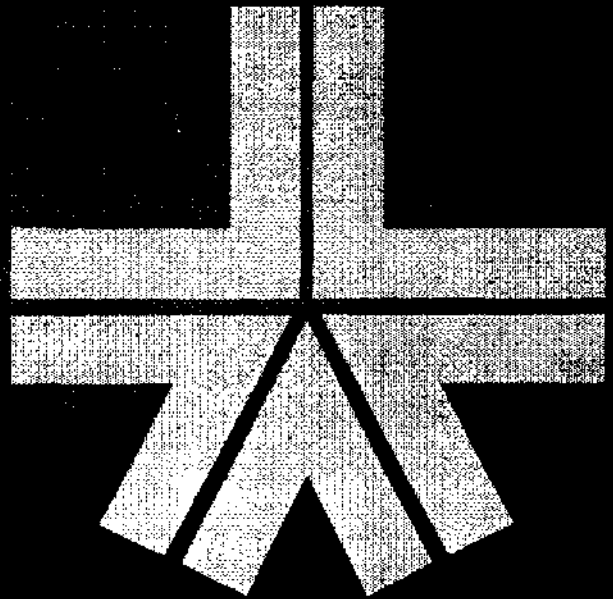


Problem Solvers



A.C.E.S. Football, D.24

Montreal Urban Community Police Service

"A.C.E.S. FOOTBALL, D.24"

A group of volunteer police officers concentrated their efforts to involve the youth from Little Burgandy and Pointe St. Charles in the ACES Football program and has as objective to improve and facilitate police relations with the community. Football, because of its nature was chosen as the tool to achieve our goal and 10 000\$ was raised.

The youth are required to participate in all games and must demonstrate effort in school and attend after school study programs. They are also required to show impeccable a social behavior.

The parents and police officers also built a float for the St. Patrick's parade and won a prize for their efforts. Since the start of the project ACES Football, crime has dropped by 30% and one parent went as far as to turn himself in for a warrent and ask his son's coaches to take care of his family while he was in jail.

In 1995, we have added one more football team and a cheerleading program to our agenda.



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ACES FOOTBALL

THE SITUATION

Police District 24 of the Municipal Urban Community Police Service (MUCPS) covers two geographical areas, Pointe St. Charles and Little Burgundy. Once a prosperous industrial area supporting a large working class population, it is now the second largest economically deprived area in Canada. Technological progress and market changes have made obsolete the tradesmen and skilled manual laborers once employed by the hundreds in these factories. Welfare beneficiaries now make up over half the population.. Well over 25% of the area residents are illiterate and single parenting make up almost 95% of the local family units.

Pointe St. Charles, known locally as "La Pointe", is bordered to the north by the Lachine Canal where abandoned factories and warehouses still stand. At its southern limits are found the railway tracks which were once the main arteries feeding the obsolete industries. There are many families that have been established in the area for generations. There are also several rooming houses that provide cheap shelter for a transient population of former psychiatric patients, drug and/or alcohol users, as well as individuals on probation or parole.

Little Burgundy is an area predominated by block after block of city housing. The occupants of these buildings are primarily single parent of immigrant families. For the most part, the buildings are rundown and dirty. The drug trade is very heavy in this area, several crack houses have been shut down in the last few years. The residents feel unsafe in their neighborhoods. Little Burgundy is a predominantly black area and relations between the police and this community have been tense. Police interventions are often assumed to be racially motivated.

The primary problem in these poverty stricken areas was of course crime, the offenders were mostly minors. Their behavior was a problem for their parents (who wished for a better life for them) as well as for the victims of their crimes and the police, who had no way to curb the trend. Their kids were headed in the wrong direction, and no one seemed able to stop them. Police response to the situation was traditional, reaction once the crime had been committed. Since the crimes were usually minor, all that was done was to take a report and no indepth investigation followed. The result was that although each individual incident was petty, the cumulative numbers were alarming. Furthermore, some of these minors were passing to more serious offenses.

