Youth and Law Enforcement Mentoring Guide
2023
SECTION 1:

BACKGROUND ON YOUTH & POLICE RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS

Youth & Police Officer Interactions
Youth interactions with police are common in the United States. In 2018, one in every seven youth in the United States ages 16 to 17 had contact with a police officer.¹ Police interactions with youth take place not only in community settings but also in schools as our country has seen a dramatic increase in the number of schools that have police officers on site. In 1975, only 1 percent of schools reported having police officers on site, but by 2018, approximately 58 percent of schools had at least one sworn law enforcement official present during the school week.² The prevalence of youth and police interactions in and of itself is not problematic; however, there are substantial racial disparities in outcomes of youth interactions with police. When we look at the overall justice and policing system, we see that Black youth are more than four times more likely to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities as their white peers.³ Furthermore, a 2021 study shows that exposure to police, even when not related to being detained or an arrest, can be detrimental to Black youth, particularly males.⁴ These inequitable outcomes exemplify the ways in which systemic racism continues to be perpetuated in our country and demonstrate the need for implementing innovative programs and approaches related to youth and policing.

Youth & Police Officers: The Need for Trust & Relationship Building
This racial disparity within the juvenile justice system, as well as recent high-profile cases in which police have used unnecessary force against youth of color, have led to deepening mistrust between youth and police. Youth’s images and assumptions about police are tainted by what they see in the news and the more traditional roles of “enforcers” that youth assume police take on. As one officer shared, “[When youth see an officer] kids think they are there to lock them up, that something bad is going to happen.” Not only do youth have negative assumptions about the police, some police officers may have negative assumptions about certain youth. “In the past when they encountered people, a lot of officers made assumptions that all young people are bad because they hang out on the street or they have dreads or their pants are low...” shared an officer. The mistrust and lack of relationship between officers and youth, and its detrimental impact, is well documented:

“Over the years, a number of studies have documented the strained relationship between law enforcement and youth, specifically youth who are (1) from urban environments, (2) from lower socio-economic areas, (3) male, and (4) a minority. These studies demonstrate that these youth may hold an implicit bias against police; moreover, they may demonstrate their perceptions of injustice and societal marginalization by acting disrespectful toward police. Similarly, studies found that police officers may hold unconscious biases against minority youth and make assumptions about young people based on their race, age, dress, and appearance.”⁵

Increasing trust and building relationships between youth and police has a positive impact on both officers and youth as well as on overall community safety. There is evidence that policing is more
“A key component of successful policing is building collaborative, trusting relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve, particularly immigrant and minority communities. Developing these relationships allows law enforcement to more successfully address the challenges of crime control and terrorism prevention. The knowledge and insight that come from trust-based relationships between law enforcement and the community are critical because they allow law enforcement to distinguish between innocent cultural behaviors and behaviors indicative of criminal activity.”

Building relationships and trust between youth and police must be an intentional, carefully thought out process that equips both groups to interrogate their implicit biases, be vulnerable, and humanize one another. In any community or relationship, trust building is a process that must take place over time. Trust is built through shared experiences, developing empathy, honesty/transparency, and consistency. Youth police mentoring programs are an ideal way to increase the trust between police and youth and work toward dismantling the inequity that persists in our juvenile justice system.

SECTION 2:
OVERVIEW OF YOUTH & POLICE MENTORING PROGRAMS

What are youth/police mentoring programs?

According to the National Mentoring Resource Center, “mentoring takes place between young persons (i.e., mentees) and older or more experienced persons (i.e., mentors) who are acting in a non-professional helping capacity to provide support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee’s development.” Youth/police mentoring programs are unique in that they are aimed specifically at having police officers, rather than another type of adult, serve as mentors. The content of youth/police mentoring programs may vary from session to session with different structures and cadences of meeting; however, a key commonality across youth/police officer mentoring programs is that they provide youth and police officers an opportunity to interact in a nonenforcement, nonpunitive context. As stated in the Youth Police Relations guide published by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, “Regardless of the strategies used, it is essential to engage the youth through positive, non–law enforcement activities that enable them to see law enforcement in a nonaggressive, humanistic light.”

A list of already established youth/police mentoring programs is available in Appendix A.

How do youth/police mentoring programs fit into the larger context of policing strategies?

Youth/police mentoring programs are a component of a larger overarching policing strategy called community policing. Community policing is focused

1 https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cbppl8st.pdf
3 https://www.sentencingproject.org/fact-sheet/black-disparities-in-youth-incarceration/
4 https://today.uic.edu/study-shows-contact-with-police-may-be-detrimental-to-health-well-being-of-black-youth/
on police officers developing relationships with community members who reside in the communities the officers serve. This model of policing allows for a proactive, community-driven approach to address and solve public safety challenges. Youth/police mentoring programs can be an important linchpin in community policing as these programs allow officers to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with youth as well as their parents.

