Engaging Youth Through the Six Pillars

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The *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* pointed out how a number of landmark events involving law enforcement responses in the United States have exposed "rifts in the relationships between local police and the communities they protect and serve."[1] The task force was charged with examining how to address the challenges at hand and realized that the mission of law enforcement is "to build trust between citizens and their peace officers so that all components of a community are treating one another fairly and justly and are invested in maintaining public safety in an atmosphere of mutual respect."[2] To this end, the task force identified six main topic areas ("pillars"):

1. Building Trust & Legitimacy
2. Policy & Oversight
3. Technology & Social Media
4. Community Policing & Crime Reduction
5. Training & Education
6. Officer Wellness & Safety

One of the keys to building trust in communities is the establishment of more effective relations between law enforcement agencies and youth. How law enforcement agencies "police youth" is critical to constructing confidence in those agencies. Youth-focused policing strategies from around the United States demonstrate how the six pillars designated by the task force can be used to improve police-youth relations. Both police agencies and community partners can benefit by clarifying issues and strategies that law enforcement can use to enhance trust and service to youth in their communities.

Building Trust & Legitimacy

The task force pointed out that people are more likely to "obey the law when they believe that those enforcing it have authority that is perceived as legitimate."[3] When it comes to engaging young people, law enforcement agencies must find a variety of ways to encourage officers to build trust and legitimacy with youth. Officers must exhibit the "guardian" rather than the "warrior" mentality. This is accomplished by ensuring that there are non-enforcement opportunities for positive interaction between youth and the police. For example, Clarence Cox, chief of Clayton County Public Schools in Georgia, explains how his officers are involved in mentoring students throughout the year:

> Officers are involved in sponsoring students for different activities. We emphasize that, in order to build trust with our youth, they need to know that police are a caring part of the community that we serve, and, in our case, that community is the school system. When we build trust in our youth, we are able to build legitimacy. We talk, share, care, and show respect for young people.[4]

Clayton County Public Schools isn't the only agency working to engage youth in positive interactions. To build trust with youth and the rest of the community, the Pueblo, Colorado, Police Department is engaged in a wide variety of outreach efforts to youth, ranging from Police Explorer Academies to participating in events like

Clayton County, Georgia
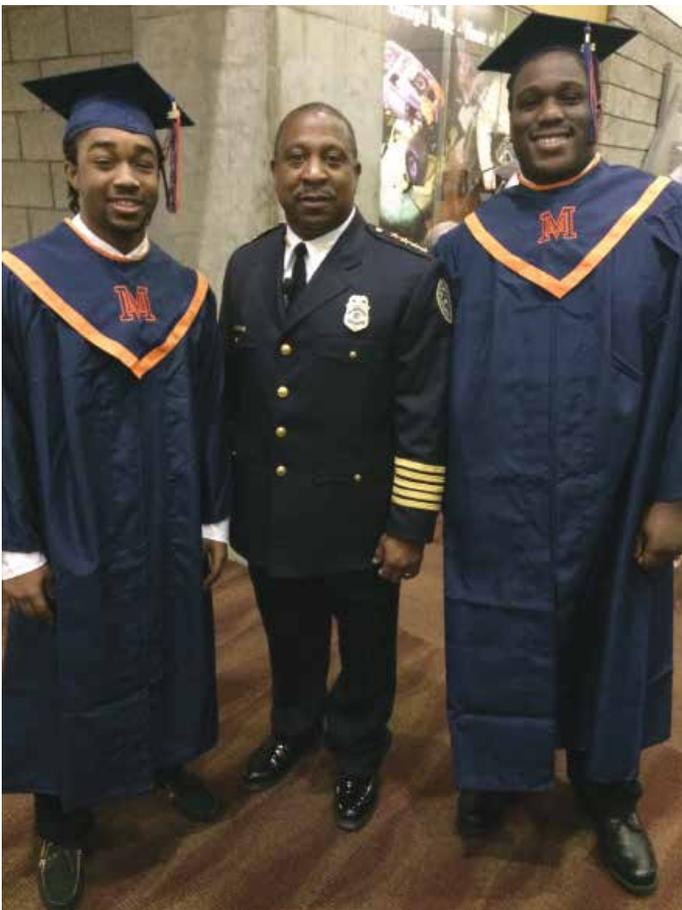
Safety Jam and Kick Off to a Drug-Free Summer in the city park and to traffic safety and civic lessons taught by officers. The leadership of the police department, starting with the training academy and continuing through subsequent training, strives to instill in officers a genuine approach of service and communication with the public.[5] In another approach to grow trust and legitimacy, the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Police Department has reorganized its Police Explorers Program so that there are two patrol officers in each of its 21 patrol districts, helping the department to expand to close to 500 explorers. The program is designed to demonstrate the department's commitment to youth in the geographic areas the patrols serve. Explorers who complete the program receive a waiver and are allowed to apply to the police academy without the usual requirement of 60 hours of college credits, which enhances recruitment efforts from the ground up.

