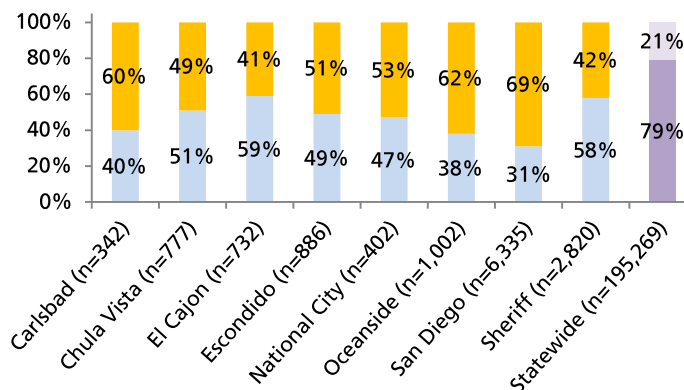


## JUVENILE ARRESTS AND REFERRALS TO PROBATION

The juvenile justice system strives to be a “court of equity”, balancing public safety with guiding youthful offenders to a constructive life path. As the front line of the juvenile justice system, law enforcement officers have discretion regarding how to respond to low-level juvenile offenders. Specifically, officers may release the youth to the parent/guardian, take the youth into custody and refer the case to Probation, or recommend the youth be “diverted” from the juvenile justice system to services geared to prevent further delinquent behavior. Diversion is based on the theory that more positive and cost-efficient alternatives exist at the community level and that processing some low-level offending youth into the juvenile justice system can do more harm than good.

For almost a decade, the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency’s (HHS) Community Action Partnership has partnered with local agencies to provide services to youth 12 to 17 years of age who demonstrate behaviors typically associated with delinquency and likely to result in involvement in the justice system. Based on recently released local and state statistics, it appears that local law enforcement are utilizing this diversion program, increasing the probability that pre-delinquent youth are provided with positive alternatives to disrupt the risk of continued delinquency. Specifically, while 79 percent of juvenile arrests statewide in 2011 resulted in probation referrals,<sup>1</sup> local statistics reflect a referral rate of only 50 percent, implying a greater percentage of youth locally are eligible for these other options, compared to other jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup> As Figure 1 shows, the probation referral rate for the eight local law enforcement agencies that made the greatest number of referrals to Probation ranged from 31 percent (SDPD) to 59 percent (El Cajon), all well below the State rate of 79 percent, a result that underscores the efforts by local law enforcement to divert youth away from the criminal justice system.

**Figure 1**  
**LOCAL RATE OF PROBATION REFERRALS LOWER THAN STATEWIDE**



■ Referred ■ Not Referred

Sources: SANDAG; San Diego County Probation Department; and California Department of Justice, 2012

The region’s public safety agencies, community leaders, and community-based organizations are committed to sustaining efforts to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system by ensuring that diversion options are available, effective, and standardized. For more information about local diversion efforts, visit:

[http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/programs/sd/community\\_action\\_partnership/juvenile\\_diversion.html](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/programs/sd/community_action_partnership/juvenile_diversion.html).

<sup>1</sup> California Department of Justice (2011). *Juvenile Justice in California*. Retrieved from <http://oag.ca.gov> December 12, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> San Diego County Probation Department (2011). *Annual Statistical Report 2011*. Retrieved from [www.sdcounty.ca.gov](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov) December 12, 2012 and Burke, C. (2012). *Arrests 2011: Law Enforcement Response to Crime in the San Diego Region*. San Diego, CA: SANDAG.