



SANTA CRUZ POLICE DEPARTMENT
155 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

MEDIA RELEASE



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TOPIC: Youth Programs Help SCPD's Community Policing Efforts Reach Kids

INFORMATION:

Youth Programs Help Santa Cruz Police Department's Community Policing Efforts Reach Kids

The Santa Cruz Police Department today releases the fourth in a series of articles about Santa Cruz Police Department's longstanding commitment to Community-Oriented Policing. Read the other articles at www.santacruzpolice.blogspot.com

Building trust between youth and police officers can have a preventative effect on juvenile crime and victimization, while improving quality of life in neighborhoods. Creating these relationships with youth has been a focus of Santa Cruz Police Department's (SCPD) Community-Oriented Policing for years.

More than six years ago, SCPD launched the Personally Responsible Individual Development in Ethics (PRIDE) program in conjunction with Santa Cruz City Schools. The multi-faceted approach to early gang prevention engages with middle school-age kids, usually 11-15 years old, to educate, mentor and guide them in how to make healthy choices.

"The PRIDE Program gives us the opportunity to build lasting relationships with students, which can positively change the way they interact with law enforcement for a lifetime," SCPD Deputy Chief Rick Martinez said.

The program is geared toward middle school teenagers — boys and girls — at risk of joining a gang. The 2016 session began in November with two cohorts of 21 students, one from Mission Hill Middle School, the other from Branciforte Middle School.

"I think this is an unbelievable bridge for the police department because they are forming personal bonds with these kids," PRIDE volunteer Robert Orrizzi said. "One on one, these kids are great. But they need help, they need to see another way of living."

Youth ask to be in PRIDE following a police presentation at their school. Their parents also must agree to let the student participate in the free program.

The biweekly classes are geared toward considering good and bad choices. Good choice classes introduce kids to positive activities and show them options for their future, should they stay out of gangs. Field trips to UC Santa Cruz and Google, bowling, horseback riding and a day trip to San Francisco are among the highlights for kids.

Bad choice classes depict a different, darker future. Kids tour San Quentin State Prison, write their own obituaries, visit a cemetery, go through the jail booking process—including handcuffs and shackles—and do volunteer work at Salvation Army.

As part of PRIDE, youth in the class also are paired with a mentor, most of whom are UCSC students. The mentors help keep the kids accountable and encourage them toward pro-social activities.

“Most of these kids are lacking in attention,” said Orrizzi, who has personally mentored five youths since he started volunteering with PRIDE. “They just want someone to know them and be interested in them.”

Around the same time as PRIDE started, BASTA (Broad-Based Apprehension, Suppression, Treatment & Alternatives) expanded from Watsonville into North County. BASTA is a countywide collaborative formed for the purpose of keeping schools and the community safe by reducing and preventing youth gang violence, school truancy, suspensions, expulsions, and alcohol and drug abuse.

The BASTA Operation Team, comprised of law enforcement and school officials, shares information and works together on anti-gang strategies and programs. A second BASTA group engages in case management of at-risk youth who have been identified by school representatives, law enforcement and probation. Their aim is preventing gang involvement before it starts.

BASTA creates a network of support around the youth and works to find the teen a “pro-social” activity, such as joining a sports team or getting a job, as well as working with a mentor. The collaboration works with about 20 kids each year.

“One of the things that works is noticing the first sign – the first drawings on their Pee-Chee folder or wearing gang colors,” said Michael Paynter, student services manager at the County of Office of Education, a BASTA partner. “Connecting them at that point with a sports program can be the simple solution.”

A few years ago, BASTA added a free summer sports camp in partnership with Santa Cruz City Schools that serves about 30 kids, many of whom are also case-managed through BASTA. Participants try out a new sport every week, and practices are led by local high school coaches with help from some of their student athletes who serve as teen mentors for participants. BASTA looks at the needs of the at-risk youth on case-by-case basis. Sometimes an action as simple as paying a sports team fee or buying cleats for a youth is all the intervention needed.

“I think for the right kids that small dose can turn things in the right direction,” Paynter said.

Beyond targeted programs like PRIDE and BASTA, SCPD officers connect with youth through the summer Teen Public Safety Academy. The courses provide teenagers who are considering a career in public safety, or who are interested in learning more about public safety, the opportunity to gain an understanding of what it takes to become a police officer, a firefighter, a 911 dispatcher and other public safety jobs through direct observation and participation.

SCPD also has a dedicated school resource officer who divides time between Harbor and Santa Cruz high schools, and Branciforte and Mission Hill middle schools. The officer presence on campus deters criminal influence while also developing positive relationships and open communication with students and school staff.

“These programs are proven and successful thanks to strong partnerships and a lot of people who care deeply about young people, year in and year out,” said Deputy Chief Martinez. “Building trust between police and our youth is an investment in kids’ futures, as well as the future of our whole community.”

ABOUT SCPD

The Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD) is committed to working in partnership with the community to enhance public safety, prevent crime, enforce laws and protect the rights of all people through innovative problem-solving approaches. A progressive, professional organization, SCPD officers are dedicated to conducting themselves with the highest ethical standards and the department is accountable to the community. SCPD has 94 sworn officers and 29 civilian staff to protect and serve Santa Cruz’s 64,000 residents and millions of annual visitors. Learn more at www.santacruzpolice.com, <http://santacruzpolice.blogspot.com>, or via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest.

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Anonymous tips can also be sent to the police department through our Tip Line (831) 420-5995, or from our Website; www.santacruzpolice.com . Tipsters can also submit an anonymous tip via our smartphone app or from an SMS text. Visit our Website for instructions.