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# Jackson County juvenile arrests double state average

MEDFORD (AP) — The juvenile arrest rate for Jackson County is nearly twice the state average, but officials say it means they are halting more young offenders before their crimes turn more serious.

"There are a lot of law enforcement entities involved," said Carl Erickson, deputy director of Jackson County Juvenile Services. "You're going to see things when you're out shaking leaves."

Officers in the Medford area and surrounding Jackson County arrest 31.4 juveniles per 1,000 children and teens under the age of 18, according to an annual report released this week by Children First for Oregon.

The Jackson County rate is nearly twice Oregon's overall rate of 17.4 arrests per 1,000 youth, according to the Portland-based advocacy group.

Part of the reason for the continued high rate in Jackson County is the concentration of local law enforcement personnel, Erickson said. He estimated that more than 300 officers are employed in police and sheriff's departments throughout the county.

Those officers are a strong deterrent, said Arnie Green, executive director of Community Works, a Medford social service agency that often works with troubled youth.

"I'm pleased with the level

that law enforcement plays with kids to keep them safe," Green said. "Accountability is part of that."

But Green said social service agencies need more resources to intervene with kids before they commit crimes.

"My biggest concern is that (law enforcement) is the last resort," he said. "If we had more resources, we could prevent a whole lot of kids from being involved in the system."

One solution is more community alternatives for youth, added Will Young, outreach director for Kids Unlimited, a local nonprofit agency.

"If the rate is high, it's because

a lot of those kids aren't being served," he said. "It's easy to do something wrong when you don't have anything to do."

Most of the arrests are for theft, criminal mischief and trespassing, officials say.

Thefts accounted for the largest single category of juvenile arrests, or 17 percent, according to county figures. Combined, criminal mischief and criminal trespass accounted for 22 percent of arrests.

Possession of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other controlled substances accounted for nearly 22 percent of arrests. Assault, harassment and disorderly conduct accounted for about 15 percent of arrests.