

KEYS FOR A SUCCESSFUL POLICE AND YOUTH PROGRAM

Connecticut's Police and Youth Program promotes positive youth development while working to increase the numbers of police officers who are experienced and comfortable working and interacting with young people. The Youth Development Training and Resource Center has provided technical assistance to these programs over the last 6 years, and has identified 4 key elements found in the most successful and high impact projects.

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

Successful Police and Youth Programs pay special attention to engaging all participants: youth, police and staff. The projects include fun activities that are of interest to both youth and adults. During the planning stages, it is important for youth to be involved and for their input to be included to ensure that the activities are age-appropriate and appealing. In the implementation of the planned activities, police are strongly encouraged to be active participants, not just supervisors or facilitators. The program should reinforce youth and police working together, sharing responsibilities, and creating partnerships.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

A crucial component of the Police and Youth Program is relationship building. This should be reinforced throughout the length of the program. Early in the program, participants usually take a trip to a local ropes course designed to strengthen relationships and build teamwork. During regular program sessions, relationship building is easily reinforced with the implementation of icebreakers, energizers and other short teambuilding activities. This ensures that throughout the program youth and police are getting to know each other on a more personal level and building relationships that will remain after the program has ended.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Police and Youth Program offers great opportunities for youth leadership development. Some ways to develop youth leadership have included:

- Recruiting new participants: youth create flyers, refer youth to the program, and plan other strategies to recruit additional participants
- Becoming program ambassadors: youth speak about their project accomplishments to community members, funders, or other audiences
- Mentoring younger participants: program alumni return to the program as counselors and take on more responsibilities or older participants plan and conduct activities for younger teens or children
- Planning program and fundraising activities to support a community service project
- Representing their team and community at a recognition event or cross-site project showcase

REFLECTION

Time for reflection has been noted as a very important component of the Police and Youth Program. This means going past the program activities and reinforcing the objectives of the program. Reflection can be done in a variety of ways; journaling, pairing up and talking to a partner, and group discussions can all be effective. Reflection can be asking one question at the end of a session to wrap up the day. It can be as simple as "what was your favorite part of the day?" or "name one thing you wish we would have done differently today." Reflection gives participants a chance to make the connection between the activities and the learning or desired changes in the youth and adult program participants.



KEY #1: PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

Successful Police and Youth Programs pay special attention to engaging all participants; youth, police and staff. The projects include fun activities that are of interest to both youth and adults. During the planning stages, it is important for youth to be involved and for their input to be included to ensure that the activities are age-appropriate and appealing. In the implementation of the planned activities, police are strongly encouraged to be active participants, not just supervisors or facilitators. The program should reinforce youth and police working together, sharing responsibilities, and creating partnerships.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

- **USE PARTICIPANT NAMES:** At your first few meetings include activities that encourage the learning of participant names. There are many different name games and activities that can be employed to encourage your program participants to learn each other's names. During introductions encourage participants to share how they would like to be referred to. Many times people prefer to be called by a nickname or you can also find that people do not like to have their name shortened. Police officers should also share how they would like to be referred to. You can also provide name tags for the first several sessions so that names are easily visible.
- **CREATE A GROUP AGREEMENT:** Ask the participants to come up with their own ground rules, ones that they will all agree to observe and list them on newsprint. Make sure to clarify the ground rules as needed to be sure that everyone understands all the ideas. Both adult and youth participants should contribute to the group agreement, and they all will be held accountable to follow those ground rules. During the program refer to your group agreement and display it in a visible location where it can easily be referenced.
- **KEEP COMMUNICATION OPEN:** Communication is very important to keeping participants engaged. In between meetings make sure to send out reminders to participants about future meetings. Follow up with participants that are unable to attend a session and to make sure they get any information they missed. Ask youth what the best contact method is, you may need to contact them through text, email or through social media. Another aspect of communication is providing ample opportunities for youth voice to be shared. Youth voice refers to the ideas, opinions, attitudes and knowledge of youth. Giving the youth in your program varied opportunities share their voice and provide their input on issues that directly affect them will ensure that they continue to be actively engaged in your program. Some easy ways to encourage youth voice and to get more youth input include:
 - Group discussions
 - Pairs or small group discussions
 - Dotmocracy: voting or rating ideas with sticker dots
 - Thumbs up/down voting



