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COPS WHO CARE
A CRIME REDUCTION PROGRAM

Final Report

Submitted to

**US Department of Justice
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Submitted by

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**NATIONAL BLACK POLICE ASSOCIATION
COPS WHO CARE PROGRAM
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Overview

COPS WHO CARE was developed as a pilot program by the National Black Police Association (NBPA). The overall goal of this project was to pilot test a program strategy that would address the growing needs of a vulnerable population--young adolescent males who have been exposed to the justice system. NBPA's long-term commitment in the area of youth development prompted this effort to test a model approach that might be replicated through the Association's affiliates.

The original intent of the program was to target ten adjudicated youth referred by the District of Columbia Superior Court. The project's overarching goal was to reduce and prevent delinquency, crime and violence among first time offenders in the District of Columbia. Attempting to address several risk factors, NBPA designed a model that incorporated comprehensive group counseling, job preparedness training, cultural enrichment and mentoring activities.

Challenges

During the course of the project period several challenges necessitated adjustments in the project's implementation plan. The most persistent challenge was a high no-show rate among the target participants. Despite a formal linkage with the DC Superior Court and designated representatives from the Office of Probation, attendance was the greatest challenge to the program. It was quickly determined that unless program participation was mandated by a judge as part of the youth's court/sentence disposition, then the program would have limited control over attendance.

Although the project recruited and oriented 12 youth referred by the Court, only two came the program on a consistent basis. Active parental involvement was evident in both instances. After making several adjustments to the recruitment process and conducting multiple meetings with representatives in the Office of Probation, the project director sought alternative sources of participants.

Referrals from two group homes resulted in 15 additional youth being introduced to the program. The population was somewhat diverse in terms of their academic pursuits. One was college-bound in the Fall, others were still matriculating through high school. Most shared a common thread, prior to the group home experience they lived in single female-headed households. Many had faced challenges academically and some appeared to be easily influenced by their peers.

Most of the youth participants had prior negative experiences with law enforcement officers and exhibited difficulties in bonding with some of the project staff initially. The project director engaged youth in very candid dialogues about their experiences. These discussions facilitated sharing of experiences among group members and helped to sensitize staff to some of their issues. Other project staff provided supportive insight which also helped to move toward trust building activities. Following these discussions, the project director introduced the youth to the NBPA's *What To Do When Stopped By The Police*. The video and training materials were very effective in helping to allay their apprehensions.

Program Highlights

Despite some of the obvious risk factors, most of these youth demonstrated a need for caring, nurturing adults to provide guidance and support. Some of the positive observations included: expressed interest in learning more about selected African-American leaders and reading certain literary works; a real desire to master various levels of computer operations; an expressed desire for self development; and the ability to articulate some goal setting activities.

The NBPA was pleased to have been able to pilot test this model. The project provided us with a better understanding of what refinements and adjustments need to be undertaken in order to improve the implementation process for possible replication in other jurisdictions. The following *Lessons Learned* summarize some of the modifications we would make in future *COPS WHO CARE* programming.

Lessons Learned

- When working with adjudicated youth, mandatory participation as a part of sentencing or court disposition may serve as an incentive for active and consistent participation in program activities.
- Recruitment activities may need to be planned as an on-going process to ensure that an adequate participant pool is always available.
- The program should incorporate a parental involvement component. This will help parents better understand strategies used to reduce risks for delinquency and the program gains the support of parents to encourage youth participation.
- Group home settings may provide an alternative recruitment site. These settings typically have several programmatic needs for their residents. In this setting there is access to a captive audience, selected training sessions and activities can be conducted on-site or can be arranged off-site as a group activity.
- Including multiple mentors with diverse backgrounds may have several advantages. Youth get exposed to various professionals, no one mentor gets over extended, and each mentor may play a different and unique role with the youth.
- The group counseling activities and self enrichment workshops should be increased and offered on a weekly basis (minimally) rather than twice a month.
- When NBPA conducts future *COPS WHO CARE* programming with adjudicated youth, the Association's "*What To Do When Stopped By The Police*" will be incorporated into the orientation activities.
- Since the completion of this project, NBPA has identified a potential collaborator who has the capability to conduct the computer literacy training activities and

accommodate a larger number of trainees with varying competency levels with greater ease.

- The implementation schedule will need to accommodate school vacation schedules (i.e., winter, spring, and summer). Sometimes youth participate in youth employment opportunities, which also affects attendance.

In summary, the National Black Police Association extends its appreciation to the Department of Justice for underwriting this pilot project. The NBPA has responded to a number of affiliate inquiries about the project and expressions of interest in replicating the program in their jurisdictions. The NBPA envisions as a next step conducting a second pilot which again includes the involvement of the National Consortium for African American Children as a subcontractor to help NBPA in providing technical assistance to affiliates and other law enforcement groups interested in implementing *COPS WHO CARE* in their jurisdiction.