

# A new approach to young offenders management

## a. Young criminals

Countries all over the world have to deal with young criminals. The reasons for teenagers to cross the line can be multiple : unstable family situation, lack of parental supervision, harassment, peer rejection, ... Some juveniles may also develop aggressive and violent behaviors due to their involvement in street gangs or troublesome youth groups.



It is recognized that these juveniles have to be managed differently from adult offenders. That is why the responsibility for juveniles is

typically taken by different institutions and courts from the ones dealing with adult offenders.

Even though some juveniles end up in detention centers in order to ensure public safety, it is well known that prison is the best school for crime and that keeping juveniles out of prison at an age where their social relations, networks and identities could be negatively altered by imprisonment is a much more desirable solution both for them and for society.

It must be borne in mind that beyond a punishment, the primary purpose is to change the behaviour of these young offenders in a structured framework so that they can get a stable, worthy and blooming life within society and without the need of an external support.

To reach this goal, a welfare oriented approach to young offenders, as opposed to a punitive one, will deliver the best results. Young offenders need special attention and more humane attitude than adult offenders.

One of the answers to this challenge is the use of traditional electronic monitoring based on ankle bracelets. This is a good solution in the sense that it keeps young offenders away from prisons. However, it suffers from a number of shortcomings for which there are workarounds.

Electronic monitoring based on traditional ankle bracelet allows government agencies to impose the juveniles to be at certain places at certain moments and to force them to better manage their life. However, the ankle bracelets are perceived by young offenders as stigmatizing, too punitive and neither adapted to their age nor to the new ways of communicating in this digital era. The only role of these ankle bracelets is indeed to enforce a judge or government agency decision but they are not directly helping juveniles in following the rules or taking the right actions. Moreover, these ankle bracelets may also cause a sense of victimisation or a sense of vulnerability which does not help juveniles in the rehabilitation process. Finally, public opinion might see this sentence as not appropriate for young people.

Imposing electronic monitoring to young offenders looks like a good first step to keep them away from jail, but obviously brings a number of new issues. What can be improved ?

### b. Towards a more humane system

The question is : how can we move away from a system perceived as passive and purely punitive to a system actively helping the juveniles in the rehabilitation process ? Let's try to bring an answer to this.

As a prerequisite, such a new system must be able to do all what a traditional system can do: location based tracking, curfew based tracking, notification of tampering attempts, monitoring possibilities from different places in a Software-as-a-Service mode, edition of various types of reports ...

Beyond this, the most straightforward feature coming to mind is communication. If the ankle bracelet is replaced by a communicating device fitted to the offenders' body, the monitoring agents can easily communicate with them and provide them with all kind of information and messages. Moreover, there is a certainty that the device will always be with the juvenile and this without the need for invasive regular biometric authentication or other types of validation.

One might also expect such a system to perform tasks like reminding the juveniles their appointments, tracking when they are not where they should be (for example in areas that have been a bad influence on them) and instructing them on what to do. This would ensure that the juveniles are always notified that the responsible agency knows that they are breaking a rule. In such a case, the monitoring agents can then decide whether they want to follow up immediately on the violation or if the problem is of such a nature that automated instructions can get it solved for now and that it can be addressed later on in a conversation with the juvenile.

And building further on these communication and automated reaction capabilities, other more interactive features could be added, like asking the juvenile how he/she feels or implement an incentive program for complying to the given rules.

In a nutshell, it is all about turning today's purely punitive system into a personalized digital assistant helping the juvenile to rehabilitate.

### c. A concrete solution

Upstream's Active Tool Suite consists of:

- ActiveTrack, a wrist-worn bracelet featuring a screen, communication capacities, real-time location capabilities and numerous other features. It has the size and the form of a sport watch.
- ActiveHome, a device to be placed at the juvenile's residence allowing to check his/her presence at home.
- ActiveMonitor, a user-friendly and state-of-the-art monitoring platform based on the latest security standards.

Thanks to its form factor, ActiveTrack is much less punitive and stigmatizing than an ankle bracelet, and all the embedded features bring the juveniles a



concrete help in their everyday life. It can be used either in combination with a given measure (probation, community work, ...) or as a back door to such a sentence.