- **ACKNOWLEDGE PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK:** Try to incorporate feedback as much as possible so that participants feel that they have a voice and that they are being heard. When a suggestion cannot be implemented it is helpful to explain why. This allows participants to understand that their feedback has not been dismissed or ignored.
- **ENCOURAGE NEW PEOPLE TO SHARE THEIR IDEAS:** Many times there will be a subset of individuals in your program who will be more likely to contribute to discussions. An easy way to invite other people to

share ideas is to use the phrase “step up, step back” to encourage people who have not contributed to “step up” and ask people who have already provided feedback to “step back” and give other people an opportunity to be heard. Participants can get comfortable letting more outgoing people speak up and this is an easy strategy to employ to still acknowledge the individuals who have been participating but also give an opportunity to those who have not spoken up. Another phrase that can be used is “share the mic” which serves as an easy reminder to give an opportunity to someone new. Some youth find it easier to jot ideas down first or meet in small groups before speaking in front of a full group of youth and police.

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

- **CHOOSING.** Young people can choose which activities they wish to participate in and how they wish to participate and contribute to the group.
- **DECISION-MAKING.** Young people can meet on a regular basis to discuss and modify existing program.
- **PLANNING.** Young people can meet regularly to plan future programs or community activities.
- **ASSESSING.** Young people can “map” their communities, research needs, and/or engage in a variety of program documentation and evaluation activities.
- **COMMUNICATING.** Young people can regularly present the program to outsiders: talk to different community audiences, be on workshop panels, do site tours, or present to a key funder.
- **VOICE.** Young people can feel confident and encouraged to voice their own views, opinions, and ideas.

TIPS FOR POLICE OFFICERS TO BUILD “INFORMAL” CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

- Be relaxed and informal, sitting next to youth rather than standing in front them or off to the side
- Think back to your adolescent years, and briefly share an “awkward moment” that you recall
- Avoid “teaching” but still share explanations about law enforcement, as questions arise
- Appear for some activities without the full police uniform during the program year
- Listen a lot, be patient and encourage young people to brainstorm or elaborate on their ideas
- Try to find time for 1-1 conversations with many of the youth team members
- Have fun as you engage in the team-building games, rather than appear to compete with youth
- Recognize and celebrate individual contributions as well as team progress and accomplishments
- Be yourself!

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- **ACT for Youth Center for Excellence** (www.act4youth.org) “**Being Y-AP Savvy: A primer on creating and sustaining youth-adult partnerships**”
- **National Youth Leadership Council** (www.nylc.org)
- **Search Institute – Discovering what kids need to succeed** (www.search-institute.org)
- **Youth Development Training and Resource Center** (www.ydtrc.org) **The mission of YDTRC is to provide training, consultation, assistance, curriculum and resource development services for middle and high school youth leaders, program staff and volunteers that work within Connecticut’s diverse youth-serving organizations or schools.**



KEY #2: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

A crucial component of the Police and Youth Program is relationship building. This should be reinforced throughout the length of the program. Early in the program, participants usually take a trip to a local ropes course designed to strengthen relationships and build teamwork. During regular program sessions, relationship building is easily reinforced with the implementation of icebreakers, energizers and other short teambuilding activities.

2 TRUTHS AND A LIE

Tell the group that each person will introduce him- or herself by stating two truths about their life and one lie. The rest of the participants will guess which statement is the lie.

CHART YOUR LIFE

Thinking back as far as you can, draw a time line that represents your life. Consider the high points, low points, moments of inspiration, leveling off times, where you are now, and where you see yourself in the future. After you have drawn it, share what it means with the group.

“Now we know that all police aren’t rude... mean! But there’s police out there that care for us, our feelings, and watch out for us if we make bad decisions.”

