

THE ST. LOUIS YOUNG ADULT COURT

The Problem:

Juveniles and young adults between the ages of 15-29 years old account for 45% of the arrests in St. Louis, Missouri. In 2017, 916 juveniles and young adults between the ages of 15-18 years were arrested, and 7,858 young adults between the ages of 19-29 years for Part I and Part II crimes were arrested¹ Young adults are at a critical stage of brain development (see box below) and may suffer the impact of even a limited jail stay, as well as the collateral consequences of a criminal conviction.

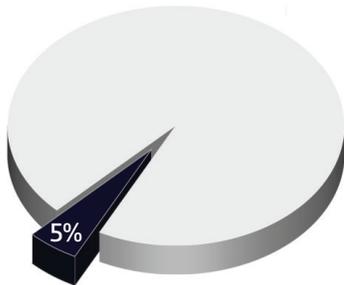


Chart 1: Young Adults (15-18) 5% of total arrests in 2017

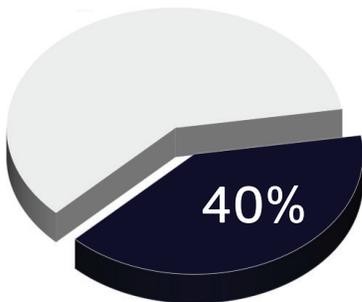


Chart 2: Young Adults (19-29) 40% of total arrests in 2017

¹ Missouri Uniform Crime Reporting Program, All Arrests, CJ550201, Annual Report, 2017. ² Act for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence, a collaboration of Cornell University, University of Rochester, and the NYS Center for School Safety, Adolescent Brain Development, Research Facts and Findings, May 2002. ³ The Council of State Governments Justice Center, Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Young Adults in the Juvenile and Adult Criminal Justice Systems, (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015) citing Laurence Steinberg, Age of Opportunity: Lessons From the New Science of Adolescence (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2014); Ashley R. Smith, Jason Chein, and Laurence Steinberg, "Peers Increase Adolescent Risk Taking Even When the Probabilities of Negative Outcomes Are Known," Developmental Psychology 50, no. 5 (May 2014): Elizabeth Shulman, Kathryn Paige Harden, Jason Chein, and Laurence Steinberg, "The Development of Impulse Control and Sensation-Seeking In Adolescence: Independent or Interdependent Processes?" Journal of Research on Adolescence, Advance online publication (October 2014); doi: 10.1111/jora.12181. ⁴ The Council of State Governments Justice Center, Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Young Adults in the Juvenile and Adult Criminal Justice Systems, (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015).

The Response:

The St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office (CAO) and research partners from St. Louis University and Arizona State University are launching a prosecutor-led Youthful Offender Diversion Program through a grant awarded from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The program is designed for individuals, 17-25 years old, who have committed a felony offense, and is tailored to provide appropriate in-house and community-based service referrals for strength-based, trauma-informed and evidence-supported educational, vocational, and counseling opportunities.

Adolescent and Young Adult Brain Development

Current research poses that adolescent and young adult brain development continues during the teen years and well into the 20s.² As a result, young adults, 18-24 years-old, may engage in risk taking and impulsive behavior as well as poor judgment and decision making.³ This combined with other factors such as lack of education or employment can lead to potentially criminal behavior and calls for strategies to improve outcomes for young adults in the criminal justice system.⁴

