

# School to Work: A Recruitment Model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## *Abstract*

*Recruitment in Law enforcement has traditionally been a reactive process, meaning that departments fill vacancies as they occur. There is little or no long term focus or vision to involve young members of the community in the criminal justice system. Therefore there is no local pool of applicants that are available when the need arises to hire. The present system of recruitment is costly and non-effective. This paper presents a model for pre-service recruitment of young males and females into the criminal justice system. The model will streamline costs associated with the recruitment process and develop a pool of dedicated and diverse applicants.*

## Introduction

The focus of this research was limited as there are limited to the number of projects in existence. School to work programs have only been in existence in the state of Florida for eight years and most of the schools contacted were in the early second, third, and fourth year stages of the program. Of the sixty seven counties in the State of Florida, only thirty four have adopted an active criminal justice school to work program. In some of these counties there may be several high schools with only one offering a criminal justice program.

There are several issues that need to be addressed regarding the reason for a pre-service criminal justice program. They are who, what, where, when, why, and how this program might be adopted for the Fort Pierce Police Department.

## Why

The most important question to be asked is why? There are five basic reasons to consider.

First: Law Enforcement statewide as well as nationally is having trouble recruiting eligible candidates to fill open criminal justice positions. The economy is good, the public unemployment rate is low; therefore criminal justice has to be very competitive in a tight job market. Exacerbating the problem is the growing wave of retirements of the baby-boomer officers who now have more than twenty years of service. With law enforcement job salaries being lower than their counterparts in the private sector it only stands to reason that law enforcement is going to have a tough time in this competitive market.

Second: The public turnover rate for agencies in the state of Florida is approximately eight percent. Using the Fort Pierce Police Department as an example there are nine new officers that have to be recruited and hired each year. Without a local pool of talented applicants the city has to reach out to other communities for applicants. Once these applicants complete the hiring process and become officers, approximately thirty percent leave Fort Pierce to go back to their home communities within two years.

This is just not a local community or statewide problem, there are national ramifications as well.

For example; 25 percent of the Washington, D.C. police force is expected to retire in two years. The Seattle, Washington police department is looking at 150 officers retiring by the end of 1999, severely impacting an agency that is already operating at 10 percent below authorized strength. The Atlanta, Georgia police department is currently staffed at 19 percent authorized strength

Third: There would be a definite cost benefit to local agencies having an eligible applicant pool base. Fort Pierce averages hiring one out of thirty applicants that it considers. Statewide, other agencies have about the same average. The cost of expensive out of area background searches and recruitment trips would be eliminated. The training and benefit package given to a new hiree is about fourteen thousand dollars. The cost savings which will result in hiring local applicants that will spend a long career in their community working is worth the program.

Fourth: Well over seventy percent of law enforcement agencies statewide are incorporating a community policing philosophy. Hiring local men and women assists agencies in fulfilling some of the goals of Community Policing; such as,

- Without community involvement, police responses to crime and disorder are limited.
- The recognition and focus on a communities unique social geography.
- Preparation of employees to deal with cultural diversity issues in the community.
- To build partnerships and collaborations with residents in the community that are necessary to successfully address the problems of crime and disorder.

Fifth: As baby boomers start retiring, the criminal justice field will start feeling the pinch of being competitive in the future job market. Criminal Justice has to have a vision of being proactive and develop candidates for a career in the criminal justice field.

### What

The goal of the program is a five to seven year plan to recruit future criminal justice employees using the local educational infrastructure. At the end of the program students have been prepared to enter directly into the criminal justice work force. They have developed the knowledge skills, understanding, and attitudes that are necessary to function in the criminal justice field. Students will also have received a minimum two-year degree.

The college degree is necessary because more and more law enforcement agencies are requiring degrees before hiring. The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) recently conducted a survey of police chiefs in medium and large cities regarding education levels in their work force. The research indicated that 94.8 percent of agencies have an educational requirement. Of those with such requirements over 50 percent require high school degrees, 27 percent require a two year associate degree, and 5 percent require a four year bachelors degree. That is significantly higher than the requirements in 1990. It is even more

important in the upper ranks where 87 percent of Chief's have bachelor's degrees and over half have master's doctorates or law degrees. That is compared to 15 percent who had bachelor's degrees and 4.3 percent who had advanced degrees in 1975.

A college degree is significant because studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between the level of higher education and an unlikelihood that educated recruits will involve themselves in a corruptible act, a better management of sick time, and better interpersonal communication skills necessary to de-escalate violent situations and have less chances of citizen complaints lodged.

### When

Research reveals that the program in the state of Florida is in its infancy. Most programs begin in the tenth grade. A few in the ninth grade, mainly preparing students for the program the following year. Lake Worth Highschool in Palm Beach County has been involved in a criminal justice curriculum for seven years. Most of the others are in their third and fourth year. There are no real hard facts and figures available at this time to document and track graduates.