Having the right officers on the job is a key ingredient for building trust and legitimacy. As Richard J. "Rick" Stelljes, chief of Pinellas County, Florida, Schools Police Department explains,

> Each and every one of our School Resource Officers is here because they want to be, and because they genuinely care about their students. As a result, they develop relationships with their students, they mentor and provide guidance, all in an effort to make a difference in their lives and assist them in being successful.[6]

Policy & Oversight

Policy is another powerful strategy that can be used to enhance youth-focused policing. Local policing policies must reflect local community values. Communities should aim to develop policies and strategies to reduce crime and improve relationships and engagement with young people.

Law enforcement leadership can work with local schools to develop policies that help lessen involvement of youth in the justice system. Recent developments in the United States, including the landmark *School Discipline Consensus Report* produced by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, have reinforced that the School Resource Officer's (SRO's) role is NOT to enforce school discipline rules. The report's policy statement says, "Educators and school officials do not call on officers to respond to students' minor misbehavior that can be appropriately addressed through the school's disciplinary process, and the officers use their discretion to minimize arrests for these offenses when possible."[7] One example of policy language regarding the role of SROs comes from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the police department and the public schools, which states the following: "The SRO may not enforce or investigate violations of school rules or policies or become involved with matters that are strictly school discipline issues."[8]

Employing language in policy that supports the diversion of youth from justice involvement is another effective measure. For example, the Intergovernmental Agreement between the Denver, Colorado, Public Schools and Denver Police Department not only clarifies that the SRO must differentiate between disciplinary issues and crime problems and respond appropriately, but the policy also states that

> SROs must de-escalate school-based incidents whenever possible. SROs must understand that the Denver Public Schools have adopted a discipline policy that emphasizes the use of restorative approaches to address behaviors, and is designed to minimize the use of law enforcement intervention.[9]

A policy that calls for de-escalation and the use of restorative practices is a strong example of the expectation that SROs divert students from justice involvement.

Technology & Social Media

The use of technology provides an opportunity to better engage youth and improve communications. One rapidly changing technology is social media. Police agencies are using social media tools by performing actions such as setting up their own Facebook page

Pueblo, Colorado

and or Tweeting out information and details that may be left out by mainstream media. Since youth are comfortable using social media, participating in these new media allows law enforcement to set up lines of communications with youth that lets agencies both provide and collect information about public safety situations. Law enforcement agencies also need to be equipped to monitor social media to see what issues are important to youth, how young people are interacting with others in the community, and how events are unfolding. Media technology changes rapidly, and youth are on the forefront of emerging technologies, so it is incumbent upon law enforcement to keep up with the social media and other information sources youth are using.

Using technology in policing that serves young people can be quite simple. Law enforcement agencies are using cellphones to call a range of responders to a scene. For example, as needed, the Manchester and Waterbury, Connecticut, Police Departments call upon assistance from the Emergency Mobile Psychological Services (EMPS) for mental health services for children, youth, and families in their Responding to Children of Arrested Caregivers Together (REACT) initiative.[10] This service positions the law enforcement agencies as agencies that protect and serve by drawing upon a full range of services in the community.

Community Policing & Crime Reduction

Community policing is about working with community residents, including youth, to "co-produce" public safety. For youth-focused policing, that means engaging youth in the process of community safety, including their voice in testimony about the problems facing the community and involving them in joint problem solving. Some law enforcement agencies are making a more conscious effort to engage youth as the eyes and ears of the department, not in terms of youth being informants, but rather, as youth being stakeholders in the future of the community.