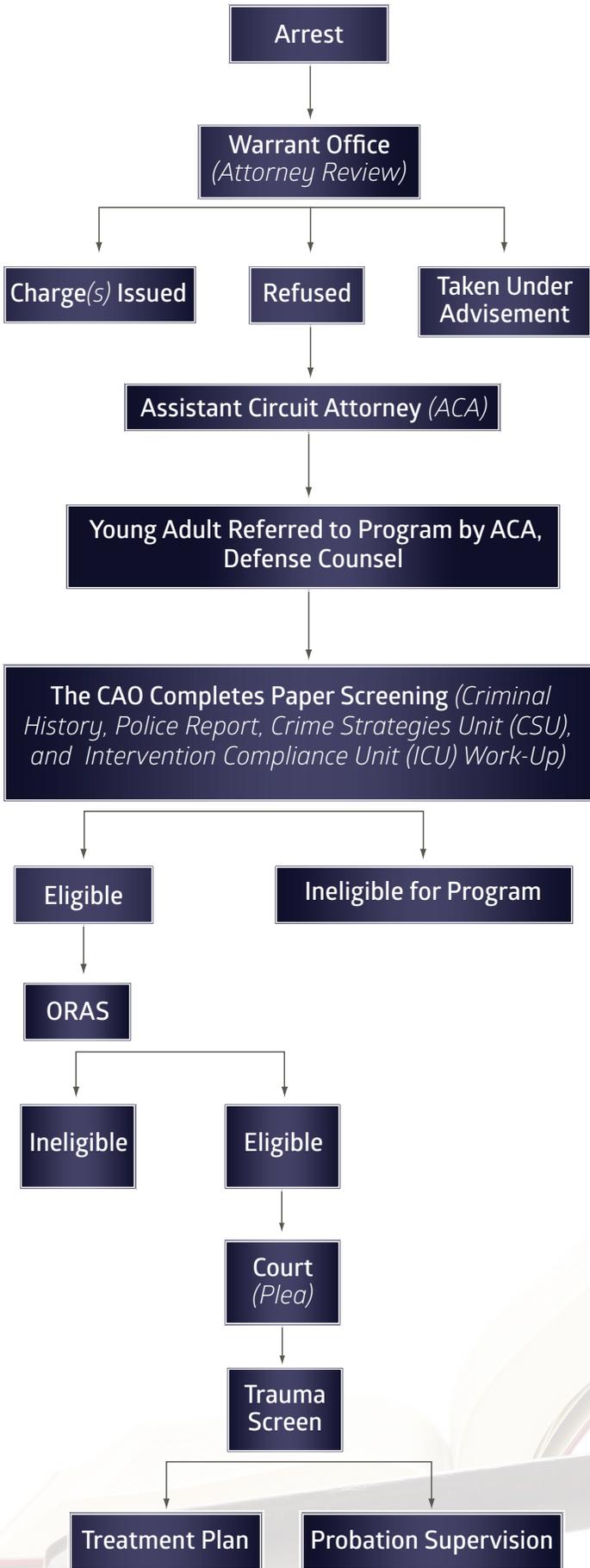
Challenges:

Some participants lack motivation or are negatively affected by outside peer influence while others can be difficult to contact; either because they lack phones or do not have stable living arrangements. Identifying and recruiting potential candidates, as well as length of time for completing the screening process, are additional challenges the team is encountering.

Solutions:

The team plans on incorporating a motivational enhancement intervention, providing participants with calling cards or burner phones, and communicating more frequently with positive support networks for participants (e.g. parents) in the near future.

The St. Louis Young Adult Court Flow Chart



Key Features:

- Individuals may be identified and referred for potential program participation by criminal justice stakeholders including: prosecutors, the defense bar, and law enforcement
- The Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) will be administered to potential program participants. Individuals scoring in moderate range will be deemed eligible
- The program will be delivered in four highly structured phases for a period of ten to eighteen months
- The program's aim is to enhance a program participant's opportunities to: (1) obtain future employment, (2) pursue educational and vocational prospects, (3) prevent future recidivism, and (4) become a law-abiding citizen

“Reform efforts in adult criminal justice that divert non-violent youth offenders away from the more traditional post-plea probation options are long overdue in the US. By applying what we now know about brain development and trauma informed services to those efforts, we have broadened the opportunities to prevent and intervene early in their lives to reduce the likelihood of them reoffending.”

-Khatib Waheed

Diversion Manager, The St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office