

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
Community Relations Service

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Police and Urban Youth Relations:
AN ANTIDOTE TO RACIAL VIOLENCE

A Guide for Police, Youth and Community Leaders to Improve Police/Urban Youth Relations
(March 1995)

Improving relations between police and urban youth is part of the Community Relations Service's concerted national effort to facilitate community oriented policing in police departments and communities throughout the Nation. The new publication, Police and Urban Youth Relations: AN ANTIDOTE TO RACIAL VIOLENCE, provides useful guidelines and effective models for enhancing police and urban youth interaction.

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FOREWORD

The Community Relations Service is mandated by the Congress to provide assistance to communities and persons therein to resolve disputes, disagreements and difficulties relating to discriminatory practices based on race, color and national origin (Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §2000g). Since the creation of CRS in 1964, CRS has sought to identify, create, and make known programs and methods communities could implement to address tensions and conflicts caused by discriminatory practices.

CRS experience has shown that a major source for racial tensions, and often the flashpoint of citywide violence, stems from the relationship between the Police Department and urban youth. When there is a lack of positive contacts between police and urban youth, particularly minority youth, there are constant problems and friction.

Over time minor communication issues between urban youth and police can grow into serious levels of distrust, fear, and even hostility on the part of both some police and some urban youth. If these feelings of alienation are left unattended - and in many cases they have been - they contribute to decline in the quality of life in many urban areas across the Nation.

This guide is designed to help police, youth and community leaders understand and improve the issue of police/urban youth relations.

Police-Youth Relations: A Current Problem

The current relationship between urban youth and police has been described as negative by community and police leaders. Common problems in the relationship have included; a lack of trust, racial and cultural differences, little or no contact, except through police responding to crime-related incidents, and high levels of anger, fear, and hostility between the two groups.

The relationship has been described as one of natural adversaries. This hostile relationship discourages open communication between police and youth, which, in turn, further exacerbates the levels of distrust and fears felt by both youth and police officers. Without open communication chances for violence are increased. Officer and citizen safety are threatened, unnecessarily. Public order is also threatened by a negative relationship between police and youth. For example, police giving simple directions to youth to disperse can, without a positive relationship between the police and the youth, lead to violence, property destruction, arrests, court hearings and more.

The current relationship between police and urban youth can be dysfunctional and is directly related to increased levels of violence, physical injury to police officers, youth, and others, and contributes to disrupting public order.

I. POLICE AND YOUTH: THE DESIRED RELATIONSHIP

Background

Policing in the United States has undergone many changes since the first police departments were formed. Major urban police departments have grown from a small staff of officers who lived in the communities they policed into organizations of hundreds, even thousands of individuals who often do not live in the areas they police.

Sir Robert Peel's Principles of Policing which guided the first police departments stated that policing needs to address crime and disorder. Disorder refers to non-criminal activities or situations that are perceived as negatively affecting the quality of life (noisy children, homeless persons, abandoned vehicles, etc).

As police departments grew in the United States they developed new means of policing which were thought to be more effective. Most of the new police strategies were aimed at addressing crime including: patrol units and cars, rapid response, and investigative units. Policing went from a system of walking beats to a process of covering larger areas by patrol cars.

These policies and strategies resulted in police having less contact and conversation with residents in the community. In the past, officers on a walking beat had addressed both crime (robbery, assault, theft, etc.) and disorder issues. Policing was redefined as a function of addressing only crime as opposed to the original understanding that police would address both crime and disorder.

Added to these developments were the growing segregation of populations in the 19th and 20th centuries creating

mostly minority urban populations and from the 1960's onwards, an urban youth more politically aware of his or her rights under the law; an urban youth more culturally aware of his or her racial and ethnic identity; police who live apart from the communities they serve and youth who feel distrust and estrangement from the police.

Modern Police Response

To resolve these shortcomings modern police leaders have recommended moving towards "community-oriented policing" to bring the police back into the community. This is a philosophy of policing in which the police engage the community to solve problems that affect the environment where crime, disorder, violence and drug abuse thrive.

Community-oriented policing calls for a partnership to be developed between the police and the community.

Modern police leadership recognizes the danger of ignoring the feelings and perceptions of public safety and of the police department held by various segments of the community.

Improvements in the relationship between police and urban youth can only be accomplished through a partnership based on mutually agreeable community needs. The community and the urban youths have distinct responsibilities to fulfill in moving a community and its police department toward the ideal.

The Ideal Relationship

The ideal relationship developed by the Task Force on Police/Urban Youth created by CRS and composed of police executives, youth, and community leaders, can help guide police and youths in improving their relationship as follows:

The relationship between police and urban youth is a positive partnership including police, youth, parents, schools, community and business leadership, clergy and the media aimed at both preventing and resolving problems of crime and disorder based on cooperation, collaboration, and mutual respect.

II. POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE IDEAL RELATIONSHIP

Attaining an ideal relationship can only occur if community leaders, youth leaders, and police executives work together.

Police executives in such communities as New Haven, Connecticut; Seattle, Washington; Ft. Myers, Florida; and Somerville, Massachusetts have articulated several actions departments can take to reduce the schism between police and urban youth.

Among the common actions Departments have taken include:

Policy/Procedure

Policy is a guide to the thinking and actions of those responsible for making decisions. Assess departmental policies with the goal of improving police/urban youth relations. Procedures are instructions on how officers are supposed to carry out departmental policies. Departmental procedures should be reviewed to assure that they support the development of an ideal relationship of police/urban youth relations.

Reviews of department policy and procedures, as well as the creation of new policies and procedures as relates to the police/urban youth relationship (e.g., allocation of officers time to be involved in non-incident related contacts) should be undertaken as cooperative actions by local youth and police leaders.

Recruitment and Selection

Although there is a wide range of opinions on what type of person is best suited for being a police officer, there are several areas believed to be important as they relate to violence between the police and the community. These areas should be incorporated into overall consideration of the type of individuals recruited and selected to be police officers that can reasonably be expected to develop positive relationships with youth.

- ! Recruit minority employees and persons from the neighborhood served to reflect the communities being policed.

- ! Recruit candidates with college training to ensure a more professional police force.
- ! Take steps to ensure that candidates are psychologically suited to handle the requirements of the job.
- ! Monitor recruiting practices for effectiveness in obtaining desired candidates.
- ! Review selection procedures for criteria not related to policing.

Training

Training can have a significant impact on all aspects of police service delivery and is of critical importance in addressing police/urban youth relations. New approaches in training and empowerment to implement the training are required. In-service and academy training should consider:

- ! Cultural awareness courses which demonstrate how an officer can recognize and deal effectively with different cultural groups and their points of view concerning police, authority, communications, etc.
- ! Communications skills courses in which officers are given alternatives to traditional authoritarian communication patterns.
- ! Conflict resolution and negotiation skills in which officers are trained to use alternative dispute resolution without the use of arrest or force.
- ! Contact skills (people skills) in which officers are trained in developing community relationships and partnerships.
- ! Training programs in which new recruits work in a community center or with a youth advocacy program for a specified period.

Assignments

Examine the duties of patrol officers and, where necessary, make changes to include time and assignments for each officer to be involved in normal everyday contact with youth. It is through such contact that urban youth gain respect for and confidence in the Department.

Program Models

Several models of proactive contact to improve police/urban youth relations exist. One thing each model, policy, or program has in common is that the parties involved (police, youth, community) agree the issue of police/urban youth relations is important enough to address. Key to the success of any of the models listed below, and models designed by local communities, is this mutual involvement of each party in a solution.

Police Department Programs:

Safe Haven - these are programs in which police establish a permanent or visual stationary presence (in a community center, a recreational facility, or other sites) at which a myriad of services might be provided. These services might include: counseling, education, or recreational activities.

The Columbia, South Carolina, Police Department, for example, operates substations at several city housing projects. Officers participate in youth athletic activities, make school visits, serve as mentors, and cosponsor social activities such as camping trips, community talent shows, dances, movie matinees, and puppet shows.

Partnership - The New Haven, Connecticut, Police Department has established a Board of Young Adult Police Commissioners composed of 26 youth members elected by their peers and appointed by the Mayor. The Board has an office in police headquarters and meets regularly with the Chief to address issues of concern to youth. Hartford, Connecticut, Police Department has a similar Youth Commission.

Employment - Several cities including Somerville, Massachusetts, Ft. Myers, Florida (Youth Enrichment Corps), and Bridgeport, Connecticut (Summer for Safety), run summer programs in which the police departments employ city youths to work along with police in recreational, educational, and safety programs.

Problem Solving - The youth and police of the city of Seattle, Washington, produced RESPECT, a handbook distributed to police and youth of Seattle, focusing on the police and youth approaches to two problem situations - hanging out/loitering and traffic stops.

Education - The Ft. Myers, Florida, Police Department runs Law Related Education programs to reduce delinquency and improve the student's role as a law abiding citizen for youth at risk of dropping out or being suspended from school. The Jacksonville, Florida, Sheriff's Department initiated its Youth Intervention Program whereby officers meet informally after school with youth from 12-18 to talk, listen, and serve as mentors. Other police departments have created an Adopt-a-Student program which targets youth at risk and provides a police officer for each identified youth as a mentor.

