

2008

HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD

APPLICATION FOR

STEP UP!

YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM



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Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
White Plains, New York

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 New York Times article dated June 29, 2007

 Journal News article dated January 25, 2008

Summary

Step Up! **White Plains Department of Public Safety**

Scanning

The 2003 Communities That Care (CTC) survey confirmed youth participation in gangs through self report. Information was obtained from school administrators regarding youth with suspected gang affiliations. Youth were committing offenses such as assaults, disorderly conduct, criminal mischief (graffiti), drugs, and prostitution. In 2006, the problem came to the forefront when a 19 year old was murdered for wearing a blue bandana in Blood territory.

Analysis

In 2006, NYS DCJS provided information demonstrating the disproportionate minority contact the WPDPS had with African American and Hispanic youth. Of the 30 juvenile arrests reported to Probation during January 2005-August 2005, 5 involved African American and 17 Hispanic youth. In 2006, WPDPS identified 9 gangs with approximately 140 members involved in criminal activity. The CTC survey indicated that African American and Hispanic youth were demonstrating anti-social behaviors characteristic of gangs. (Attacking - intending harm (16%) and getting suspended (14.6%)). The lack of systems in place to deal with gang problems added to the complexity of problem solving.

Response

WPDPS and WPYB decided that the Comprehensive Gang Model was the best strategy to address the problem because it calls upon community institutions – including police departments to work with social agencies to achieve an integrated team-oriented approach to build partnerships and solve problems.

The 5 strategies are:

- Community mobilization: The Steering Committee is comprised of WPDPS, WPYB, Schools, CTC, faith institutions, parents and youth (ages 14-21). The Committee sets policy and oversees the direction of the program
- Provision of opportunities: 1. Youth-Police Initiative – attempts to reduce gang membership, and crime by building positive relationships between youth and police. 2. Outreach/Case Management – provides non-traditional outreach and case management utilizing the wraparound approach.
- Social Intervention – Direct intervention by outreach/case manager and police
- Suppression – Youth are encouraged to control their behavior and participate in legitimate, mainstream activities.
- Organizational change/development – Promoting opportunities for targeted youth and investing in community change to reduce risk factors

Assessment

The program is evaluated by the WPDPS and WPYB. The March 2008 evaluation indicated:

- 80 young men have received case management services
- 90% of participants gained summer employment
- 100% of graduating seniors are attending college

- Reduced arrests and contact with the juvenile justice system
- Reduced school behavioral incidences and increased academic homework completion
- Improved relationships between police, youth, and the community
- 0 murders since inception of program

Scanning

In 2006, the White Plains Department of Public Safety and its partner the White Plains Youth Bureau realized that the community gang problem had to come to the forefront when a 19 year old was murdered for wearing a blue bandana in Blood territory. A survey conducted in 2003 by the White Plains Communities That Care (CTC) had confirmed youth participation in gangs through student self report, but the community's response to this information was limited. Information was obtained from school administrators regarding youth with suspected gang affiliations. Youth were committing offenses such as assaults, disorderly conduct, criminal mischief (graffiti), drugs, and prostitution.

The White Plains community realized that African American and Hispanic male youth in White Plains were struggling to succeed and in fact, were exhibiting a significant number of red flags that are indicators of gang involvement or at high risk for gang involvement. The Step Up! program is in direct response to the red flags being loudly waved by the African American and Hispanic male youth population. These red flags included gang activity, individual and neighborhood conflict with the police, weapons possession, academic failure, school behavioral incidents including school suspensions and dropout, drug use, and other anti-social behaviors. The White Plains Communities That Care Coalition, Youth Bureau, Public Safety, School District, parents and youth population became mobilized in response to the rising concerns with the African American and Hispanic male youth population. An assessment of needs and a review of resources in the community indicated that the target of resource development must be the underserved population of the most at-risk African American and Hispanic male youth since services for this population were limited.

