



## Successful Practices & Strategies

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# West Palm Beach Police Department

West Palm Beach, Florida

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### Community policing element

Community partnerships and problem solving

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### Problem/issue

Juvenile offenders and their involvement in violent crime

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### Problem description

Juvenile offenders in low-income areas with higher rates of violent crime are too often failed by traditional juvenile diversion programs and soon progress to violent offenses and adult criminal records. Gangs have been growing in the immediate metropolitan area at an alarming rate.

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### Community policing strategies implemented

The pioneers of this project took best practices from a variety of successful departments, including Boston (Operation Ceasefire); High Point, North Carolina; Kansas City, Missouri (Aim4Peace Program using public health); New York City (social media); and Durham, North Carolina (Project Safe Neighborhood). One success story we have is our Reduction Intervention Prevention (RIP) program.

In response to repeated violence involving the city's inner city youth, the West Palm Beach Police Department looked to develop a new approach to prevent youth and gang-related violence. Thus, West Palm Beach Operation Youth Violence, RIP was developed.

The resulting program brought together the resources of local community leaders, leaders from the faith-based community, and other public and private entities to identify and assist young people who are at vulnerable points in their lives. The program is aimed at first-time felony offenders to provide them the necessary resources and mentoring in hopes they will become productive members of the community. Team members including police, community leaders, faith-based leaders, and representatives from our public and private partners jointly made home visits to offenders to offer services. The program is 100% voluntary.

The second tier of the operation is geared toward stricter sentencing in the criminal justice system for those who decline to accept assistance and instead become repeat offenders.



Partnerships include the following:

- Urban League of Palm Beach County
  - Black on Black Crime Prevention
  - Youth Crime Prevention and Intervention Programs
  - Teen Outreach Program
  - Urban Youth Empowerment Programs
  - National Urban League Incentives to Excel and Succeed
  - Workshops including Youth Gang Resistance, Social Responsibility, Behavior Modification, and Parenting Skills
- The Youth Empowerment Center
  - Teen Council
  - Video and Audio Production
  - Computer Training
  - Web Design
  - Digital Literacy
  - Community Garden
  - Open Gym
  - SAT and Act Prep
  - Homework Study
  - Professional Tutors
  - Digital Awareness
  - Digital Photography
  - Reading Club
  - Students Against Violence
  - Gang Resistance Education
- State Attorney's Office
- Department of Children and Families
- Palm Beach Behavioral Health and Wellness
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- School Board of Palm Beach County
- Baptist Ministries Conference

The partners involved implemented the Neighborhood Accountability Board as a diversion program offered to first-time misdemeanor offenders. The goals are to provide the victim and community the opportunity to converse with an offender in a safe and productive manner, to provide an opportunity for an offender to take responsibility for his or her actions and to make amends, to provide citizen ownership of the justice system, and to provide a timely community response to repair harm.



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

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Recidivism among participants (in the first six months, 3 of 79 participants became repeat offenders) is significantly below that of first-time offenders as a whole prior to the program (15 of 102 who met the program's criteria were repeat offenders).

- More than 40 youths have walked through the doors at the Urban League or Youth Empowerment Center.
- 26 youths have completed a five-week job readiness course.
- 7 youths are enrolled in a GED program.
- 6 youths have earned industry-recognized credentials (forklift or security).
- 2 youths have earned a high school diploma.
- 11 youths have found subsidized employment.
- 5 youths have participated in youth empowerment programs.
- 3 families have used DCF services for family care.
- Total crimes committed by youthful offenders included a lower percentage of the most violent offenses. By the second six months of the program, the rate decreased from 47% to 39% (involving firearms, robbery, or homicide).

## Lessons learned through program implementation

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In the second year of the program, funding was temporarily lost for programs that provided financial assistance for participants to study for and take their GED or attend other training. As a result, there was immediate reduced participation and a lack of growth in the program as a whole. Although much of the funding has been restored through alternate sources, some residual damage lingered, slowing program growth and success. A consistent funding source is critical to program success and credibility with potential participants.

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