We could enumerate a long list of possibilities and use instances (positive reinforcement, gamification, ...), but the best way to show possible uses and the value of it is probably to illustrate them through an example of one day of Tim, a young offender under electronic monitoring.

#### d. One day in Tim's life

**7.00 AM** ActiveTrack vibrates to wake Tim up. Tim stops the vibration by a long push on one button.

**7.05 AM** Tim checks his schedule for the day by navigating through the ActiveTrack screens. Today, it's Friday. Tim needs to be at school from 8.30 AM to 4.00 PM. He has an appointment with his social worker at 4.30 PM. After that, he needs to go back home. Tim had been committing offences at night, partially

due to influence of drugs and alcohol during parties.



His social worker wants to make sure that Tim has structured activities during the day and sleeps at night.

**8.15 AM** ActiveTrack vibrates and reminds Tim to leave for school, via a message on the screen.

**8.30 AM** Tim arrives at school.

**12.00 PM** ActiveTrack asks Tim how he feels right now. Out of several options, Tim chooses "I'm feeling good". ActiveTrack sends automatically Tim's choice to ActiveMonitor, and this is available in the platform for the social workers.

**4.00 PM** ActiveTrack reminds Tim of his appointment with his social worker at 4.30 PM.

**4.15 PM** ActiveTrack automatically generates a message to Tim, vibrates and displays it on

the screen : "You have been to school every day this week. Congratulations !".

**4.16 PM** By browsing on ActiveTrack's screen, Tim can see that his efforts to comply to the rules have paid off. In the frame of the gamification system put in place by his responsible agency, his regular school attendance has earned him 15 days less of monitoring. As a consequence, his sentence will come to an end in 22 days rather than in 37 days.

**4.30 PM** Tim meets with his social worker. They discuss about how Tim has been doing over the last week, about his progress and about how he feels. To help him prepare the discussion and get a sense on how Tim complied with the rules, the social worker could rely on the information on Tim's activities in ActiveMonitor. During the discussion, they plan a new appointment for next Friday.

**5.37 PM** Tim is now back home. His social worker just added next appointment in ActiveMonitor. ActiveTrack automatically vibrates to inform Tim and he can now see the appointment in his calendar on ActiveTrack.

**6.02 PM** Tim checks on ActiveTrack's screen what are the rules to follow for the next days.

**8.14 PM** As the battery level is getting low, ActiveTrack instructs Tim to reload the battery using the mobile charger.

**11.45 PM** Tim invited a few friends at his place and is still partying at a time where he is supposed to sleep. ActiveTrack notices a suspect activity thanks to its embedded sensors. ActiveTrack informs Tim that he is supposed to be sleeping at this time, and instructs him to go to bed and keep quiet. An event is logged in ActiveMonitor. When coming to work on Monday, Tim's social worker will be informed of this suspect activity on Friday night and will be able to trigger a conversation with Tim to check what was going on.



#### e. Conclusions

As opposed to a purely punitive process, ActiveTrack brings a concrete help to the juveniles in following the rules and structuring their life in the frame of the reintegration process.

Thanks to its constant presence with the juveniles and its communication capabilities, an interaction is possible to detect non compliances and bring a solution. Reminders, wake up calls, positive reinforcement, progressive relaxation of the monitoring regime and gamification are also part of the equation. All this could not be managed in real time by a human being. However, human communication is key in the rehabilitation process and ActiveMonitor provides the

monitoring officers and the social workers with insightful information on the juvenile's activity and behavior, which can then be opportunities to trigger a conversation and address potential concerns.

While less punitive than a traditional ankle bracelet, ActiveTrack carries out the same surveillance tasks adding a structuring dimension. Having it fitted to the juvenile makes it much more secure than a smart phone app, as there is never absolute certainty that the smart phone is permanently with the juvenile. ActiveTrack does not replace human contact and does not intend to do so, but it offloads social workers from basic and administrative tasks and provides them with useful information to carry out their mission better.