He and his wife both hope to go back to school soon to become health care technicians. That’s how Manny came back from serious offender to achieving young person? He says that there was a point in his life when it just hit him that he was going nowhere; that he needed to keep himself occupied and out of trouble. Many of the youth I interviewed had this realization, and moved their life in a positive direction. Many said that the program had helped them realize that they could be successful outside of prison, and that they could be successful if they wanted to. The birth of his child was a turning point in his life because it took place just when he grew “tired” of his old life, when it no longer paid off for him. But this also happened when he could set a new lens for viewing his old life and especially his old friends. Manny’s story shows how what happens in the environment can be in promoting positive development through the system. An institutional placement that provides a set of opportunities to get back on the right track. Involvement with the system may present instill changes in offenders, oftentimes toward lowering rates of criminal activity and ultimately complete desistance/cessation from criminal behavior shift for an individual, and the reasons for these shifts may vary considerably with the age and the number of charges seeming to change. No longer are they being sent to placement for short periods of time, probably higher than what the research points to. It is encouraging to see that the juvenile justice system offered promising potential of the system. Understanding the process by which individuals acquire and maintain these values is important to the extent that they see legal restrictions as highly legitimate and have low levels of cynicism about the legal system.

The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 96 (1), 101-134.

Individuals generally obey the law because they possess a set of values and beliefs that place these social rules above their own desires at any given moment. This set of attitudes and beliefs about the law, legal...
Young people who become involved with the juvenile justice system can take several different paths as they move toward adulthood. Over the last five years, I have had the opportunity to witness many of these different paths firsthand as an intern at the Philadelphia Prevention Pathways study. As a result of these experiences, I have become convinced that there is no single clear road for getting out of trouble and into a productive adulthood — and no guarantee that it will happen at all.

Certainly, there are some people who enter the juvenile justice system and then continue to offend well into early adulthood. At the same time, there are others who somehow manage to turn their lives around. They might have one more contact with the system or none at all. The young man I spoke with is an example of the latter.

Manny (not his real name and not the person shown in the picture on the right) had his first encounter with the juvenile justice system at the age of sixteen. At that time, he was reported to the police for throwing a bottle in the subway. He later explained how his life as a youth was filled with hardship.

"Don't have time to be a kid. I was real serious. I didn't have the pleasure to play around. I had to grow up real fast."

The combination of lots of free time, little supervision, a tough environment, and a tough attitude can produce an unexpected finding — no dramatic shifts in these attitudes in offenders after their court involvement.