



Successful Practices & Strategies

Vol. 4 | No. 3

Phoenix Police Department

Phoenix, Arizona

<http://www.phoenix.gov/police>

Community policing element

Community partnerships and problem solving

Problem/issue

Juvenile relationship violence

Problem description

Some students come from a social and family background lacking healthy relationships modeled at home, and as such, act out through violence when faced with challenges in life.

Community policing strategies implemented

Officer Chad Lutz at North Canyon High School in Phoenix, Arizona, is working with the school social workers, Michelle Stuart and Mike O'Guinn, to lead a selected group of students in an interventional cohort focusing on building healthy relationships and juvenile relationship violence awareness and prevention. Participants in the program come from a variety of life experiences, including some with a family history of domestic violence, some referred by school staff if they exhibit precursor behaviors of violence, and some who wish to learn more about preventing juvenile relationship violence. The cohort of students voluntarily participates in the program during the traditional study hall period for 8–16 weeks, with each class lasting 25–50 minutes. Officer Lutz, Ms. Stuart, and Mr. O'Guinn facilitate the group discussion on building healthy interpersonal relationships, learning coping skills to overcome adversity, anger management skills, and decision processing to make positive life choices.

Officer Lutz participates in the program in uniform but interacts with the students as a member of society by sharing personal views of conflict resolution and asking questions to engage the students in conversation about the topic for the session. It is critical for the officer participating in the program to demonstrate an ability to humanize the image of the law enforcement officer by openly communicating with the students, demonstrating appropriate empathy, and maintaining a nonjudgmental position when communicating with the students.



Change and/or impact as a result of these community policing efforts

While no data have yet been collected on the outcome of the program, anecdotal evidence indicates a reduction of violent acts by participants and improvement in handling adverse personal challenges. The reduction in violent conduct in response to life challenges benefits the school community, the students, and the neighboring community.

Lessons learned through program implementation

The program was developed based on feedback from the student body at North Canyon High School after students expressed concerns and interest to learn more about juvenile relationship violence and learning to build healthy interpersonal relationships. The classes focus on learning coping skills, anger management, making positive choices, and building healthy relationships in the community. The topics for the session can be adjusted to discuss topics relevant to current affairs and should be student driven. For example, a high school in a neighboring city experienced the tragic deaths of two students on campus. The officer and social worker guided the discussion to talk about the recent events and skills that the students could use to avoid a violent outcome.

The cohort is guided by the officer and social worker asking questions and promoting open discussions on the topic of the session. For the students to buy in to the program, the officer and social worker act as facilitators in the discussion rather than delivering the material in a traditional educational model. The officer and social worker may share personal or professional stories from life experiences to stimulate the conversation and guide the students in learning. The students should be encouraged to speak openly about the topic at hand and help provide feedback to one another to learn skills to avoid resorting to violence.

The school social worker works closely with school counselors, teachers, and other staff to ensure the students invited to the program have demonstrated a desire to participate in the class. While the class is not mandatory, the students are invited to the class with an understanding that they will participate openly. Participation in the program can be used to offset school suspensions for delinquent behavior, but the class does not serve as a mandated consequence for student misconduct.



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Participation by an officer in uniform brings a new dimension to the program by humanizing the officer and helping to bring a unique societal viewpoint to the discussion. For the officer to be successful, the officer must possess the ability, skills, and desire to serve as a mentor and openly communicate with the students.

The classes are separated by gender to allow for more open discussion but also include times of coed discussion and interaction.

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Published 2017