– Windsor, CT youth participant

HOUSE ON FIRE

Ask, “Your house is on fire, and everyone is safe. You have thirty seconds to run through the house and collect three or four articles you want to save. What would you grab? Why?” After everyone has done this, the group can discuss what they learned about the things they value.

HUMAN KNOT

This activity works best in groups of 10-12. Have everyone stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Ask everyone to raise their right hand and then grab the hand of someone across the circle. Next, ask everyone to raise their left hand and then grab the hand of a different person. Tell the group to untangle themselves into a circle without breaking the chain of hands.



Officers learned about partnering with young people and saw leadership in action as their group was directed by two seniors from the Watertown High School Cooking Club. These older girls displayed their culinary skills at a donut-making session for Watertown’s Police and Youth program at Swift Middle School. Some officers had never baked; no one had made *homemade* donuts. Officers shared at headquarters, while youth took favorites to their family (or ate on the late bus!).

■ THE BIG WIND BLOWS

Have everyone stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder and ask for one volunteer to stand in the center. The person in the center must think of a true statement about themselves. Then they will say “The Big Wind blows those who _____” followed by their statement. At this point all of the players who share this characteristic must run across the circle and find a new place to stand. The last player left in the center will now share a statement about themselves. For example, “The Big Wind blows those who have traveled to Mexico,” and any person that has traveled to Mexico would run across the circle to a new spot.

■ TOILET PAPER ICEBREAKER

Get a roll of toilet paper and tell all those playing not to take too much but to take however much they want. Once all the players have taken the number of sheets they want, each has to tell one thing about themselves for every sheet they have.

“I learned not to be afraid of police officers.”

– Hebron, CT youth

■ WHO AM I?

Prepare a card for each person and write on it the name of a famous man or woman. On arrival, pin a card on the back of each person who must then ask questions of each other in order to find out their identity. When they succeed, the card is pinned on the front of them.

CROSS-SITE RECOGNITION SHOWCASE



Relationships are fostered both within teams of police and youth, as well as across different program sites that represent the diverse communities across Connecticut. The highly interactive 4-hour Saturday event recognizes young people and officers from larger cities, smaller suburbs and rural areas in the state. Each P-Y team chooses how to present their project – by leading an activity, showing a power point, displaying a tri-fold poster, or showing a video of their service in the community. Team members receive certificates, a group photo, a “shout out” after lunch and a choice of dessert. The benefits are numerous as all the youth and police hear creative ways to strengthen and build

trusting relationships with law enforcement, engage with many officers and teens, and feel important as part of a significant statewide project.





KEY #3: YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The structure of the Police and Youth Program calls for youth and adults to work together and to share responsibilities and offers many opportunities for youth leadership development. When youth are given an opportunity to take on a leadership role it is vital that they are also given the support they need to be successful. Listed below are several leadership opportunities for youth that are available in the Police and Youth Program as well as examples of how to support youth taking on new roles.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

In order to become leaders, youth need to have opportunities to explore, express, earn, belong and influence. Leadership opportunities give youth the chance to experiment with new challenging roles and test out ideas that will help them grow.

- Create a presentation about the program
- Recruit new participants
- Mentor younger/new participants
- Facilitate an icebreaker
- Facilitate a closing activity
- Plan an activity
- Plan a fundraiser
- Create a survey/evaluation
- Create a budget
- Plan an event
- Create a newsletter
- Write a press release
- Create a media campaign
- Plan a community service project

YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUPPORTS

Youth not only need opportunities to become leaders, they also need relationships that will help nurture and support them. According to New York's Youth Development Institute curriculum for Advancing Youth Development, there are three main types of supports that are needed by youth:

- **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:** the friendship and affirmation youth receive from others, and their involvement in caring relationships.

Scenario:

A young person, Jaime, in your program has volunteered to create a newsletter for the program. They have no idea where to start and are feeling overwhelmed.

Emotional Support:

Officer Smith, an adult that Jaime has a strong relationship with reminds him that he did a great job when he created the recruitment flyer for the program a few weeks before. Officer Smith tells Jaime not to be nervous and that they can work together to brainstorm ideas for the layout of the newsletter.

