

Name of Program: Truthseekers - Mentorship Program
County/State: Baltimore County, Maryland

01-05

Summary_

Scanning:

The citizens of Woodlawn Precinct have been battling with a diminishing quality of life as this once rural community has transformed into a bustling suburb. Like many growing suburban communities, a rise in nuisance crimes committed by juveniles such as loitering, trespassing, and truancy, have threatened the quality of life for which many of Woodlawn's residents initially sought out by moving there. The idea of a mentorship program began in this context. The founders of the Woodlawn mentorship program recognized a need in the community for accessible role models for community youth as well as a local resource base for helping families in the community access a vast array of underused community services. Lt. Jonathan Trenzsch, Commander of the Community Outreach Team, along with other Outreach Team members, developed the idea of a mentorship program for at-risk kids in the community to fill this gap in service. It was thought that the positive attention given to the youth of today would improve our quality of life tomorrow.

Analysis:

To confirm that juveniles were a major factor in the quality of life of Woodlawn communities, the Outreach Team reviewed community complaints, interviewed school representatives, patrol officers, community members, and obtained crime analysis reports. The data obtained supported this hypothesis. The juvenile problem had been a long-term problem, in which various solutions had been attempted and failed. The

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analysis further suggested that the influence of two parent households had diminished considerably along with the presence of grass roots organizations.

Response:

Over the years the Baltimore County Police Department has developed and/or adopted programs to curtail the deviant behavior exhibited by some juveniles, they include a Counseling unit, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, the Police Athletic League, the Juvenile Offenders In Need of Supervision program, and various other juvenile crime reduction programs. These programs however, only served as a band-aid to the juvenile delinquency problem, not a solution. The Community Outreach Team responded with a new strategy directed toward reaching "at risk" juveniles before they become delinquents. A one-on-one mentorship program was developed to improve relations between officers and troubled youth and reduce juvenile truancy and delinquency in area communities.

Assessment:

The Mentorship program has resulted in reduced truancy rates for participating youths, a reduction in deviant behavior with participating mentees, and notable improvements in officer relations with local youth, schools, and parents. The program's success has been measured by complimentary letters from people who were exposed to the young members, as well as from the parents of the mentees. Other methods utilized to measure the success of this program were surveys of parents, school officials, and the volunteer officers (mentors).

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Description

Scanning:

The Mentorship Program (TruthSeekers) was originally developed to reduce juvenile truancy rates in the community. Truancy was identified with antisocial behavior of youth since truant juveniles tended to exhibit destructive behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, and general criminal activity. The TruthSeekers program is a one-on-one mentorship with officers as the mentors and "at-risk" youth age 11 through 16 being the mentees. The objective of the program is to reduce and/or prevent truancy and delinquent contacts among identified children by implementing a mentoring program with officers and an alliance of community and government resources. The mentorship program was developed in April 1999 headed by Lt. Jonathan Trentzsch and implemented in December of 1999 as part of Woodlawn Precinct's Strategic Objective in dealing with the youth. The Program is an integral part of the Woodlawn Precinct's 3-5 year strategic plan to integrate at-risk youth back into the mainstream of the community.

The TruthSeekers formed with 20 officers volunteering to be mentors. School administrators were then approached and were advised of the program. They welcomed our support and provided dozens of names of children who would benefit from this program. The children and their parents were interviewed and screened for acceptance into the Mentorship Program. Officers received training on several occasions by the

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Baltimore County Police Counseling Team and the Baltimore Mentoring Partnership to help them handle youths and family dynamics.

As mentoring officers became increasingly involved in the everyday lives of the participating youth, it became apparent that the antisocial behavior exhibited by the mentees was in most cases symptomatic of a dysfunctional family background. Officer participants in the program quickly observed that many of the families of participating juveniles, lacked knowledge of and thus failed to take advantage of crucial government and community services. Many families were single parent households or consisted of members who were dealing with substance abuse, poverty, and other socioeconomic difficulties. As a result, adequate parenting skills were lacking in a majority of mentee households. TruthSeekers filled this void by linking parents to the necessary resources to assist their children and by providing additional moral guidance and support to the mentees who generally endure a considerable amount of social stress.

In late 1999, the Mentorship program was awarded a Law Enforcement Block Grant to assist the program. Shortly thereafter, the program received another private grant from the Board of ChildCare because of its partnership with students

Analysis:

To test the hypothesis that juveniles were a major factor in disrupting the quality of life in the communities, Community Outreach reviewed community complaints, spoke with school representatives, patrol officers, church leaders, community members, and

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reviewed crime analysis reports. The data obtained confirmed that juvenile delinquency left unchecked, evolves into more serious crimes that effect the quality of life in the Woodlawn area. Analysis further indicated a significant decrease in two-parent households and a dearth of grass roots community organizations that serve to guide youth.

