

Bike Cops for Kids

Summary

Scanning- This program originated in 2009, and was the product of two school resource officers wanting to stay connected with the students from their schools as well as other Minneapolis Public School over the summer break. As they had both worked as patrol officers prior to their school resource officer roles they realized it was rare that youth, particularly in the high crime/high poverty neighborhoods, had an opportunity to connect with police officers under positive circumstances. Essentially the exposure many youth have in these neighborhoods are when the police are called to their house, their neighbor's house, a local business etc. to some sort of crisis or 911 call.

Analysis- It was realized through direct observation, and first-hand experience that many of the kids in these high crime/ high poverty neighborhoods observations of police officers on the job are actually under negative circumstances that many times they cannot understand. I go back to the adage that "no one calls the police because they are having a good time." In many cases youth exposure to police is through them observing them having to deal with a 911 call in their house, in their neighborhood, etc. and likely involving someone that they know either as family, or as a friend.

It's our observations as inner-city police officers that youth exposure to police in an inner-city setting are likely very different from that of a suburban/rural setting. It's unlikely we could accurately define why that is but it is a circumstance that we believe is static across many other cities in the US.

Response- Our response was forward thinking, and directly addresses the issues we had observed. We started our program out in 2009 by getting two cops out on bikes connecting with kids during the summer months. We sought out the kids in the tougher neighborhoods of Minneapolis (North Minneapolis and Phillips Neighborhood), and sought out kids in their yards, in the parks, or simply those

playing out in the street. The goal was simple: Allow us as police officers to connect with kids under positive circumstances. This spans a range of activities from us getting them a bike or helmet, to us getting off of our bikes and playing football/basketball with them.

Assessment- We can't be sure that we are changing the trajectory of the young ones we come into contact with but we are letting them know that the police are there for them, and that they don't need to be afraid of us. We've given out hundreds of bicycles, thousands of helmets, thousands of water bottles, etc. but more importantly we believe we are building public trust in their police department.

Description

Scanning

In 2009 two school resource officers were trying to figure out a way to stay connected the kids with their schools as well as other schools within the district. In addition to wanting to stay connected with the students they had identified an opening for the Minneapolis Police Department to essentially gain more trust from the community, and in specificity the youth within the community.

In having experience as both patrol officers and school resource officers they had directly observed that patrol officers in high crime/high poverty (North Minneapolis/Phillips Neighborhood) are rarely afforded the window of opportunity to meet youth under positive circumstances. It's not a criticism of the police officers working these neighborhoods but simply a reflection of the fact that these police officers days, evenings, and nights are consumed with going from one 911 call to another.

As school resource officers we are afforded the time, space, and opportunity to connect positively with the kids within our school. The positives that come out of these connections and relationships are something that we hoped to carry over into the communities themselves.

Analysis

In identifying that many youth in these high crime/high poverty do not have the opportunity to meeting police officers under positive circumstances it was a major concern to us. As school resource officers we were able to establish trusted relationships with the staff and students within our schools. It allowed us to do our job more efficiently when we had the trust/support of the staff and students.

It is easy to understand in basic terms why many kids have a negative perception of the police in inner-city communities. It isn't because the community or the officers are sub-par but the circumstances under which the officer meets the youth. As previously stated "No one calls the police because they are having a good time." A child's exposure to an officer is usually on a 911 call which usually come under negative circumstance that a young person's mind isn't able to understand. These calls can range from a police officer responding to their house on a domestic assault call that results in the arrest of a loved one to a police officer chasing a drug dealer/gun possessor in their neighborhood. These cases can be magnified in which officers end up using required use of force. Obviously all of these calls are "negative" but they are necessary work police officers have to do.

Response

Our program was forward thinking and directly addresses our observations. We started our program out in 2009 by getting two cops out on bikes connecting with kids during the summer months. We sought out the kids in the tougher neighborhoods of Minneapolis (North Minneapolis and Phillips Neighborhood), and sought out kids in their yards, in the parks, or simply those playing out in the street. We also are specific to wanting to connect with kids that don't have a lot of parental involvement. We've found there are two groups of kids we encounter in our inner-city neighborhoods: Those with parents/guardians that sign them up for summer activities, and those that don't have a lot of parental involvement through summer, and make their own plans.

Our goal is simple: To allow us as police officers to connect with youth under positive circumstances. We want the kids in these tougher neighborhoods to know that the police are there for them, and that they do not need to be afraid of them. This is achieved through a range of opportunities that come to include having the ability to give them a free bike helmet, a free water bottle, bike lights, bike locks, and in some cases a free bike or us simply getting off of our bikes to play a sport with them.

