



COMMUNITY JUSTICE REPORT

Newsletter of the
Pennsylvania Council
on Community Youth
Aid Panels

Policing Our Children

Dealing with the many issues facing children today may be one of the biggest tasks facing educators, counselors, law enforcement and other agencies serving the greater good of the community. Law enforcement, especially school resource officers (SRO's), walk a fine line in this process.

Community policing is nothing new in law enforcement; in fact, community policing created the baseline for community-based programs several centuries ago. School-based programs encourage a type of law enforcement reminiscent of earlier times, when officers were approachable and always accessible in the community.

Not all police officers are cut from the same mold; likewise, not all officers can or should be SRO's. A wise detective once told me that I would never become wealthy in law enforcement, but if I treat people with respect and compassion, it will pay great rewards.

The other important advice that this wise detective—my father—imparted to me was that respect is earned and not demanded. These two things are crucial for the survival of any program dealing with children.

There is a very fine line that an SRO walks in the school setting. It certainly is not the normal police job. While performing everyday duties in

the school setting, the SRO acts as an administrator, teacher, counselor, and—of course—police officer. Trust is a huge factor, but the right officer easily develops this sort of relationship with children. It is critical not to lose that trust.

Have an open door policy; get to know the children; change for gym class and play sports with them; teach classes; go to sporting events, concerts, plays, or anything else to support the school. It will be noticed. Hold the children accountable for their actions, and—most importantly—handle discipline, arrests, and detentions of youth with respect, not arrogance or sarcasm.

Since the juvenile justice system is about rehabilitation, an SRO must be willing to start new programs or work with existing programs to this end. Restorative Practice is the new trend and has great success rates with my department. I have referred first time offenders to the Community Justice Panel (Youth Aid Panel) for several years now, and, as a township, we have an 89% success rate for completion and non-recurrence.

It is important for an SRO to think outside the box and try new things. Our program was chosen as 1 of 8 schools in the country for a grant based largely on our proposal for Restorative Practice training for teachers, and the school district has trained all school staff in the middle and high
(continued on page 4)

Community Justice Report:

Fall 2008

Inside this issue:

A Youth Aid Success Story 2

Westmoreland County—The First Youth Commission 3

NEXT ISSUE:

Look for A Note From the Chairperson!

Pennsylvania By The Numbers For 2007:

- Counties active in PCCYAP: 13
- Panelists in PA: 939
- Cases heard: 2,880
- Successful cases: 82.5%
- Hours of community service: 27,067
- Restitution paid: \$31,605.00
- Summary/ Misdemeanor/Felony: 1255 / 1287 / 338



A Youth Aid Panel Success Story

Submitted By Aaron Richwine

It was a typical offense for a juvenile male – vandalism. What made mischief night 2007 memorable for 16 year old Robert was that he got caught.

At around 10:30pm, he was the passenger in a car that just happened to contain a recently purchased carton of eggs. As they drove down Laurel Drive, Robert hurled an egg at a car parked on the street – and it was an accurate throw.

The problem – a neighbor witnessed the incident. Before Robert knew it, the police were at his front door, and he was confessing to the vandalism. Luckily for Robert, his local police department has a Youth Aid Program, and the investigating officer is kind enough to recommend that the case go before the panel, rather than a judge.

Since the local Youth Aid Panel had been busy during the fall of 2007, Robert's case was not heard until January. The Central Bucks Panel "A" listened for about 30 minutes. The violation that landed Robert in front of the panel was not particularly exciting.

What juvenile hasn't engaged in a minor incident of vandalism? But this panel used it's many years of experience to see more than just a minor offender.

Through careful questioning, the

full picture was revealed: Robert lives with only his mother, and never met his father. A bright young man, Robert scored 1340 on his SAT's. However, he was failing nearly every class at school. It did not help that he was also setting school records for unexcused absences.

His mother could not get through to him, and he spent much of his time in front of the television. Mom was losing control, and the panel sensed that she had been waiting for an opportunity to regain it.

The panel drafted a contract that called for 90 days probation, community service, a writing assignment, improved school grades, and assignment to a mentor with Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Bucks County.

There was now light at the end of the tunnel for both Robert and his mother – complete the contract, improve his grades at school, and everything would be fine.

Robert's case had been assigned to panel member Tom McAllister. He wasted no time contacting Robert to ensure that he started his obligations.

McAllister's job would not be an easy one. Six days after the Youth Aid Meeting, Robert has another run-in with the police. This time, he receives a warning

from a police officer, after a juvenile prank. McAllister is quick to warn Robert about the consequences of getting in trouble again.