Involving youth means also involving parents, who can serve as a protective factor, helping their children stay out of trouble. In an effort to reduce and prevent crime by youth in Rockland County, New York, District Attorney Thomas Zugibe partnered with Spring Valley Police Chief Paul Modica and other police departments in the county to launch the Youth and Police Initiative (YPI) in 2008. The program, originally created by the North American Family Institute to enhance officers' and prosecutors' understandings of the beliefs, values, and experiences of local youth, breaks down stereotypes of youth and officers, develops mutual respect between the two groups, and helps establish long-term positive relationships. As part of the YPI, boys and girls ages 9–17 participate in an eight-day program of dialogue with police and other public safety officials. Through team-building and role-playing, the officers build positive relationships with young people that are meant to change the trajectory of the youths' lives, as well as the future

of the community. Sergeant Rony Charles, who leads the program for the Spring Valley Police Department, notes that the YPI has not only changed the relationship between the police and the youth; it has also changed the relationship between the police and the *parents* of the youth in the program—including those parents police have locked up in the past—as those parents witness the positive role the officers are playing in the lives of their children.[11]

Community policing strategies such as the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment) problem-solving process can be used with youth-focused policing. The La Crosse, Wisconsin, Police Department began to address special problem activities documented by their SROs using the SARA process. The approach is seen as consistent with the department's mission of serving its citizens, being proactive in the prevention of crime, and "valuing youth as a precious resource to be protected and developed."[12] The SARA problem-solving process has been successfully applied to the problems of youth loitering, littering, and fighting.

The Vancouver, Washington, Police Department has found value in working with the community through its Chief's Diversity Advisory Team and other community partnerships that have resulted in positive relationships and improved trust. The Vancouver Police Department sought to enhance its outreach to the Latino community, so it worked actively with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), including its youth leadership. Through this partnership, police liaison training sessions were held with adult and youth leaders. Community events involving the police in city parks in high-crime areas were also organized by LULAC youth leadership in an effort to help bring the community and police together to improve trust and understanding. In another partnership, the Vancouver Police Department worked with the Safe Communities Task Force and an involved neighborhood association to reach out to local gang-affected youth and their families and held a neighborhood picnic in an effort to reclaim a city park that had become gang- and crime-ridden. Assistant Chief Chris Sutter observed, "Everyone involved noted the positive and lasting outcomes that came from engaging youth and their families, and that we could not have achieved these results through an enforcement model alone."[13] As an outcome of these partnerships, community representatives have worked actively with the department to address other issues before they become bigger problems.

This year the Scottsdale, Arizona, Police Department is implementing its COPS program—Community Outreach Partnerships—to increase police presence in the elementary and middle schools within the Scottsdale Unified School District. Each month, teachers throughout the district will identify students who perform "good citizen" or "good neighbor" acts. SROs will then present COPS certificates to the students at their respective schools, with photographs taken and posted on the school district websites, and distributed via the Scottsdale Police "Policeline" monthly email. The officers will also have lunch with the students at their schools. This program is designed to increase officer visibility on the elementary and middle school campuses and create a trusting relationship with students, starting at a young age, so that when the students are in high school, police will be more trusted and approachable.[14]

Training & Education

Law enforcement officers and leaders must be trained in a wide variety of areas involving youth, including how to engage young people positively, de-escalation techniques, understanding youth brain development, the impact of trauma and other mental health issues, cultural differences among youth populations, and more.

In 2007, a working group in Philadelphia, with the support of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Committee, and the MacArthur Foundation DMC Action Network, created the Pennsylvania DMC Youth/Law Enforcement Curriculum. This curriculum is used with every recruit graduating class to help them better understand the dynamics the graduates will face when they are deployed.[15] All recruits start out on foot patrol (for a minimum of six months) and are assigned primarily to African American and Latino neighborhoods. The department's leadership believes that providing training on adolescent brain development is extremely important to assist officers in formulating an effective response during a juvenile encounter.