Analysis

The data obtained during the analysis painted a picture of a growing problem for White Plains African American and Hispanic male youth. While the White Plains Department of Public Safety was attempting to respond proactively to the issue of gangs in the community, it realized it could not do it without community partners. With the assistance of the White Plains Youth Bureau and White Plains School District nine gangs were identified with 140 resident members. A review of police department records indicated that these members were involved in criminal activity. The typical offenses that they committed were assaults, disorderly conduct, criminal mischief (graffiti), drug sales and possession, and prostitution.

The White Plains community was uncertain about how to define gangs. As mentioned in the *BJA: Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Model for Problem Solving*, there is a great deal of diversity in gangs and gang activities. The White Plains analysis showed that the gangs in the community involved various ethnicities, were involved in different crimes, the members were of varying ages, and the gangs had different levels of organizational stability. The CTC survey also indicated that the youth of White Plains were of the opinion that they were living in a disorganized community and as stated in *Addressing Community Gang Problems* “gangs thrive in disorganized communities”. The community finally agreed to use the definition mentioned in the BJA monograph – gang problems are harmful incidents that occur in the community and cause the public concern.

In joint interventions the WPDPS, WPYB, and WPSD collaborated to train adults, who worked with youth, to be able to identify youth who are affiliated with gangs or are recruiting gang members. In addition, a police officer with specific training in gangs spent time at the high school and middle school campuses and identified the youth that may be affiliated with gangs.

In 2005/2006 the White Plains Department of Public Safety Intelligence Unit identified the following gangs operating and recruiting members in White Plains: LA13, South Side 13, Locos Treces, Bloods (sets: TRU and Rollin' 20s), Crips, Hilltop Boys, Goonies, and Latin Kings. At that time the known membership was estimated at approximately 140 residents.

Data addressing Disproportionate Minority Contact for juvenile offenders was provided by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services to the Department of Public Safety in early 2006. This data indicated that in January 2005 to August 2005, 17 of the 30 cases presented to the Westchester County Department of Probation involved African American and Hispanic male youth.

White Plains School District indicators were also evaluated regarding risk factors for the targeted population. The overall rate of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch in 2003 was 43.3%, of which 7% of White students, 60% of African American students and 69% of Hispanic students qualified. The reality is actually worse since in areas with high Hispanic populations, free/reduced rates are suppressed due to undocumented immigrants being frightened to fill out the paperwork. The school suspension rates at the Middle School rose from 95 in the 2001-2002 school year to 144 in the 2002-2003 school year. Of the 144 students exhibiting this gang member characteristic 46% were African American and 45% were Hispanic students. There was an alarming racial achievement gap found in all evaluations. For the last several years prior to 2006, on average White students scored 100 points higher than African American and Hispanic students in both the verbal and math sections of the SAT exams. In 2001, only 32% of African American and 33% of Hispanics 8th graders met New York State standards in the English Language Arts exams, as compared to 82% of White students. Summer school

attendance records again indicated the disproportionate representation of African American and Hispanic students, at 28% and 47%, respectively.

The 2003 White Plains Communities That Care coalition survey results also were evident of the anti-social behaviors characteristics of gangs. Hispanic and African American youth had the highest marijuana and other drug use rates. The anti-social behaviors of particular concern: attacking someone with intent to harm and getting suspended rates were especially concerning. 16.0% of the participants indicated that in the past year they attacked someone with intent to harm, 24.1% of 9th graders indicated this behavior. In the past year, 14.6% of students were suspended. This number peaks in 12th grade at 20.8%.

Response

The Department of Public Safety had tried other responses on its own, in particular enforcement. From 2003 to 2005, arrest numbers increase by 33% for all offenses however; this suppression effort did not impact youth violence. The Community Policing Division formalized a process of making personal visits to the home of suspected gang members to meet with the youth and their parents. This effort had only a minimal impact. However, what it did was identify that there was a great divide in the relationship between the police, the youth and their parents. The officers who made the home visits also realized that there was no follow up to offer to the youth and their parents. There were no community services available to specifically address gang problems.