The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) is one example of a community policing strategy. According to the CAPS website, CAPS brings police, the community, and other city agencies together to identify and solve neighborhood crime problems. This problem-solving is supported by a variety of strategies including neighborhood-based beat officers, regular beat community meetings involving police and residents, extensive training for both police and community, more efficient use of city services that impact crime, and new technology to help police and residents target crime hot spots.⁹

Why are youth/police mentoring programs needed?

Both youth and police officers benefit from youth/police mentoring programs with perhaps the most important benefit being the potential for these programs to transform youth/police relationships in our country. Youth/police mentoring programs allow police to get to know youth on an individual, personal level thus mitigating potential implicit biases they may have.

Youth/police mentoring programs are a key way to build trust between police and youth, reimagining what youth policing looks like and creating a world where policing has less negative outcomes for youth, particularly youth of color.

Benefits for Youth

Youth/police mentoring programs offer positive and safe experiences for youth; the opportunity for youth to build trusting, supportive relationships with adults; and allow for youth to see police as “regular people” who have their best interest in mind. There is some evidence that these programs may help prevent youth from engaging in criminal activity or socially unacceptable behavior.¹⁰ Additionally, participating in youth/police mentoring programs may positively impact the youth's perceptions of police.¹¹ As one officer who engaged with youth in mentoring programs stated, “[Youth in the program] see me as a regular person just like their person, uncle, cousin.” Given the tumultuous history of youth/police relations in this country, the fact that youth/police mentoring programs may offer youth an opportunity to see police as “regular people” rather than someone negative, punitive, or an enforcer, is a huge first step in transforming how youth understand the role of police in their lives and communities.

As a young person from the West Side of Chicago shared about the Chicago Police Department, District 11th CAPs mentoring program they participated in:

“Over the years I got closer to officers who I felt wanted to help and change my community through mentoring us. They wanted to know who we are and how they can help mend relationships between police officers and my peers. We were close with the officers. They showed us love and gave us many opportunities to enjoy ourselves and show us many new things. Like attending sports games, concerts, plays, things like that.”
Benefits for Police Officers

In addition to the ways in which youth/police mentoring programs benefit youth, they also provide benefits to the officers who participate in the programs, increasing professional satisfaction for police officers, providing them with consistent, positive experiences in their day-to-day work.

“A police officer’s typical day consists of meeting people at their worst, whether taking victim reports or enforcing the law. Individuals who mentor report positive experiences and a sense of satisfaction. Many officers indicate that mentoring comprises the best part of their week. Most mentors look forward to it with anticipation.”

In addition to the positive experience of mentoring, engaging in mentoring programs provides police with an opportunity to change their mindset and perceptions of youth. Mentoring programs not only change an individual police officer’s professional experience, they also may increase the pipeline of youth interest in becoming police officers. When asked about the benefits of youth/police mentoring programs, an officer stated, “One of the main reasons it’s important is so young people can become police.”

Youth/police mentoring programs are a promising approach to increasing police legitimacy and improving youth/police relationships, both of which will, over time, hopefully aid in addressing some of the systemic racism that is a product of our country’s juvenile justice system. Added benefits for youth/police mentoring programs include increasing professional satisfaction of police officers and increasing the number of youth who pursue careers in policing.

Limitations:

While there are many potential benefits to youth/police mentoring programs, it is important to note that there has been criticism and concern about the ways in which these programs may risk bringing youth into closer contact with the juvenile justice system. Given that our country is just beginning to dismantle the systemic racism that is embedded in the juvenile justice system, and that in many communities tension and distrust between youth and police officers still exists, it is crucial that any youth/police mentoring programs are grounded in the best practices outlined in the next section. Central to these best practices are additional training and support for police prior to them engaging as mentors. It is important to note that without ensuring proper training and support, youth/police mentoring programs have the potential to harm the youth that they are aiming to help.

6 https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0734-pub.pdf
7 https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/resources/what-is-mentoring/
9 https://home.chicagopolice.org/community-policing-group/how-caps-works/what-is-caps/
11 https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/02-2016/answering_the_call_to_mentor.asp
SECTION 3:
BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUTH & POLICE MENTORING PROGRAMS

The best practices listed below are generated from reviewing information on established, successful youth/police mentoring programs. These best practices are aligned with general youth mentoring program best practices, but in some instances, they’re customized to the specific opportunities and challenges that are presented by police officers serving in a mentor capacity.

Provide training and support to participating police regarding youth development.

