

Speaker 1:

I've been a prosecutor for 13 years and I was motivated to become a prosecutor simply because I was looking for a way to be able to help my community, and I saw the prosecution side as being the best way to be involved in that, and to feel like I was making a difference.

We had a girl who was driving through one of our little towns recklessly and the wrong way, on one way streets and things. So obviously, the officer could tell something was really wrong. Pulls her over, nothing good comes of that contact, because folks that are really suffering in a mental episode like that don't cooperate with law enforcement. But she was safely taken into custody. And within the next day, we were able to divert her from any actual charges or jail time because we were able to contact her family and have her parents and a sister come and retrieve her. So we were able to be a part of that as an alternative to wrapping her up in our criminal justice system and tagging her with either a first or another conviction that she probably didn't need, that wouldn't really help this situation.

What can happen is by diverting somebody from the criminal justice system and getting them into treatment instead, you can help them get leveled off on their meds and actually keep them crime free or law enforcement contact free for a lengthy period of time when we have that community involvement and that treatment provider involvement. You want to approach things in a trauma informed way, try to help the victim through the process without re-victimizing them.

Another myth would be that they want to be jobless or homeless, and I don't think that actually is true at all. I think only when they're in that type of mental health crisis are they mentally okay with their situation, because I've seen in my experience, once they're on their meds or with their counselor and leveling out, that they regret putting themselves in that situation and don't want to be back there again.

The myth that there's nothing we can do, that someone with mental health issues will always have mental health issues, and even though scientifically that might be true, it doesn't mean they're going to always be in crisis. Just because someone's causing the scene doesn't mean that person needs to be locked up or that jail is going to help fix the problem.

If they really want to make a difference, a prosecutor's office is the place to do it, but a prosecutor really does have the most discretion, and I believe the most power to make some kind of a difference. So really, I would encourage any prosecutor out there that doesn't have a jail diversion program or that's considering one, definitely support that. We've really seen no downside from our participation in one here in Malheur County, Oregon.