Step Up! is a program that is built upon White Plains specific factors and stressors. Step Up! utilizes the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive

Gang Model program. Its components reflect the apparent needs of the African American and Hispanic male youth population which include: a Steering Committee, effective, non-traditional outreach and community based case management; and a youth –police partnership training program. Step Up! has built community, trust, and builds skills and knowledge so African American and Hispanic male youth can have true opportunity for success.

This OJJDP program, Comprehensive Gang Model, received the rating of effective. The Comprehensive Gang Model holds that the lack of social opportunities available to this population and the degree of social disorganization present in a community largely account for its youth gang problems. The Model also suggests other contributing factors, including poverty, institutional racism, deficiencies in social policies and a lack of or misdirected social controls.

The five key strategies of Step Up! are community mobilization, provision of opportunities, social intervention, suppression, and organization change and development. Community mobilization is responded to by way of the White Plains Step Up! Steering Committee. The Committee is comprised of Public Safety, Youth Bureau, Schools, the White Plains CTC Coalition, faith institutions, parents and youth. The Step Up! Steering Committee sets policy and oversees the overall direction of the program as well as spearheading efforts in their own organizations to remove barriers to services and social and economic opportunities. Parents who participate on the steering committee receive stipends in recognition of the value of their time and efforts. The Steering Committee is co-chaired by a representative of the Department of Public Safety and Youth Bureau. The Committee meets once a month at the Thomas H. Slater Community Center and is located within walking distance for most of the participants.

In response to the need to address the provision of opportunities through community change, there are two major sections: Youth-Police Partnership Training and Outreach and Case Management. The Youth- Police Partnership Training section has been subcontracted to the North American Family Institute (NAFI). NAFI is a training and nonprofit human service agency that operates a coordinated network of over 90 community based programs from Maine to Florida. NAFI is a leader in the field of training and consulting to organizations in the areas of law enforcement, education, and human services.

NAFI and the Step Up! Steering Committee have been working collaboratively to offer systematic training and consultation to assist police officers to increase their ability to pro-actively engage with adolescents and their families. The purpose of the project is to reduce arrests and violence among city teens while building a more positive relationship between police and all youth who are experiencing conflict. Embedded in this approach are ways to build stronger relationships with particular focus on adolescents from the African American and Hispanic communities in White Plains. Additionally, the project has permitted youth to learn about and pursue jobs in Public Safety, including law enforcement and Fire Department jobs.

Another key component of the training and consultation has been to enhance police officer understanding of the beliefs, values, and experiences of participants and the community. It is important to provide training that enhances each officer's understanding of youth or family's needs and how a family views issues such as poverty, substance abuse, sexual roles and domestic violence. Also, inherent in developing cultural competency is an understanding of where youth and families can feel comfortable going for help, and how they see their relationship to law enforcement.

The Youth-Police Partnership Training has five distinct phases:

Phase 1 – Assessment

Phase 2 – Collaborative Development of Final Curriculum and Training

Phase 3 – Youth Training

Phase 4 – Police Training Implementation

Phase 5 – Follow Up In Service Training

Youth and Police Officers are initially trained and prepared separately for the culminating joint training. The youth training generally includes 7 to 9 youth for each training session. NAFI leads the selected youth in an eight-hour training led by a psycho-dramatist. The youth trainings will occur in two-hour blocks, twice a week, after school. Each youth receives a \$10 stipend for each training session and a \$20 stipend for each day of the training (total stipend per youth equals \$80 per training). All trainings are held in community facilities that are in close proximity to public and low income housing, where targeted youth reside to assure accessibility.

The police training consists of ten-hour intensive trainings, offered to 10 trainees per session. Each of the ten-hour trainings occurs over two consecutive days of approximately five hours each. Topics include: value clarification, youth sharing and informing, team building, Redefinitions: who are urban kids-who are urban cops? The Youth-Police Partnership Training is both didactic as well as experiential; it involves youth and White Plains police officers in structured presentations and group learning experiences. The training initiative has incorporated interactive techniques that address an adolescent in crisis, in addition to scenarios reflecting how the adolescent's family or peer group may respond to police intervention.

