older more mature population has shown little success.

Juveniles involved in the criminal justice system do not automatically become full functioning adults on their 18th birthday. The professionals working with them need to have a strong understanding of adolescent brain development, the impacts of abuse and neglect, navigating the school systems and most importantly family engagement.

There will be many challenges in creating a system for young adults. This is especially true for those young adults who have caused serious harm to individuals and the community. However, given our increased understanding of human development and the utilization of evidence-based practices studying this issue is an appropriate next step.

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