

Get Out Of Juvenile Hall Semi-Free

By Cathy Tyson



Youth Services Officer, Mark Greenwood

Photo by Cathy Tyson

“Juvenile detective,” no longer. As of April of this year, the Lafayette Police Department has a Youth Services Officer, Mark Greenwood, who heads up the juvenile diversion program. As Youth Services Officer, Greenwood’s emphasis is on, “making good choices, and realizing the choices you make now affect your future.”

Under the direction of Chief Mike Hubbard, the department wants to have a positive influence on kids and the schools they attend. The younger kids at Stanley seem more receptive so far, according to Greenwood, perhaps because they’re younger and not as susceptible to the ‘cool factor.’ During the school year Officer Greenwood can be found at dances, football games, visiting at lunch at both Acalanes and Stanley. “Its good community relations,” he says, “My main focus is to support the schools.”

In a nutshell, first time juvenile offenders who make a bad decision get one “freebie.” The goal is for these kids to learn from their mistakes. This program is not an option for kids who commit violent crimes. But for the majority of good kids with otherwise clean records who get caught shoplifting, for vandalism or perhaps even a possession ticket, this is a wonderful opportunity. To qualify, kids need to have a good attitude, be remorseful, and have a desire to keep their record clean, along with parents who are willing to be supportive in enforcing the arrangement. Through this program, if a juvenile completes the requirements, his crime won’t show up on his criminal record. Both Moraga and Orinda have teen



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diversion programs as well.

Then there are four steps that must be completed. First, the young participant must write an essay; generally about ‘what I did wrong, how could I have made a smarter choice, what have I learned from the experience.’

Second, community service hours, for example washing the police cars. There was a young man doing just that when we visited the department. Lafayette Parks and Recreation always needs help picking up litter. Sometimes Officer Greenwood leaves it up to the parents, and gives them the paperwork to keep track of hours worked.

Third, the juvenile takes an “offender” class for eight hours at the Concord police department. Classes specific to the minor’s infraction are offered, for example drugs and alcohol or vandalism.

Fourth, a curfew can be assigned, trusting that the parents will enforce it – strictly on the honor system. In addition phone probation might be enforced. Officer Greenwood would call the youth, asking about their weekend plans, and what choices they plan to make.

Finally, if any kind of damage was involved, restitution has to be paid.

In addition to his duties as Youth Services Officer, Officer Greenwood can be found on bicycle patrol, working on domestic violence situations, following up on traffic accidents and more. He adds, the police know where kids can be found partying, and encourages students to think twice and make good choices.



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