During the first two hours of the first day of the training, the police officers participate in a values clarification workshop in which they examine their attitudes and feelings toward urban

youth, urban youth culture and working with people of color. Through a series of exercises, followed by discussions, the officers have an opportunity to become aware of their own values – positive and negative-that affect how they implement community policing.

Trainees and youth review significant experiences from the scenarios and then focus on identifying interactions that assist in de-escalating problem behavior. The youth are prepared to recognize and understand how to respond constructively to the trainees (police officers) during the training scenarios.

At the conclusion of all training, a recognition dinner is held for all participants, youth and police, and the parents of the youth, in appreciation of their efforts and success in completing the training.

The Outreach and Case Management section provides the critical service of non-traditional outreach and case management employing the individualized, strength-based wraparound approach to working with youth. Through the development of strong, trusting relationships with participating youth, the case manager has been able to access and match youth with a wide array of youth development and intervention services already available in the community of White Plains.

For example, the White Plains Youth Bureau Employment Services Department offers extensive job readiness training, career exploration, and employment opportunities for youth. However, because the targeted youth generally do not avail themselves of the opportunities that exist, the case manager will access and match the youth with the services.

The success of this linkage relies on two significant efforts. The first effort is that of the case manager's to really understand the needs of each individual participant and to create personal goals based on the individual's needs, history, strengths, resources, and dreams. The

second effort is that of the network of services delivered by the community of youth-serving agencies and organizations to be flexible and responsive to the individualized needs of each youth. This flexibility is critical to overcome barriers to success that exist in practices, policies, and protocols. The Steering Committee is a central resource for the success of this component.

While youth are provided with individualized services for their academic, economic, and social needs they also must be encouraged to control their behavior and to participate in legitimate, mainstream activities. External controls on gang and gang member behavior must be exercised to address the suppression component of the program. It is important that youth understand that they will face consequences if they do not follow reasonable expectations of the program.

The Step Up! Steering Committee addresses the organizational change and development response. The committee has been responsible for setting policy and making decisions. The Steering Committee has been making progress in determining how to address two major concerns for the participants, the need for African American and Hispanic adult males to mentor the young men and employment. The committee is in the process in determining if the current Youth Bureau mentoring program is appropriate for the StepUp! participants and asking local fraternities, service club members, and Business Improvement District (BID) members to provide employment.

Step Up! was chosen because this multi-pronged approach will effect change within the individual youth, the community at large, and the network of agencies and organizations. White Plains has committed agencies, community members, and organizations such as the CTC that provides the ability to coordinate and impact community change.

Assessment

Traditionally police organizations have used crime statistics to evaluate performance. Since 2002, the White Plains Department of Public Safety has used CompStat as its method to measure performance and during this time period has reduced crime by 41%. 11% of that reduction has occurred since the implementation of StepUp!. Even more important is the statistic that there have been no murders since Step Up! began and there has been a reduction in juvenile crime perpetrated by African American and Hispanic male youth. An evaluation of police records used the same time period as that used in the original analysis (January-August). In 2006 only 7 African American and Hispanic male youth were charged as juveniles for gang related crimes, none were Step Up! participants. From January 2007 to August 2007, 20 African American and Hispanic male youth were arrested for gang related crimes. Of these 20 only 2 were Step Up! participants and the other 18 youth and their parents were encouraged to join Step Up!.

Gang activity has significantly decreased. According the White Plains Department of Public Safety there has been a sharp decline in gang activity and membership. Only 6 gangs are known to exist with 100 members and most of those members are adults over age 18 years.

The youth that were formally members of opposing gangs now participate in Step Up! activities together. They play basketball games with each other and the officers, they go to Broadway shows together, have eaten together at restaurants, met Erin Gruwell the teacher who was portrayed in the movie "Freedom Writers", and visited the Simon Wiesenthal Tolerance Center in Manhattan.