The program for high school is three years of study designed to help students understand and be prepared for a career in criminal justice. The programs curriculum develops in students the knowledge, skills, understanding, and attitudes that are necessary in becoming a productive person in the criminal justice field. Upon completion of the program there are three outcomes;

- students go directly into the work force and are prepared to go on to a post secondary educational institution.
- students continue on to a two year associate degree program if that is a requirement for job selection.
- students continue directly to a four year college or university if that is the requirement.

### Who

Young men and women who are attracted to a career in law enforcement should be recruited at the junior high level. A special emphasis needs to be placed on finding minorities.

### Where

The program will be targeted to the local Community High schools and Community Colleges. Internships will begin in the students senior year. Partnerships will be formed with the local criminal justice agencies and the internships will be conducted at these agencies.

### How

Ten high schools, selected randomly throughout the state with the school-to-work criminal justice program, were contacted. Many of these schools had a slightly different approach to the classroom instruction and the selection process. That is one of the integral parts of this program. There is no one right way to conduct this training. There is an integrated

approach to classroom instruction but there is enough flexibility and adjustment so as not to infringe upon the individual program's effectiveness. The curriculum does not just teach the basic function of law enforcement but also includes special topics and other contemporary law enforcement issues. The program is a model that takes high school students out of the traditional school setting and places them in the working world. It is designed to provide these high school students with an enhanced understanding of the criminal justice system and law enforcement.

Traditionally, law enforcement career development programs rely on sending officers into the high schools. This program takes the opposite approach; it brings the school to the law enforcement setting. Educational leaders, parents, students and law enforcement all have a say so as to what the programs goals and objectives are. Following are comments from the directors of six of the programs. A seventh individual who sits on an advisory boards also had their commentary selected.

Osceola County High Schools are in the early development of the program. Mr. Flowers, who is in charge of the program, states that students who enroll in these classes can acquire six college credit hours. No student convicted of a felony can be selected; to remain in the program the students have to maintain a 3.0 grade point average in the criminal justice classes and a 2.5 grade point average in all their other classes.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Gary Marx, Director of the Criminal Justice program at Hillsborough Durant High School, states that the program is in the fourth year. Internships are conducted at the Tampa Police Department and Hillsborough Sheriff's Department. They have a board of advisors who assist in working with the students and the local colleges. Students that have had previous problems with conduct and attitude are accepted; however, before any internship a criminal history will be completed.<sup>2</sup>

Ms. Turner, at Zephyrhills High School states that they have over 100 students in the program which is in the third year. This number is continually increasing. She states that this program prepares students for the work place. The program is a dual track between the law program and criminal justice. Students go on field trips and the classes have guest speakers from the local law enforcement. She states they have an application process and an advisory council. She states that communication between the local law enforcement agencies is extremely important.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Louis Johnson from Lake Worth High School states that they are in the sixth year of the program. He states that the program would not exist and could not flourish without a commitment from local law enforcement agencies and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Department. They have 230 students in the program this year. They have an agreement

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<sup>1</sup> Flowers, December 3, 1998

<sup>2</sup> Marx, G., November 16, 1998

<sup>3</sup> Turner, November 16, 1998

with the local community college and approximately 85% of the students continue pursuing a criminal justice degree in college. They also have an advisory council and their criminal justice program also contains programs on juvenile delinquency and criminal justice awareness. They maintain an eligibility list and try to keep a balance of minorities in the program.<sup>4</sup>

One of the original founders of the program is Captain Tom Peters at Ocala Forest High School. They have approximately 120 students in the program. The local college recognizes nine credit hours for completion of the high school program. They actively try to attract minorities into the program. The freshman and sophomore years are orientation programs. Starting in the junior year there is a 21 week internship program with local law enforcement. The advanced program is very competitive. Students that have bad records will be kept out of the advanced program. Scholarships are available and several students have gone on to work in the criminal justice field.<sup>5</sup>

Ms. Jackie Whitworth, the program director and a retired Federal Law Enforcement Officer, conducts the program at Newberry High School in Alachua County Florida. She states that there are 150 students in the program this year. There is an introductory program that begins in the ninth grade. Actual classes begin in the tenth grade. Students have to apply to get in the program because it is a magnet program in the county. Students are bussed in throughout the county. The program actively recruits minorities. The program has complete autonomy. Internships begin in the students third year. She states that there is also money made available for scholarships.<sup>6</sup>

Several of the programs contacted stated that an advisory board was formed to assist in scrutinizing the curriculum. Ms, Darlene Halsteadt of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office was contacted and interviewed. She is an advisory board member for the Bell Glade High School criminal justice program. She states she is one of fifteen members on the board. She states that there are chief's of police, state attorney's, public defender's, federal government officials and school principals on the advisory board. She states that the board meets monthly. During the board meetings the programs curriculum is prepared, enrollments are checked, and even fund raisers are conducted.