GREAT - Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) is a program which was initiated in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1991 and adopted by the Boston Police Department and other departments featuring an 8-week course taught by Boston Police officers to reinforce conflict resolution, team-work, and leadership skills in middle school youth (12 - 15 years old). The Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms is a co-sponsor.

Community Programs

Boston Community Centers--The Streetworkers Program, recently ranked as one of the top three violence prevention programs in the nation, aims to rejuvenate community involvement by working with the "worst of the worst" gang members. As part of their program they are assisting Boston Police Department's youth service officers in building common trust between the officers and youth of the inner city; training Boston police, as part of the community policing program, in understanding youth issues, how to communicate with gang members, and how to utilize the streetworkers in their work with youth; and working as a youth advocacy program with the courts and the Department of Youth Services.

ROCA (Reaching Out to Chelsea Adolescents) is a nontraditional youth center that encourages young people to discover themselves and to lead productive lives rather than just providing a place for recreation. Active in building better relations with police in Chelsea and Revere, Massachusetts, ROCA initiated such programs as Street Summits in which police and youth communicate and problem-solve through direct dialogue.

Our Positive Posse, established in Brockton, Massachusetts, is a teen empowerment program, consisting of seven youth organizers from three city family housing developments, employed to plan events and workshops to reduce drug related violence among youth. Our Positive Posse works closely with the Brockton Police Department as a bridge to youth, especially in the family housing developments.

STARS (Success Through Academic and Recreational Support) Program. The City of Fort Myers, Florida, the School District of Lee County, the Fort Myers Police Department and private corporate and non-profit agencies have joined in providing resources and opportunities for at-risk youth from 8-14. Police officers refer youth who meet the criteria for the program. The Police Department has established a direct link with the S.T.A.R.S. Program tracking the delinquent youth.

III WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN DO TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLICE AND URBAN YOUTH

Identify Youth Leaders

Identify youth leaders. CRS defines a leader as a person other people in the community listen to for advice, guidance and or information. Leaders among the urban youth can be identified and recruited to participate in activities to improve the relationship between urban youth and a police department.

Establish a Task Force on Police/Urban Youth Relations

Organize a task force on improving police/urban youth relations. The task force should include police leaders,

youth leaders, youth agency workers, representatives from local colleges or universities who are involved in youth related curriculum, representatives of local minority organizations, etc. The purpose of the task force should be to develop and implement local programs and policies that will improve the relationship between police and urban youth.

Symposium

To assure that the topic is fully covered and that a maximum number of leaders are involved the task force can sponsor a symposium on police/urban youth relations. Invitees to this symposium can be given the opportunity to present papers and describe programs that support improvements to the relationship between police and youth. The results of the symposium can help provide a work plan or guide for the municipality.

Publicize Findings

The task force needs to develop means of communicating their findings to every community. Media coverage, speeches, participation with the police department's community relations staff, and other public appearances by members of the task force can help to spread the word on how to improve or define the relationship between the police and urban youth.

Market the Program

Members of the task force and others need to sell the idea of addressing the relationship between police and urban youth. Often this selling starts with the police department, and city leaders. Community and youth leaders need to be prepared to convince people within the law enforcement system, and the community at large that their efforts are worthwhile and will contribute to a more peaceful community.

Conclusion

Positive police relations with urban youth is a critical element in any city's efforts to keep racial tensions to a minimum. Given the volatile nature of race relations in America, and the mostly minority makeup of some urban communities, this element can be crucial in preventing violence, the loss of property or even the loss of life. This guideline presents a pragmatic means of improving the ongoing relationship between police and urban youth utilizing the involvement of local youth and police, and others. This process can be instituted by local leadership, using existing resources. The ultimate solution to the issues facing cities today lies with the people living in those cities.

THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE

The Community Relations Service (CRS), an Agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, has been charged by the Congress to be the principal Federal agency to address racial and ethnic conflict in the United States. For more than 30 years CRS has been the Federal Government's first line of defense against racial unrest. CRS focuses on the prevention and the resolution of interracial tensions, conflicts or violence by assisting local jurisdictions and community leaders in responding to riots, demonstrations, civil disorders, and widespread frustrations over issues involving discriminatory practices. CRS also assists local law enforcement to improve their relations and activities with local minority communities.

This guide was prepared to assist communities, youth, police and others to address and improve their police and youth relationships.

CRS Assistance

The Community Relations Service offers its assistance to municipalities which wish to address this and other issues involving disputes, disagreements and difficulties related to discriminatory practices based on race, color, or national origin.