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training—which POST academies should offer for basic recruit and in-service training, according to the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing—is an example of training that a number of agencies around the United States are using. In Montgomery County, Maryland, the police department provides a 40-hour training course focused on handling incidents involving persons (including youth) with mental illness, developmental disabilities, co-occurring disorders (mental health and substance abuse), and brain injuries. The training—which is required before

the department will issue a TASER to an officer—exposes officers to the signs of a variety of different mental illnesses, how to respond to calls where people exhibit mental illness (through demonstration and role-playing), the availability of mental health resources and other community resources, and how to write a successful emergency evaluation petition to get someone needed psychiatric care in a hospital. All Montgomery County SROs are required to attend CIT training to learn about county resources that are available to youth in crisis.[16]

Officer Safety & Wellness

In an effort to help officers realize how they may be impacted by trauma experienced on the job, the CIT program administered by the Salt Lake City, Utah, Police Department offers an 8-hour post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) class (funded by a grant from the Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health) that includes officer "self-care," teaching them that police officers are not exempt from mental illness and how to take care of themselves.[17]

Enhancing relationships with youth and the rest of the community will, in and of itself, enhance officer safety. For example, the Vancouver, Washington, Police Department provides youth workshops where role reversal techniques are used in mock scenarios to provide the opportunity for the youth to experience making decisions under pressure and how to de-escalate a tense situation. Officers then discuss with the youth what they observed and felt, if they perceived threats, and how and why they made decisions during the scenario.

This popular interaction has helped youth appreciate what officers must deal with; such an awareness may result in less threats to officer safety on the street.

Conclusion

Building trust between law enforcement and youth in communities is a critical task for 21st century policing. By considering the pillars identified by the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing as guides for developing and implementing effective youth-focused policing, law enforcement agencies can strengthen their relations with youth. This approach will pay off now—and even more so in the future. ❖

Notes:

[1]The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf (accessed February 10, 2016).

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Clarence Cox (chief of Clayton County, Georgia, Public Schools), email to John Rosiak, 2015.

[5]Troy Davenport (deputy chief, Pueblo, Colorado, Police Department), email to John Rosiak, 2015.

[6]Richard J. "Rick" Stelljes "Chief's Message," http://www.pcsb.org/Domain/174 (accessed February 11, 2016).

[7]Emily Morgan et al., *The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014), https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/The_School_Discipline_Consensus_Report.pdf (accessed February 10, 2016).

[8]John Rosiak, "How SROs Can Divert Students from the Juvenile Justice System," *Journal of School Safety* (Spring 2015), http://www.mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?i=245824#{"issue_id":245824, "page":28} (accessed February 11, 2016).

[9]Denver Public Schools and Denver Police Department, *Intergovernmental Agreement Concerning the Funding, Implementation and Administration of Programs Involving Police Officers in Schools*, February 2013, http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/SRO%20MOU%20Denver.pdf (accessed February 10, 2016).

[10]Jason M. Lang and Christopher T. Bory, *A Collaborative Model to Support Children Following a Caregiver's Arrest: Responding to Children of Arrested Caregivers Together* (REACT) (Farmington, CT: Child Health and Development Institute, 2012), http://www.chdi.org/files/7914/1200/4697/children_of_incarcerated_parents.pdf (accessed February 10, 2016).

[11]Rony Charles (sergeant, Spring Valley, New York, Police Department), telephone conversation with John Rosiak, 2016.

[12]La Crosse Police Department, Vision Statement, https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/index.aspx?NID=210 (accessed February 10, 2016.

[13]Chris Sutter (assistant chief, Vancouver Police Department), email to John Rosiak, 2016.

[14]Scottsdale, Arizona, Police Department, Community Outreach Partnerships, Scottsdale Unified School District, email to John Rosiak.

[15]Pennsylvania Disproportionate Minority Contact DMC Youth/Law Enforcement Group, "Law Enforcement Curriculum," 2015, http://padmc.org/law-enforcement-curriculum (accessed February 10, 2016).

[16]Essie McGuire to Public Safety Committee and Education Committee, "Briefing—School Resource Officer Program," memorandum, October 1, 2015, http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2015/151005/20151005_PSED1.pdf (accessed February 11, 2016).

[17]When people take care of themselves they are better able to serve others through better customer service for all populations, including youth.

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John Rosiak is a safe schools trainer and facilitator who works in multi-disciplinary settings helping law enforcement, juvenile justice, education, and mental health leaders collaborate to keep youth in school and out of justice involvement. John has worked in a variety of positions for more than 30 years, including directing crime, substance abuse, and violence prevention efforts on the local, national, and international levels. He has led training for police chiefs and sheriffs in support of community policing and delivered drug, violence, and bullying prevention workshops for thousands of law enforcement officers, juvenile justice representatives, and others working with youth. For more information, contact john@rosiakassociates.com.