

Jamecia Luckey

Cocoa Police Athletic League - Cocoa, Florida

I would recommend that the Task Force consider supporting programs that foster positive relationships between cops and kids, and that program is a national organization; the Police Athletic/ Activities League.

The Police Athletic League was founded in 1914. It is based on the conviction that young people - if they are reached early enough - can develop strong positive attitudes towards police officers in their journey through life toward the goal of maturity and good citizenship. The PAL program brings youth under the supervision and positive influence of a law enforcement agency and expands public awareness about the role of a police officer and the reinforcement of the responsible values and attitudes instilled in young people by their parents.

I'm not going to quote stats or tell you what you what research says about youth and law enforcement, I'm here to share my personal story. I will share how caring people from my community, which included law enforcement, helped save me from myself. The same organization has saved countless young people and has given them the tools to make good decisions.

Before I got involved with PAL, most of you would not believe that I was the most disobedient child anyone could have. I was always in trouble. I could never spend a whole week in school without getting into trouble or suspended. I was disrespectful not only to authority figures but also to my peers. I was failing because I was missing too many days from School. I felt like I wasn't smart enough. Why did I feel this way? Many adults, and some of my peers told me that I would never be anything in life; no one loved me or ever would. What hurt me the most was when a Pastor told me that I would never make it—that hurt me badly, so I shut everything and everybody out. I wanted to commit suicide.

After a few months of moping around, my mom decided to put me in the Summer Weed and Seed Youth Employment Training Program. I just knew it wasn't going to work out, but to my surprise, I liked the program. We learned how to fill out applications; how to dress appropriately, and how to interview for a job. They also covered life-skills, time management, and setting goals.

The second phase introduced me to the Cocoa Police Athletic League's Youth Directors Council; a youth leadership program. Through this experience, I started to gain faith that I was somebody and that I could be or do anything that I wanted. I did an 180-degree turnaround in School. I went from a D/F student to an A/B student and eventually I was making straight A's and helping out at my school. I got more involved in my community and learned how to give back as we were being taught in our Police Athletic League's Leadership Program. I refused to miss an event with our PAL Program, no matter what it took for me to get there. My hard work and determination paid off, and I was selected to attend the State Police Athletic League Youth Directors Conference. The Police Athletic League Youth Conference is a conference for youth, planned and coordinated by youth under the supervision of adults, many of whom are law enforcement officers. What I saw and experienced on stage was so amazing. At that very moment, I decided that I was going to be up on that stage the next year.

What I experienced were my peers from all over the State, expressing themselves, and no one was judging. We were encouraged just to be ourselves. After the conference, whenever anyone would ask about my trip, I would beam with pride because I had a new goal. I was committed to my local PAL. Doing what I had to do to get up on that that stage as part of the conference committee the next year, was all I could talk about, and it kept me focused. I worked the entire next year in our local program, alongside police officers and my advisors, cleaning homes of Veterans and the elderly, and working in the Weed and Seed Community

Garden. We attended the Youth Crime Prevention Summit and volunteered for National Night Out Against Crime, to name just a few things. It all paid off.

When you finally get there, it is the most intense training, that involves planning, coordinating, public speaking, and making presentations. The fellowship with my peers gave me the opportunity to share my story, and it felt good. To know something that I could say or do could help someone out that was in the same boat as me, just a year before I joined the Police Athletic/Activities League. It was an honor!

Now, that I have graduated High School and returned as a volunteer, I hear too often that the future of providing the same opportunities that I had are not as bright because of the lack of funding. And, more and more in our communities, young people think that they are supposed to be at odds with the Police. They have no experience with law enforcement, except the negatives that they see in the media or hear about from friends and family members.

“Studies have shown that if a young person respects a police officer on the ball field, gym or classroom, the youth will likely come to respect the laws that police officers enforce. Such respect is beneficial to the youth, the police officer, the neighborhood and the business community”.¹

There is a whole world out there and a lot of people who care and understand. I believe children have to be reached at an early age before they start to believe in all the negatives. Please help organizations like the Police Athletic League continue to fill the gaps between parents and schools.

1. National Police Athletic League