A closer examination of the problem easily exposed its root cause poverty. With little education, no discipline, no hope, no future, no strong positive influences in their lives and with basically nothing to do, these kids didn't stand much of a chance. They just gravitated towards petty crime (theft, public mischief) and later progressed towards the more serious offenses (drug dealing, car theft). They came from broken homes and they were repeating the same patterns as their parents: little education, substance abuse, unemployment, unplanned pregnancies, etc. There were some organizations dealing with the extreme and urgent cases, but there were no social programs designed to break the vicious circle. What was needed was a way to give these kids a chance at something better and to involve their parents in the process.

THE IDEA

During a discussion of the situation in the district and what the personnel of district 24 could contribute towards a long term solution, Detective sergeant George Widz and Officers Ron Durand and Philip Charbonneau of the Youth Squad and ACES program came up with an idea - FOOTBALL. Detective sergeant Widz had been involved for 12 years in amateur football, Phil Charbonneau was a former player and offered to coach and help recruit others, and Ron Durand (a 29 year veteran who was raised in the area) volunteered his time to solicit sponsors.

The three officers formed an administrative committee and their idea began to take shape. Officers Rosemary Volpe a former secretary, was recruited for the same position. A project outline was developed and sent to H.Q. for approval by the Service, letters sent to associations for sponsors and flyers distributed to the schools to recruit players. The committee was rounded out in its first year by the addition of Sergeant Jean Lambert of the Youth Squad as treasurer, Officers Simon Allard, Fred Tomie and Pat St-Germain as coaches to help the initial coaching staff, and Traffic Officer Jacques Guilbault as equipment manager.

The team was named the "ACES" after the MUCPS ACES program. ACES is a french acronym for "Action concertée en élaboration de solutions". Literally translated it is "concerted action in the elaboration of solutions". Basically it is a problem solving unit that works within the community. The 4 or 5 officers attached to the unit target crime, participate in community events and form a link between the Service and the local community. They have become familiar faces to the residents.

The idea behind ACES football was quite simple: to teach children responsibility, respect for themselves and others, as well as self discipline within the structure of team sports.

The sport of football was decided upon for two basic reasons: it had been the popular sport in the past for the area and its appeal could rally kids from all the racial, ethnic and language groups that reside there. Practices were held 4 days a week from 4 to 6 p.m. (after school hours) when in most cases these kids had simply hung around in the street. The target group in the first year was the 7 to 9 year olds for an atom team.

Community support was excellent from the start. Parents were present at every game and most practices. They lent enthusiastic support in organizing awards luncheons as well as ordering team jackets and caps sporting the ACES logo. These parents also formed their own committee and have taken on some of the administration for the organization. This developing self-sufficiency was from the start an important aspect for the creators of the project. The community was taking itself in hand, finding solutions to their problems.

A fund raising drive raised 10,000\$, much of it coming from the Irish community in "La Pointe". This enabled the team to purchase badly needed new uniforms. As well, the Director of the MUCPS lent his support to the project, although the team remained a community based initiative and received no direct financial support from the Service.

THE RESULT

The 7 to 9 year olds, who had never played football before, won half of their games. An awards ceremony was held at the end of the season. In the off season, a study program was set up for the players. Once a week, after school, they came to do their homework. In this way, contact was maintained during the winter months.

ACES football also undertook two large projects in March and April of 1995. In the first project, members and parents worked together to build a float for the St. Patrick's day parade in Montreal. The parade is the second largest of its kind in North America, and the float was awarded "Best New Entry". The second project was a benefit concert held in April to raise funds for the new season. The performance was held at Notre-Dame College (a private high-school) where one of the player's parents teaches music. It was a most enjoyable evening and the Chief of police gave a helping hand to the festivities by performing a "Kitchen Concerto".

Practices have recently resumed for the 1995 football season. Along with last year's atom team, a Mosquito team for 10-11 year olds has been added, as well as a cheerleading squad. The cheeleaders will not only follow the teams, but will also compete within their own association. The organization continues to benefit from excellent financial support from the community.

This has enabled them to equip both the new Mosquito team and the cheerleaders with new uniforms. The football team is Station 24 ACES program's long term contribution to the children of little Burgundy and Point St.Charles. Not only has a link been forged between the kids and the police, but this has extended to the parents. As an added bonus to both community and police, crime statistics are down.

The next long term goal of the ACES project is to create even more opportunities for the children via education. We are going into partnership with private schools in the Montreal area, such as Notre-Da me College, to be able to offer to their kids a better education, to catch on success and consequently a better life.