Our front office to include our boss, Chief Janee Harteau, has supported our program since its inception, and has allowed us to do this as our “duty assignment” during our summer months. In 2015 we were transferred to our department’s community engagement team, and allowed to do this assignment on a full-time basis.

Although our department pays our salaries we were able to harness the generosity of philanthropists in Minneapolis to help us fund the other elements of our program. We use \$30,000+ each year to buy helmets, bikes, water bottles, and bike parts. Are major funders are Minneapolis Children’s Hospital, Ciresi-Conlin Law Firm, and Phillips Family Foundation. These funds go directly to Ascension Place which is a 501 (c) 3 that acts as our fiscal agent. They do this free of charge.

We use these helmets, water bottles, and in some cases bikes to connect with kids. A typical day is us hooking our Burley (bike trailer for normally transporting kids) onto the back of one of our bikes, and hitting the streets of North Minneapolis. We find kids on the street, in their yards, or in the parks and offer them helmets, water bottle, etc. It gives us an opportunity to have dialogue with them. This past year, 2015, we were able to put \$5000 at each of the three Target stores in Minneapolis. At any given time we can bring a kid we connect with well to one of these stores to pick out a brand new bike. We’ve extended this opportunity to all of the other police officers (all ranks) within our department as well. It is used regularly, and in many cases it has brought some level of closure to an incident a child has had to endure. In one case a young person’s home was burglarized, and part of the loss was their

bicycle. The officer taking the report remembered that we'd been by their roll call talking about this opportunity, and this officer was able to get a brand new bike for this child.

Over the winter of 2015-16 we had decided we wanted to expand upon the opportunities of our program. We worked with our funders, and came up with the idea of a Bike Cops for Kids truck. The idea was to create a food truck style vehicle that we could use to do basic bike repairs, set up spontaneous lemonade/ice cream stands, etc. We met with our funders, and they graciously agreed to fund the \$50,000 project. We finished the truck build about a month ago. We ended up with food truck style vehicle that has really cool graphics, a mounted basketball hoop for an alley basketball game, a fridge/freezer (ice cream/lemonade), and tools/workbench that will allow us to basic bike repairs for kids.

Our school district's last days of school come this following week. We expect to be out in North Minneapolis, and other high crime areas with our truck connecting with kids. We plan to still be out on the bikes as well but this truck with greatly expanding the opportunities we can offer.

One thing that is unique to our program is that we've identified our target audience, and we aren't the only ones trying to help these same kids. The difference between our program, and others, is that we don't miss the mark. I'm sure there are many reasons for this but some significant reasons are that a true 100% of our funders donations go into our project, we are not data driven (imperial data to indicate success/failure), but what we do is utilize many ways (email, social media, media) to let others know what we are doing. It is amazing the power of a video/photo of police officers interacting with kids. A couple good ones we've had are a photo of one officer helping a young man learn how to ride his new bike for the first time. It is a powerful photo. Another is a video of two officers partaking in a game of football with some 3rd graders that were playing a pick-up game while waiting for the school bus. These images all carry a clear message.

Assessment

To date we have given away hundreds bikes, thousands of helmets, thousands of water bottles, and made thousands upon thousands of positive connections with kids. Admittedly we do not have empirical data to support that what we have done with our program has made a difference in our communities. We cannot say we've changed the trajectory of child's life. We will say that we have made thousands of positive connections with kids, community members, businesses within the communities we work, and other community partners. It is very difficult to measure the impact of the interactions we've had over the years, and particularly so in a world driven by data.

We can say that we are fixture in the neighborhoods we work in, and we believe this has helped improve public trust in our police department. We've involved other officers in our program, and have encouraged patrol officers to come out and bike with us on "special duty" time. We feel our positive efforts to improve relationships within the community have become contagious. A mechanism we've used to spread our positive efforts and our day-to-day interactions is social media. We started using social media (Facebook) early on in the program, and well before it being what it is today. Our logic was that wanted to share with others (even globally) the efforts being undertaken to build community trust in the police. It is definitely the softer side of policing, and we are proud to be pioneers in the effort.

It's important to realize that this program started well before incidents in Ferguson, Baltimore, Staten Island, and Cleveland brought increased scrutiny of police actions. We recognized years ago the need to improve public confidence in our police department.

Other agencies have reached out to us from across the country to seek our support into trying to replicate a similar program within their police department.

Agency and Key Project Team Members

Minneapolis Police Department

Officer Michael Kirchen

Officer David O'Connor

Sergeant Mark Klukow

Project Contact Person

Officer David O'Connor

Community Engagement Team

Bike Cops for Kids

4119 Dupont Avenue North

Minneapolis, MN 55412

612-231-2399

Appendices:

Bike Cops for Kids Truck Photos





Bike Cops for Kids: Photos of us in action