The police officers and youth no longer have staring show downs at the City Center, which is the spot in the City for youth to congregate. In the past the youth would hang out, block the sidewalks and often disrupt and alarm the adults who were part of the downtown dinner

crowd. Now when officers ask the youth to move on they can call the youth by name and the youth know them by name as well. The youth now have a better understanding of why they are being asked to move on.

Additional evidence of success in the multitude of municipalities that are adopting Step Up! for their communities. The Cities of Yonkers and Mount Vernon, New York have created their own versions of Step Up! to reduce their gang related crime problems. In early 2008, White Plains Joseph Mayor Delfino presented the Step Up! program at the US Conference for Mayors annual conference in New Orleans and received many inquiries. Attached is an article from the New York Times documenting the program's endeavors.

Success can also be seen in the individual youth. The program is particularly proud that 100% of its graduating participants have gone on to college. One young man was known for his many encounters with police and had been arrested in the past for dealing drugs. He is presently enrolled in an upstate New York Community College and has passed all his courses.

During a May 2007, Step Up! meeting a young man known as "D Eagle" asked another youth what was the problem he had with another youth. This youth responded that "he looked at me wrong and threw up gang signs one day on the street". D Eagle responded, "So for that you want to kill him? You need to talk to him and work it out". D Eagle then emotionally turned to the entire group and said that if he could live his life again he would change everything he did. He told the story of how he was arrested for being at a stabbing in which a young man died and how wrong it was for everyone involved. D Eagle shared how the Police Commissioner told him personally when he first joined Step Up! that gang violence was not going to be tolerated and the police were going to stop the violence. The entire audience listened quietly to this young man and it seemed as if the message was sinking in.

To date approximately 80 young men have received case management services through the program and 90% of participants gained summer employment. A Youth Bureau survey indicated that 20% of the participants want to pursue a career in social work and public safety.

School District records indicate that there has been a reduction in school behavioral incidences and increased academic homework completion for the programs participants. The Step Up! case manager has ascertained that 85% of the participants have improved academically and in school behavioral incidences. This information has been obtained from school administrators, student self report, school progress reports, and report cards.

The Youth-Police Partnership has improved relationships between police, youth, and the community. 31 young men and 50 officers have been trained through the program. Prior to the young men participating in Step Up! police records showed 3.2 negative police contacts per youth average, but after the YPI training a 1.3 negative police contacts per youth.

The NAFI pre and post test indicate that the 50 police officers that received the training showed a 30% increase in their effective demonstration of de-escalation and program solving skills and a 65% increase in their knowledge of urban language and socialization issues. These participating officers experienced a 50% increase in their knowledge of adolescent social development and a 50% increase in their knowledge of effective intervention techniques.

In early 2008, the Step Up! program for girls began. The program was adjusted to address gender specific issues. In some ways the girl participants were more challenging, they have not hesitated to speak their minds and get credible answers from the police officers. The trust is continuing to be built and there are plans to take the young men and women on joint cultural excursions.

Step Up! has proven to be a financially responsible program. The program did not impact the operating budgets of the Department of Public Safety or Youth Bureau. Additional funding required for the program was obtained from forfeiture funds and an Invest in Kids grant provided by Westchester County. The value of this program is substantiated by the fact that no murders have occurred since the program's inception and the numbers of aggravated assaults have been reduced from 59 in 2006 to 49 in 2007.

Agency and Officer Information

Step Up! is a problem solving initiative involving the entire Department. All officers in the Department receive problem solving training during In-service Training and the officers who participated in Step Up! received additional problem solving training related to urban youth issues during their training. The incentives the officers received include the Recognition Dinner but also the ability to perform difficult tasks related to youth issues more efficiently and effectively. The Youth Police Partnership incorporated the use of scenarios and other activities to shape their learning experience. The NAFI staff provided the guidelines before the training began. No problems were identified with the problem solving model. Generally the resources used for Step Up! were drawn from the Community Policing and Operations Divisions. The command staff of each Division have an excellent working relationship and are committed to solving the problem the youth violence/gang. Those expenses that went beyond the department's budget were required the use of forfeiture funds. The White Plains Youth Bureau was supported by both City funds and a Westchester County grant – Invest in Kids.