Police departments offer little to no youth-specific training to officers\(^\text{13, 14}\) and one 2013 study found that on average police spent only six hours total learning about youth policing during their training. As a result, many officers do not have knowledge of youth development best practices nor adolescent psychology and development. This can make it even more challenging for youth and police to have positive and proactive relationships with one another. Key topics to cover during youth-specific police officer training and support include:

- Adolescent psychology and brain development
- Impacts of trauma on brain development and adolescents
- Delivering therapeutic dosages
- Cognitive-behavioral interventions
- Active listening
- Self-awareness
- Restorative conversations
- Adultism and effective youth/adult relationships
- Cultural humility

One youth who participated in a mentoring program notes the difference in the skills and approach of officers who staffed this program versus general police officers: “They [CAPS mentoring officers] are different. Their attitude and the way they treat us is different from streetcar police officers.”

Provide context and information to participating youth and their families on the purpose of the program.

Youth may be naturally skeptical of police officers due to what they have seen on the news or assumptions they have about the role of police officers being solely related to enforcement and punishing youth who are engaging in negative behavior. Many adults, including parents, inadvertently reinforce these negative ideas about police by making comments to youth such as “watch out, that police officer is going to get you.” Given this context, it is critical that youth and parents receive information about the mentoring program. This information should highlight:

- The important role that collaborative, trusting relationships between police officers and youth can play in keeping communities safe.
- That part of a police officer’s role is to provide proactive community support (i.e., connection to resources).
- That the mentoring program is not a punitive approach and is aimed at proactive, relationship building.
- The purpose of the mentoring program:
  - To break down barriers between police and youth and increase the trust they have for one another.
  - To provide youth with positive, engaging opportunities and access to positive adult role models.
Identify activities that will be relevant and of interest to youth and their families.

Prior to launching the mentoring program, program leaders should identify the types of activities and/or events that will be of most interest to the target population for the mentoring program. Examples of activities/types of mentoring programs to establish include:

- Sports leagues/tournaments
- Music production/creation
- Games (i.e., chess, Pokémon tournaments)
- After-school programs
- Tutoring
- Holiday-themed events (i.e., Trick or Treat)
- Job preparation (i.e., résumé workshops, job fairs, etc.)
- Youth development councils

Chicago youth who have participated in youth/police mentoring programs cited the mentoring programming as a key part of what led to them participating in and enjoying the program. One young person stated, “I was in the program for two years. It was a wonderful experience. I got to meet officers who wanted to take us on trips and even mentor us. They exposed me to new things and opportunities that shaped my life in school and my community.”

Develop a schedule for the mentoring program that can be shared with participants and their families.

The program schedule should include the start and end dates of the mentoring program, the day(s) of the week and time(s) the program will meet, and any special events that will take place. Having this information shared with participants and mentors ahead of time ensures they are able to commit adequate time to the program.

Initially, focus programming on building trust and creating community agreements.

Given that youth and police officers are coming into the mentoring program with a large number of assumptions about one another; it is important to establish a safe space early on in the mentoring program. In order to do this, programs should:

- Engage participants in community building and icebreaker activities. Examples of these activities can be found here.
- Cocreate community agreements that will guide the space. Additional resources for creating community agreements can be found here and here.

Over time, adapt programming to ensure it remains relevant.

While the program will have a specific calendar and focus, at times it will be necessary to adapt the programming to ensure it remains relevant for the youth involved. Adaptations may need to take place on a one-time basis or to the overall program.

- One-time program adaptations may take place when there is a current or community event that has a large impact on the youth in the mentoring program. In these situations, it can be best to put planned programming on hold so that youth have an opportunity to process, reflect, and/or heal on what took place. One-time adaptations may also take place around certain celebrations, such as a graduation, or holidays, such as holding a Christmas party instead of standard mentoring programming.
• Overall program adaptations may need to take place if youth lose interest in the program topic and/or new youth come into the program who have different interests. Examples of overall program adaptations may include changing a sports league mentoring program to an arts program or changing a dialogue-based mentoring program to one focused on enrichment activities and trips.

• It is very important that programs create time and space for Youth Voice when deciding on and designing program topics. When revamping a program topic, programs should create opportunities to get feedback and ideas from the young people themselves, and design accordingly. Youth are the experts on their interests and passions and if they know programs will listen to and act on their ideas, they are more likely to be and stay engaged with the program as a whole.

Utilize restorative approaches.

Restorative approaches should be utilized proactively to build relationships and community within the mentoring program. Examples of this may include engaging participants in community-building circles or facilitating structured conversations about personal values versus communal values. Additionally, whenever possible, restorative approaches, rather than punitive approaches, should be utilized to address conflict or harm that youth in the program are experiencing. Restorative approaches differ from punitive approaches in that they are not focused on punishing the person who caused harm or misbehaved, but rather on understanding why the person caused harm or misbehaved and supporting them to identify how they can repair the situation and prevent a similar situation from happening again.

When youth make choices that are harmful to another person or their community, it is crucial that the police officers serving as mentors approach the situation by asking the following core restorative questions rather than taking a punitive approach:

- What happened?
- Who or what was impacted by the incident?
- What needs to happen to address or repair any harm caused by the incident?