The program is in a magnet school. Students have to meet academic requirements or be removed from the program. The students wear uniforms and have their own classrooms; including a crime lab. There is a scholarship program to a four year university. She states that the program is so popular that there is a waiting list to get in the program.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, L., December 5, 1998

<sup>5</sup> Peters, Tom., November 16, 1998

<sup>6</sup> Whitworth, J., November 16, 1998

<sup>7</sup> Haldsteadt, D., January 21, 1999

These comments are just a few from the leaders in this field. Every instructor contacted was very excited about the program. They however all had the same complaint and regret. Law enforcement does not use this resource to the best of their abilities. Many areas do not have the program and others that do have not been able to communicate to the agencies that this program is out there.

At the beginning of the program students express interest in pursuing careers in law enforcement at the municipal, county, state, or federal level. Others are interested in the corrections field. Many others may be undecided or express interest in private security, human services, or in different aspects of the legal profession. By the end of the program a portion of the students may change their minds. Others may decide to pursue a different criminal justice career track, and finally others may decide that a criminal justice career is not for them.

Allowing students to get a realistic picture of the criminal justice system in action and enabling them to fine-tune their career paths while in high school benefits the students as well as the profession. Students will be able to make informed decisions about alternate careers and will not waste time and effort pursuing a career path in an area that will ultimately prove unfulfilling to them and costly to the organization training them.

Whether they pursue a career a career in criminal justice or not, the students will possess a heightened awareness of the intricacies of the criminal justice system, making them more informed citizens. The program benefits the criminal justice system by exposing interested young adults to the realities of a career in criminal justice and diverting those young adults who may have a false impression of what such a career does.

### Obstacles

During the phone interviews several obstacles were presented that can and are hindering the program;

- getting local law enforcement involved i.e, intern programs and instructors made available.
- since most of the programs are in their infancy, little or no information is available to properly evaluate the program's curriculum and to find out how many students are continuing on to a productive criminal justice career.
- commitment from law enforcement to actively recruit and hire graduating students.
- since the program is being publicly funded through local taxes, how do you keep undesirable students out of the program.

### Benefits

There are many benefits of this program for the students and the criminal justice field; especially in local communities. Some of them are;

- To instill and heighten student awareness of public service as a personal value as well as a vocation.
- Develop the concepts of loyalty, integrity, honesty and pride in the students.

- Develop specific skills that will increase future employment in criminal justice occupations.
- Strengthen written and oral communication skills
- Enhancement of community and police relations
- The ability to provide on the job training for future employment.
- Budgetary cost savings in recruitment and retention for the participating agencies.

### Keys to success

To be a successful program whereby the criminal justice field can reap the benefits there are several keys or avenues that need implementation. Such as;

- developing partnerships between parents, students, local school boards and government officials.
- initiate advisory councils or boards to oversee the program to make sure it maintains its integrity and keeps up with the constant changes in the criminal justice field.
- The criminal justice field has to advocate the viability of the program and be committed to hiring students when they become available.
- The criminal justice field has to provide instructors and allow for internships in their agencies.
- All interested entities have to promote the program through assorted media outlets to pique the interest of the students and to communicate to local law enforcement the benefits of the program.
- Local colleges have to buy in to the program and have scholarships available to students.

### Conclusion

In the last decade the criminal justice field has been changing its attitudes towards policing with a new concept or philosophy called “Community Policing”. The success of this new policing strategy depends on the ability to recruit, develop, and field a group of criminal justice officers who understand their roles in peace keeping, community service, and crime fighting. The criminal justice field must select innovative, self disciplined and self motivated individuals. Criminal justice training, beginning in high school and continuing through a college education, is necessary and desirable. The criminal justice field will reap the rewards from the school to work program, both economically and in the recruitment and retention of its police officers.

Captain Joe Wirthman is a long time member of the Ft. Pierce Police Department.

## References

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## Appendix A

### Phone Survey Questions

#### Introduction:

Hello, my name is Joe Wirthman and I am a Lieutenant with the Fort Pierce Police Department. As part of my continuing education I am enrolled in a senior leadership program developed and put on by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in Tallahassee, Florida. A pre-requisite for completing the program is that I produce a research paper dealing with a facet of law enforcement that is of interest to me. My interest is in proactively recruiting applicants for a career in law enforcement. I have learned through the Florida Department of Education that your high school has a criminal justice program targeted at students in the upper grades. I have a few questions that I would like you to respond to in assisting me in my research.

1. How long has your high school had this program?
2. How many students are currently in the program?
3. Do you track students after completion of the program to see if they are being hired in the criminal justice field?
4. Do you have any pre-requisites for admission into the program or is everybody eligible?
5. Do you actively seek minority candidates?
6. What are the barricades that you have faced in trying to proceed with the program? I need honesty with this question, any negative answers will not be attributed to you without your approval.
7. What are the benefits to the program? Now is the time to market and sell this idea.

Thank you for your time. This research paper should be completed by April. I would like to attribute some comments in the paper to you. Is that okay? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

## **Other Appended Material**

APPENDIX B

**Florida Department of Education, CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

APPENDIX C

**Florida Department of Education, STUDENT PERFORMANCE  
STANDARDS/COMPETENCIES**

APPENDIX D

**Martin County High School Academy of Law and Criminal Justice Associate  
Degree Program at Indian River Community College.**