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C. LOGIC MODEL - A description of how the program theoretically works to achieve benefits for participants. It is the “If-Then” sequence of changes that the program intends to set in motion through its inputs, activities and outputs. Additional information and explanation of the Logic Model is included in the Application Instructions.

Client and System Conditions	Major Program Components	Program Activities Provided by Staff	Immediate and Long-Term Client Outcomes
<p>1. The Step Up! Steering Committee is designed to address existing organizational barriers to services and social and economic opportunities</p> <p>1. The Youth-Police Partnership Training is designed to serve and benefit both the police community as well as the most at-risk youth in White Plains.</p> <p>2. White Plains is in need of a program that will open the lines of communication between the police department and the at-risk youth in the area. Specifically, there is a need to reach out to the African American and</p>	<p><u>Step Up! Steering Committee</u></p> <p>1. Set policy and oversee program direction</p> <p><u>Youth-Police Partnership Training Component</u></p> <p>1.Pre-Training Preparations</p> <p>2.Team Building</p>	<p>1. Monthly steering committee meetings: Co-chaired by the White Plains Department of Public Safety and the Step Up! Project Director/Youth Bureau.</p> <p>1. Preparation activities: Officers will be given a pre-training questionnaire to evaluate their understanding of the subject matter prior to working with the youth.</p> <p>Youth will undergo eight hours of preparatory training in the basics of “method role playing.”</p> <p>Officers will participate in a Values Clarification workshop that examines their feelings and attitudes toward urban youth, their culture and working with people of color. The workshop consists of a series of exercises and discussions in which the officers will have the opportunity to become more aware of their own values and the impact that has on how they perform their jobs.</p> <p>2. Team Building Activities: To give the officers and youth a chance to view each other as individuals and to build better lines of communication between the two groups, each youth will be paired with an officer and together, they will form a team. Also, an important part</p>	<p>Improved community collaborations between partnering agencies, youth and families as documented by self-report survey</p> <p>Reduced youth arrests and contact with the juvenile justice system as reflected in one year measurement of base line and archival community data and program completion and updated archival community data</p> <p>Officers will experience at least a 50% increase in their knowledge of adolescent social development</p> <p>Officers will experience at least a 65% increase in their knowledge of urban language and socialization issues</p> <p>Officers will experience at least a 30% increase in their effective demonstration of de-escalation and problem solving skills</p> <p>Officers will experience at least a 50% increase in their knowledge of effective intervention techniques</p> <p>Officers will learn to identify and implement elements of successful intervention with urban youth and their families through 100% participation in role play scenarios</p> <p>Youth “trainer” participants will experience a 100% increase in</p>

Hispanic youth in White Plains.

3. This program is an opportunity to increase communication between youth and police, to assist the police department in strengthening their understanding of urban youth and culture, effective and successful intervention techniques, de-escalation and problem solving skills. It is also an opportunity to introduce at-risk youth to career opportunities in law enforcement and public safety through an increased understanding and appreciation of the work that police officers do.

1. Youth are disenfranchised and often disconnected with development opportunities

2. Youth experience significant academic, economic, and social challenges

3. Restorative Justice

4. Scenarios & Role Play

5. Debriefing Discussions

6. Recognition

Outreach & Case Management Component

1. Non-Traditional Outreach

2. Individualized Strength-Based, Wraparound Case Management

of the training includes spending the lunch “break” together, taking part in discussion groups.

3. Restorative Justice: Each youth taking part in the training program will have an opportunity to present their “delinquency history” to the entire group as a way of talking responsibility for their actions and also to assist the officers in understanding the choices they have made in the past, leading them to commit delinquent acts.