As the weeks passed, it became apparent that Robert's probationary period needed to be extended. He had not improved his grades, and he was resistant to the help his Big Brothers mentor was offering.

Tom McAllister became more and more frustrated and presented the problems to the members of his panel. They agreed to extend the contract.

The extended contract and McAllister's persistence began to pay off. By early spring, Robert's grades and attendance began to improve. He stopped "standing-up" his Big Brothers mentor and showed some interest in his own future.

Month after month, Central Bucks Panel "A" would start their night with a review of Robert's performance. It was clear that the Panel, Robert, and his mother had become very comfortable with each other.

(Continued on page 3)

Westmoreland County — The First Youth Commission



Submitted By Melissa Sullenberger

Over 40 years ago, the first Youth Commission (Youth Aid Panel) was formed in Westmoreland County.

It was a brand new idea in Pennsylvania, and began well before the state started its sway from treating juvenile offenders from a punitive standpoint toward focusing on rehabilitation. Westmoreland County was a trend-setter, one might say.

The Youth Commission allows the community to assist youth who take responsibility for a first time offense, and agree, with his or her family, to participate in the program.

Now serving all municipalities of Westmoreland County, each of 18 local commissions consists of local volunteers who serve to help youth adjust, work out or solve the harm done to victims and the community.

In order to continue to provide the outstanding services that began in the 1970's, the Westmoreland County Youth Commission Enhancement Team was created several years ago. It consists of juve-

nile probation staff and Youth Commission volunteers.

The purpose of the Enhancement Team is to identify ways in which services may be improved to the volunteer members. In turn, this improves services to youth and families, victims, and the community.

This team established liaisons to every Commission. They were also able to standardize an orientation program given to every new member. Finally, they provide for ongoing training of existing members.

As of today we have 127 Youth Commission Community Volunteers. In 2007, local commissions heard 123 cases, freeing up valuable time and resources for the Magisterial District Courts and the Juvenile Court .

Hopefully, the volunteers of Westmoreland County will continue their positive work beyond another 40 years!

Melissa Sullenberger is a probation officer with the Westmoreland County Juvenile Probation Department.

(continued from page 2) Robert recognized that these “strangers” from the community actually cared about his future.

By July of 2008, Robert had rearranged his priorities. He had finished his junior year with passing grades, and was thinking about college.

McAllister and the Panel released Robert and wished him well. Though they probably didn't realize it, the panel had just done exactly what we train our new panel members to do: Write a fair contract, make the juvenile take responsibility, and earn the juvenile's respect by showing that you care about them.

Now completing his senior year of high school, Robert is applying to colleges and plans to pursue a career in sports management. He has not had any further trouble with the law, and his mother reports that Robert has truly begun a turn-around.

Aaron Richwine, Bucks County Youth Aid Panel Coordinator, is a corporal with the Warwick Township Police Department.

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(continued from page 1) school on Restorative Practices.

I feel very strongly about holding children accountable for their actions. There are many ways to accomplish this, but the traditional ways are not always successful. That is why it is key to implement new ideas, programs, and resources to assist parents and children. When you do it, the phone calls will start pouring in for support, resources, and—most importantly, success stories of children that have made positive choices.

My program is geared around just that, positive choices. Every year I present assemblies on decision-making and show how every decision—good or bad—will come full circle and affect children’s lives.

I stress moving past poor decisions, accepting responsibility and the consequences, and moving on. I have seen the most troubled youth come back after an arrest and start a new path. That is a measurement of success.

Policing our children may very well be the busiest job a police officer will ever have. The rewards are countless, and the children are amazing. I do get overwhelmed at times, but that is when I look to educators and administrators for support.

You need a great relationship with the school and school staff in order to have success with Restorative Practices. Our team works great together from the school board down to the cafeteria Aides.

These children are truly our future, and it is our collective responsibility to mold them into upstanding young adults. With teamwork, respect, proactive thinking and a little bit of luck, our future looks bright!

Story submitted by Donald Sabo, Jr., School Resource Officer for Salisbury Township School District. He is a police officer with the Salisbury Township Police Department in Lehigh County, PA.

Community Justice Report edited by Dwight Lichtenwalner, Lehigh County CJP Coordinator. For more information on PCCYAP, to become a volunteer, or to contribute an article, please contact Dwight at 610-965-5599, via email at IMPACTDL@ptd.net, or contact your local PCCYAP member.

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