Response:

The TruthSeekers hosted the program's kick off in late December of 1999 with 125 people in attendance, including Precinct 2 officers, children, parents, and the media. The popularity of the program quickly grew and we formed several key partnerships to assist the youth. The First Step program of the Department of Juvenile Justice has been an excellent partner with our program. They provide free tutoring services and work with youth and adults to obtain their GED's. The Baltimore County Housing Office of Family Self -Sufficiencyhas also been a tremendous help. Truthseekers has established a tutoring service at the Woodlawn Police Athletic League Center. The State Mentoring Resource Center at the Baltimore County Police Counseling Team has provided the mentors with excellent training and has made themselves available for assistance.

The Board of ChildCare and their Executive Officer, Mr. Thomas Curcio, have been our greatest supporters. They have not only contributed a great deal of money to the program, but have made their facilities and equipment available to us. Monthly mentor meetings are held to discuss any problems with the program, upcoming events, and progress reports. The program has received a lot of positive feedback from parents and counselors who have observed positive changes in the youth's behavior. The program

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has been highlighted on Comcast Cable, several local newspapers, and Channel 2 for its positive impact on the youth of Woodlawn. The program also received an award from the Maryland Association of Housing and Redevelopment Conference. The program was recognized as a valuable contributor to the Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

The following are a few of the group trips that were taken in the year 2000. The Maryland Special Olympics; Maryland State Police Polar Bear Plunge; Antienam Creek-canoeing; Northern Central Trail (Biking); Board of Child Care (confidence course); West Virginia -- three day camping trip (White water rafting and horse back riding); Smithsonian Museums, and the National Zoo in Washington DC. The mentees also visited the Naval Academy in Annapolis, the Living Classrooms Foundation (sailing), the Maryland Renaissance Festival, the River Valley Ranch five day Youth Camp, bowling, ice skating, snow tubing, and swimming. During the past Christmas holiday, all mentees received a \$50.00 gift certificate, and their families a \$40.00 gift certificate from Heavenly Hams.

The Mentorship Program has also tried to stress the importance of giving back to the community. There were several group community service projects accomplished in the year 2000 and 2001 as well. The "National Make a Difference Day" at Woodlawn Middle School featured mentors and mentees cleaning and landscaping the school to demonstrate the communities concern about urban decay. Another group project was a response to a disabled WWII veteran who contacted members of the TruthSeekers seeking assistance after the program advertised for community service projects. Mentors

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and mentees joined together to paint his house, rake leaves, and construct a handicapped ramp to the front of his house. Several weeks prior to Thanksgiving, the TruthSeekers solicited the local communities for elderly people who would appreciate a Thanksgiving meal served by the community youth. The TruthSeekers held two dinners and served approximately 200 elderly citizens. Finally, the Mentors and mentees worked together to feed the homeless on a Sunday at Our Daily Bread; a local homeless shelter. This was a heart-warming experience for the kids that, was designed to facilitate a deeper admiration for their home life.

The TruthSeekers has expanded its role as mentor in many ways. Each Mentor strongly encourages their mentees to attend a tutoring program given by Family Self - Sufficiency Team. This organization has formed an alliance with the TruthSeekers, and is committed to enhancing the mentee's academic abilities by using the latest technology. To kids, extracurricular academic work often becomes trite, therefore, creative software and methods are used to keep the kids' attention during the tutoring sessions. Two IBM compatible computers are used, with a 4.02 GB hard drive. The following is a list of software that the Mentorship Program has purchased to facilitate the enhancement of its mentees' academic abilities:

- . Computer learning programs - "Logical Journey of the Zoombinis": A master problem solving program containing 48 reasoning games, designed for ages 9 and up.
- "Jump start adventures," designed for ages 9 through 12.
- Forest Technologies - "Math Generator" TCM 2704.

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- * Color Phonics - a color keyed way to read.
- * Rock @ Learn: This program contains a cassette that Raps on the following topics: States, Capitals, Division, subtraction, and multiplication. This is one of the most interesting programs that will hold the attention of the participants.

The Family Self-Sufficiency Team has introduced the participating children to computers and various types of software packages. For some participants, this was a new experience.

The cost for the Mentorship program from January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2000 is listed below. These costs represent the amount that the Baltimore County Police department would have incurred without funding from a Law Enforcement Block Grant and donations from the Board of Child Care.

The operating costs for the Mentorship program are listed below:

Overtime \$52, 492.13: This is the amount of money paid to 20 volunteer Police Officers (mentors) who spent their off duty time interacting with their mentees. These activities range from organized group trips, to individual activities like the mentors going to the movies with their mentee(s). On average, the Officer is paid eight (8) hours of overtime per month.

Supplies \$1,350.00: Supplies are an important part of the budget for several reasons. First and foremost, in order to keep track of the budget and the program itself binders and miscellaneous office supplies are needed for organization and audit purposes.