4. Scenarios and Role Play: Youth and Officers will participate in at least two of the three scenarios presented and will experience “reality based interactions” with the youth trainers, building their knowledge of adolescence and de-escalation and intervention techniques.

5. Debriefing discussions : Discussions will cover the following curriculum topics: Adolescence: Time of Growth and Self Definition; Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs; Communication Styles; Youth Life Histories Working with Youth Challenges – Successful Approaches and Career Paths. Debriefing will also include the post-training questionnaire.

6. Recognition: Following the training, all officers, trainers and youth will take part in a recognition dinner. Each Officer and youth team will be given an award for his or her participation.

1. Non-traditional Outreach: The outreach/case manager will actively seek out opportunities to meet with youth in places in the community that are safe, as determined by youth. Outreach efforts will include youth and family efforts. A spirit of hope, determination, and respect for all youth will guide all outreach efforts.

2. Case Management Services: The individualized, strength-based wraparound approach to working with youth, families, and communities will be employed. The case manager will access readily available services for participant youth including job readiness skills training, career exploration, employment, counseling, leadership and recreation.

their knowledge of career opportunities in law enforcement and public safety

Youth “trainer” participants will experience at least a 50% increase in their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the role of police officers

20% reduction in school behavioral incidences

Measured progression in academic achievement as demonstrated by improved school attendance and grades, and homework completion

Employment of 80% of participant youth, with demonstrated increase in job readiness skills

80% increase in knowledge of possible career paths through career exploration

The New York Times



White Plains police officers and young men who live in or near the Winbrook Apartments attend a Youth Initiative Training session.

In a Room, Police and Youths Talk, and Maybe See Their Similarities

WHITE PLAINS, June 27 — Like two tribes, they faced each other. One group wore the uniform of their trade: dark-blue outfits adorned with shields and badges, guns tucked in leather holsters. The other donned what could be defined as the uniform of a generation: oversized pants, loose T-shirts, chains dangling from their necks.

Unlike their previous encounters, this meeting at the Winbrook Apartments, the largest public housing complex in this city of 57,000, was not rooted in confrontation. Instead, a dozen police officers and an equal number of young men who live in or near the housing project convened for an exercise in understanding. The notion was that through frank conversation laced with street bravado, they might learn what makes each other tick and figure out how to avoid the flare-ups that define their interactions on the streets.

“I’m starting to get the feeling that we’re all just people,” Davon Melvin, an 18-year-old with reddish-brown hair and doe eyes, said as he ambled across the room.

The meeting was part of a two-week program, called Youth Initiative Training, begun here last year after a spate of violence around Winbrook, its \$10,000 cost covered by a grant from Westchester County and money forfeited in drug raids. Similar sessions, run by the North American Family Institute, a social-services agency based in Massachusetts, have taken place over the last few years in Baltimore and Boston, and more recently in Yonkers.

In this suburb 30 miles north of Midtown Manhattan, where condominiums and office towers are fast replacing old downtown structures, gentrification has given rise to tensions between well-to-do newcomers and low-income youths whose homes lie in the shadow of the building boom. The officers said they felt stuck in the middle, often summoned to shoo away teenage boys who stand around jostling one another on weekends outside City Center, a downtown mall at the base of two Trump towers, anchors of the local redevelopment.

“You have kids coming out of the projects who dress like urban kids and act like urban kids, and you have suburban families, and that has created a police issue, a flash point,” the city’s public safety commissioner, Frank G. Straub, said in an interview. “We’re trying to teach cops and kids to drop the warrior mentality. It’s not like they’ll meet on the street and give group hugs, but we hope they’ll be able to de-escalate the conflict, whenever and wherever it arises.”

At first glance, the group of officers, who are mostly white, and the youths, all of them black, seemed to have little in common. But soon similarities bubbled to the surface.

Officer Edmund Kearny, 28, who joined the police force here in May after two years patrolling the Bronx, said he worked one summer as a janitor, which happens to be the summer job that Joshua Williams, 17, has lined up this year before returning to White Plains High School as a senior.