- **MOTIVATIONAL SUPPORT:** high expectations, standards, and boundaries that encourage youth to strive toward a higher goal. Some ways to provide motivational support include the following:

- Informing youth how they are expected to conduct themselves
- Providing youth with the opportunities and encouragement to meet expectations
- Providing youth with rewards necessary to meet expectations
- Providing youth with clear messages regarding rules, norms, and discipline
- Providing youth with opportunities to discuss and modify boundaries as appropriate

Scenario:

Three young people that participated in last year's Police and Youth Program are invited back as peer leaders.

Motivational Support:

A few days before the program starts the peer leaders attend an orientation with the police officer that will be supervising them. They are given a Peer Helper Handbook which describes their responsibilities, code of conduct and details on what they are expected to do.

■ **STRATEGIC SUPPORT:** coaching, feedback, and discussion to help youth stay on track and access to the people and resources they need to reach their goals.

Scenario:

Two youth from the Police and Youth Program volunteer to write a press release about an event their group has planned.

Strategic Support:

A police officer helps the two youth with the press release. She provides the youth with examples from some local publications on what press releases look like, she gives them feedback on their rough drafts and connects them to a colleague that works at a local publication that is willing to publish the press release.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS IN CONNECTICUT PROJECTS

BLOOMFIELD:

Youth leaders run intergenerational activity sessions for seniors at the Senior Center. Officers even brought their own children to join the fun, interactive games led by high school leaders who are part of the Bloomfield Community Crusaders police and youth team.

NEW HAVEN:

Youth leaders from Youth Rights Media, Inc. designed the process, crafted the questions about interactions between youth and police, and then facilitated small groups of youth and police as part of the cross-site recognition event held at one local project site. Volunteers videotaped segments of the interactions and group responses for later viewing by another program to stimulate their discussion.



BRIDGEPORT:

Youth from Creative Youth Productions lead police and youth team members in designing and practicing skits – giving everyone a chance to try out “on the spot” interactions that keep all cool.



KEY #4: REFLECTION

Time for reflection has been noted as a very important component of the Police and Youth Program. This means going beyond the program activities and reinforcing the objectives of the program. Reflection can be done in many ways; journaling, pairing up and talking to a partner, and group discussions can all be effective. Some reflection methods include writing, reading, telling and doing. Reflection gives participants a chance to think critically about their experiences, build a sense of self-awareness and think of ways a program can be improved. See also *Reflect and Improve: A Toolkit for Engaging Youth and Adult Partners in Program Evaluation (2005)* for excellent resources to strengthen your program planning and evaluation at www.theinnovationcenter.org.

■ PEAK AND PIT

Go around the group and ask each participant to share their peak (the best part of the day) and their pit (their least favorite part of the day or something they would like to have changed).

■ HEAD, HEART, FEET

This activity is a way to ask what we learned (the head), what we felt (the heart), and what we will do when we leave (the feet). It can be at the end of a session or at the end of your program. You can decide to have these questions on newsprint and have participants write a response to each, or you can go around the group and ask participants to respond to one or all of the questions.

■ COLLAGE OF WORDS

Post a piece of newsprint and ask participants to write one word that describes their experience for the session or the entire program.

■ WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?

Participants should answer the following:

- **What:** What surprised you?
- **So What:** What did you learn from the experience?
- **Now What:** How can the experience apply to other parts of your life?

■ PAIR AND SHARE

Participants pair with one or two others to reflect on a specified topic.

■ WHAT STUCK WITH YOU?

A simple question that can be answered on post it notes, discussed in pairs or as a large group.

■ JOURNAL PROMPTS

Writing in response to a journal prompt provides an opportunity for individual reflection. The possibilities for journal prompts are limitless. Below are a few simple prompts:

- What did the experience make you think about?
- How did the experience change your thinking about [choose a topic or issue]?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- What worked? What didn't work?
- What thoughts (if any) does this experience give you about issues in your local community? The nation? The world?
- How have your assumptions or stereotypes (about people, a community, the world, etc.) been challenged by the experience?