



Police chiefs urge investment in children to prevent crime

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Local police chiefs say the key to crime prevention in the future is giving youngsters the keys to early success.

Hillsboro Police Chief Ron Louie and Cornelius Police Chief Paul Rubenstein visited the Hillsboro Head Start Center, toured the program, and read to some of the children Wednesday. At a press conference Tuesday, they spoke of Head Start as one of the most effective ways of cutting later crime.

"You can build less jail space if you build more Head Start centers," Louie said.

Louie and Rubenstein are members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon, a bipartisan anti-crime organization of 126 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors. The program's director, Martha Brooks, joined the chiefs on the trip.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon estimates that by providing high-quality Head Start to all eligible at-risk Oregon children, as many as 500 children could be prevented from committing crimes when they grow up.

"We'll win the war on crime in Oregon when we are as willing to guarantee a child space in Head Start as we are to guarantee a criminal a jail cell," Louie said.

In Ypsilanti, Mich., a long term study called the High/Scope Perry Preschool program randomly assigned at-risk kids to attend a high-quality preschool program similar to Head Start. By the age of 27, those who did not attend the preschool were five times more likely to have troubles with the law. By age 40, they were four times more likely to have been arrested for drug felonies and nearly twice as likely to be arrested for multiple violent crimes, Brooks said.

Yet, the crime prevention benefits of Head Start do not reach all Oregon children. Forty percent - or 6,400 children - of Oregon's at-risk kids who are eligible are shut out of programs, Brooks said.

"With Head Start, we can help kids now to grow up as responsible adults or we can arrest some of them later as criminals," Rubenstein said. "Oregon will be a safer and smarter state if we can get can more eligible children into Head Start."