

Myth: People with police records are 'bad' people who are a risk to our workplaces and communities

Reality: Stigmatizing and discriminating against people with police records compromises community safety

The Importance of Community Support

Luke and Sue are two individuals who overcame past troubles, in part through the support of the John Howard Society. They both highlight how stigma and judgment affected them, and how important social supports and second chances are to helping people make positive life changes.



Click the images to watch their video interviews or find them online at: www.johnhoward.on.ca

When people commit criminal acts and are found guilty, they are given punishments by the courts that "fit the crime". Serving the punishment is often seen as "paying back the debt to society" for breaking the law. The expression, "you do the crime, you do the time" is widely used to describe society's view of accountability and justice.

What happens, though, when people have "done their time"? In theory, they should be able to return to the community and actively participate in it. In practice, once people have been convicted of crime, they now have a police record.

This record, which is stored in police databases, follows a person for life. Many people who have served their sentence and have been crime-free for a long time cannot move beyond their pasts because of the record that haunts them.

In addition, the types of records that can be revealed on police record checks are not limited to criminal convictions, and can include highly personal and non-criminal information.

What Are Police Records and Who Can Have One?

Thousands of people in Ontario have a police record and have never been found guilty of any crime.

People often assume that those who have a police record have been found guilty or convicted of a criminal offence. However, **this is not true.**

Police Records

- Calls to 9-1-1 for Assistance
- Victimization
- Mental Health Crises involving police
- Being questioned by police
- Arrests
- Charges that did not result in convictions

A police record is created any time people are actively involved with the police. These records may include: calling 911 for help during a mental health crisis, being questioned by police but never arrested or charged, and being a victim of a crime. These types of police records—**non-conviction records**—can be revealed in police record checks for employment, volunteering, academic and housing purposes.

Unfortunately, the people who are most likely to come into contact with the police, and as a result have a police record, are people who are already vulnerable or marginalized, such as homeless individuals, people living in at-risk neighbourhoods or people with mental health issues. A police record adds an additional barrier to the challenges that these individuals already face.

Who are we?

"Effective, just, and humane responses to crime and its causes"

The John Howard Society of Ontario supports our 19 local offices through research, policy and program development. We strive to offer the most effective service possible to our clients and their families and contribute to the health, well-being and safety of communities.

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Further Reading:

1. John Howard Society of Ontario. (2014). [Help Wanted*: Reducing Barriers for Ontario's Youth with Police Records.](#)

The Stigma of a Police Record

Police records can negatively affect all areas of a person's life, indefinitely. Certain types of information contained within a police record can impact travel across the U.S. border, housing, employment, volunteering, adoption, foster care, immigration, and citizenship. Having a police record can also impact people on a personal level. It can negatively affect their self-esteem and how they view themselves.

Labelling

Our society frequently uses stigmatizing language to describe people who have police records—labelling them as “criminals,” “ex-offenders,” “ex-convicts” or “bad,” even after they have “paid their debt to society” and remained crime-free.



Labelling a person and defining them based on their past actions is counterproductive to community safety. Even people who are trying to improve their lives often face discrimination and judgment. Employers, volunteer organizations and other institutions that require people to undergo police record checks often assume that if someone has a police record, they are a dangerous or unreliable person.

Public Safety

Police records can place serious burdens on people because they decrease people's chances of finding employment. Research suggests that the presence of a police record, on its own, is **not** useful for predicting someone's future behaviour in a workplace. Despite this, people's efforts to rebuild their lives are often undermined by views that people with police records do not deserve second chances or are a risk. They face negative stereotypes which causes individuals to feel irredeemable or worthless, and as a result, susceptible to falling into old patterns.

Having meaningful employment, stable housing and the positive social networks that come with employment prevents people from offending in the future. Society should encourage, not prevent, people from finding employment, housing, or schooling—it means healthier and safer communities for all.

JHSO Says: The stigma that comes with a police record can decrease overall community safety. Society should encourage and support—not prevent—the re-integration of people with police records.