Officer Jason Lacayo, 25, who also came here from the New York Police Department, said he grew up in the Bronx and had friends who were in gangs, which prompted Derrick Ephraim, a bucktoothed 19-year-old, to confide that he was once in a gang himself.

“It’s good to interact when the cops don’t have their guards up,” said Mr. Ephraim, whose nickname, D Eagle, derives from the semiautomatic pistol Desert Eagle.

Over pizza and soda, the officers, who patrol the downtown area, and the young men, half of whom have been arrested or have served time in jail, talked candidly for five hours about baseball rivalries, college plans and the difficulties they face on the job and at home. Some of the young men had been referred to the program by the courts as a condition of their release; others had been enlisted from the city Youth Bureau’s job training and educational programs.

“We’re not cops all the time,” said Officer Michael Perry, 40, a former police officer with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection who has worked here for five years. “This is just our uniform, our job. We’ve got to pay the bills.” Then Mr. Perry turned to one of the young men and said: “Remember: I treat you how you treat me.”

This group was the third to participate in the program in White Plains. Each group of youths met every weekday for several hours a day over two weeks, talking about poverty, trauma and domestic violence, and sharing their views about the police, who joined them for the last few sessions.

“The goal is to help them help themselves, and to show them that they can have a bright future, and that there are people who care about them,” said Joseph M. Delfino, the mayor of White Plains.

Results are hard to measure, but Commissioner Straub said the program had played a role in the small decline in crime and other disturbances at the Winbrook housing complex over the past 12 months. There were 169 complaints from residents about noise and disruptive behavior during that time, down from 194 in the previous 12-month period. Complaints about potential illegal activities, like drug dealing, fell to 152 from 199.

Over all, reported crime in the city has decreased by nearly 39 percent over the past five years, according to the city’s police statistics.

A rookie officer, Kristin Faulkner, 24, who took part in the youth encounters this week, said “only time will tell” how much the program would help cool tempers when real confrontation ensues.

“But it was good to talk to the kids, you know?” she added. “They opened up to us, they saw we’re human and their attitude changed. In a good way.”

By FERNANDA SANTOS
Published: June 29, 2007



January 25, 2008

White Plains crime at lowest in four decades

Richard Liebson
The Journal News

WHITE PLAINS - Crime in the city hasn't been this low since Bobby Fuller had a hit song in 1965 with "I Fought the Law (and the law won)."

Mayor Joseph Delfino and Public Safety Commissioner Frank Straub yesterday released statistics showing that overall serious crime dropped to its lowest level in 42 years, crediting careful planning, proactive, professional policing and cooperation among all city departments for a 5.8 percent crime drop in 2007 and a 41 percent decrease over the past six years.

"From day one, when we started planning the renaissance that White Plains is now experiencing, we've focused on public safety," Delfino said. "Public safety is key to attracting new residents and businesses to a city. People want to feel that they're shopping, working and living in a safe environment, and we've worked very hard to provide that. I think these numbers show that it's working."

In 2007, the city saw drops in each of the categories classified by the FBI as "Part 1" or serious crimes. Those crimes - homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and arson - decreased from a total of 1,234 in 2006 to 1,162 last year, with no homicides or arsons reported.

Delfino said that while "police are the key, it's all of the city departments working together that has made this happen. It's sanitation keeping the city clean, the building department combating overcrowding and the traffic department working to keep the streets safe. Our Police Department is visible and proactive. Our parking department is very active. People say we give out a lot of summonses, and that's true. But it helps drive crime down. It sends a message that we enforce our laws."

Straub said the Police Department's weekly CompStat meeting gives supervisors a chance to analyze crime patterns and identify quality-of-life issues to decide how to best allocate resources.

"Because the number of crimes reported is low, we have the ability to focus on offenders and potential offenders and respond to them through enforcement or intervention," he said.

"We have a really good department with committed, professional people who work really hard," Straub said. "That's what makes it happen."