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The supply budget was also spent on T-shirts for all the participants in the program.

This is to identify the TruthSeekers as a group. Finally, this portion of the budget was also spent on food for different activities that the Mentorship program sponsored. For example the initial kick off to the program and a cookout for all the parents and participants of the program.

Activities \$15, 464.00: A large portion of this program consists of organized group activities with the mentors and mentees. These trips are necessary to provide varied cultural and different experiences for the mentees. A few trips that the Mentorship program sponsored thus far are listed as follows:

- a. A three day camping trip to Oak Hill West Virginia
- b. A ski-trip to Round Top Ski - resort in Pennsylvania
- c. A bike trip on the North Central trail
- d. The Smithsonian institute in Washington DC
- e. A trip on the Sigsbee sailboat sponsored by the Living Classroom Foundation

In conclusion, the total amount of money spent on the Mentorship Program between January 1st and December 31, 2000 was \$69,307.13.

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Assessment:

The Mentorship program has become an enormous success and has received County/State wide recognition. This program has taken on the challenge of accepting identified "at risk" kids in the community, and instilling the values of the program into their everyday lives. The core values of the TruthSeekers are Teamwork, Respect, Understanding, Trust, and Honesty. In addition, the objectives of this program are to reduce truancy, juvenile crimes in the local communities, and remove the divide between the police and young community members.

The success of this program has been measured by reviewing complimentary letters from people who were exposed to the young members, as well as from the parents of the mentees. Other methods utilized were surveys answered by the parents, school officials, and the volunteer officers (mentors) involved with the program. Finally, actual-observations of the mentees behavior in social settings were used as empirical evidence to prove that the objectives of this program are being met. The relevant time frame for measuring the success of the program are the calendar year before inception of the program, -January 1999 to December 1999- and the year after inception, January 2000 to December 2000. December 2000 marked the completion of one full year of program.

After reviewing a random sample of six surveys from the parents, school officials, and police officers the following facts were revealed. After the first full year of

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implementation of the program, there has been a 72% decrease in unexcused absences, a 40% decrease in suspensions and a 66% decrease in the number of negative office contacts. After reviewing the records of the 22 kids who were in the program, 3 were charged with crimes prior to joining, and only 1 recidivated. The overall consensus from parents and school officials is that there has been a remarkable, positive change in the social behavior of the kids who are in this program. In one letter, Mrs. Bonnie Ruff states that before her son, Wayne Showers, joined this program he exhibited serious behavioral problems. Despite efforts to help Wayne with his problems by showing him love and contacting a doctor, nothing helped. He was withdrawn and depressed. Subsequent to being accepted into the mentorship program, Wayne's entire life changed. He was no longer depressed, withdrawn, nor did he continue to experience the behavioral problems as originally stated. The letter stated " ...it is the best thing that ever happened to Wayne."

As a result of this program, Baltimore County has forged new relationships with other agencies, public and private, to advance our similar goals and objectives. For instance, the Board of Child Care, Family Self-Sufficiency Team, and First Step has provided this program with invaluable support and resources. This Mentorship program is an icon for everyone to see that the ills of our youth can be healed by the involvement of an entire community. The Mentorship program has evolved into a whole new level of mentoring and is thus worthy of the Herman Goldstein Award for these reasons. The program exposes mentees to Officers from diverse backgrounds and personal experience in a quest to expose troubled youth to positive social behaviors. TruthSeekers focuses on

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"awareness" and "action" as opposed to the traditional mentoring strategy of consultation and advice. Instead of relating the diverse experiences that the mentors have had that helped mold *them* into productive members of society, the Mentorship program actually offers its mentees true, positive, life experiences. The mentors and mentees are generally from different cultures and social and economic backgrounds, therefore the mentees experience new cultural activities. In conclusion, our organization is confident that our unique Mentorship program is a strong candidate for the Herman Goldstein award. This approach to crime and quality of life in communities is not just a band-aid to juvenile delinquency; it is a great step toward a cure.

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Agency and Officer Information:

1. The Woodlawn Community Outreach Team adopted the Mentorship program. This is the only location in Baltimore County and the State of Maryland that has a program of this type.
2. The Supervisors of the Community Outreach Team have read Herman Goldsteins' book titled "Problem Oriented Policing" and the Entire unit has attended various schools on problem solving.
3. Officers who became involved in the mentorship program received a minimum of 8 hours of overtime pay per month and 20 hours of compensatory leave per month. The Officers are also reimbursed for up to \$30.00 of their expenses while participating in the Mentorship program. They also attend field trips free of charge.
4. There were no specific resources or manuals utilized to create this program.
5. There were no Problems associated with using the problem oriented policing model.
6. The resources used to support this project are: Federal grant money, private donation, and time from the mentors.
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