Additional details on key questions to ask when engaging in a restorative accountability process can be found here.

When implemented with fidelity and utilizing the best practices outlined above, youth/police mentoring programs can have a profound impact on the lives of youth while also impacting the perceptions youth and communities have of police. As a youth shares,

“The officers were helpful. They were kind and were willing to learn and accept me as a teenager. They challenged me to come to school on time and they even brought me lunch to the school often, while checking in on my daily status. I like how the officer became like a mentor or I guess a coach to me. He believed in my abilities to do good in life and was teaching me how to believe in myself as well.”

14 https://www.governing.com/now/when-police-and-youth-encounter-each-other-bad-things-dont-have-to-happen
# APPENDIX A:
EXAMPLES OF YOUTH/POLICE MENTORING PROGRAMS

## Arts-Based Mentoring Programs

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<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>West Side Story Project</strong></td>
<td>The West Side Story Project (WSSP) is a collaboration among police, theater, and schools that uses the themes of West Side Story to address youth violence, youth-police relations, and cultural differences.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Little Kids Rock and PAL Guitar</strong></td>
<td>Youth learn guitar from police officer mentors.</td>
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## Sports Mentoring Programs

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<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Association of Police Athletic/Activities Leagues</strong></td>
<td>A national nonprofit organization supporting 200 Chapters nationwide that provides law-enforcement led youth mentorship through academic and recreational activities for youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Badges for Baseball</strong></td>
<td>In this national mentoring program, officers use athletics to teach youth life lessons and to facilitate positive relationship building between at risk youth and officers. A full curriculum and resources for this mentoring program are available on their website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound: Police Youth Challenge</strong></td>
<td>Youth and police officers participate collaboratively in small group challenges; these experiences are aimed at changing perceptions of and improving interactions between police and youth.</td>
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## One-to-One Mentoring Programs

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<tr>
<td><strong>Bigs in Blue</strong></td>
<td>A national one-to-one mentoring program that connects youth with police, building strong, trusting, and lasting relationships.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Organization of Black Law Enforcement (Chicago)</strong></td>
<td>The NOBLE Chicago Youth Ambassadors Mentoring Program develops youth leadership skills and engages youth in civic involvement.</td>
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Group-Based Mentoring Programs

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<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Operation Recess</strong></td>
<td>Officers engage in games and activities with youth weekly during the youth’s recess at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New York City Police Department Mentoring Programs</strong></td>
<td>A variety of group mentoring programs are offered, including cops and teens click together computer classes, citywide youth/police forums, and a 10-week health and wellness program.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Youth &amp; Police Initiative</strong></td>
<td>This program is composed of five two-and-a-half-hour sessions in which youth and police engage in discussions, games, and role plays to build their public speaking and facilitation skills, get to know each other on a personal level, and learn from each other.</td>
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This list is a sampling of programs that demonstrate a range of approaches; there are many more programs not included here that are also great resources and examples.

**APPENDIX B:**

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- Practices in Modern Policing: Police-Youth Engagement
- If Not Now, When? A Survey of Juvenile Justice Training in America’s Police Academies
- The Policing Project’s Youth Engagement Guidebook: Bringing Youth and Police Together to Better Their Community
- Guide for Improving Relationships and Public Safety through Engagement and Conversation
- The Effects of Law-Enforcement Mentoring on Youth: A Scoping Review
- Race in America: Can Cops as Coaches in Youth Sports Offer Some Healing?
- Restorative Justice for Juveniles, Literature Review
What’s a typical day in a PAL program for mentors, mentees, and staff?

“A typical day consists of a very proactive after-school program that is averaging 50 youth a day. These youth are within the grade parameters of K–12. Additionally, Dunn PAL has an immense athletic program. We are currently in AAU basketball and wrestling season. Our basketball program currently has four teams: middle school boys, middle school girls, 9–10th-grade boys and 11–12th-grade boys. Our wrestling program has 20 youth participating and 10 of these youth will be participating in the Nuway National Wrestling Tournament in Lansing, Michigan, this year in the month of April. On normal operating hours, Monday–Friday, mentors are on campus meeting with their mentees for their required hours. Dunn PAL staff remain busy at all times pertaining to the volume of youth who are on the Dunn PAL campus.”

- Dunn Police Athletic & Activities League Inc., Dunn, North Carolina

“Mentors may stop by the schools in the morning to visit the mentees. We usually speak to their parents at least once a week to touch base with their progression at home. Parents usually seek us out to share the positive changes. Most mentees attend PAL daily after school, so we ask them about their day. We also monitor their grades at least once to twice monthly. If some mentees display any behavioral issues at school, we actually visit them at school. During the last hour of PAL, as the mentees wait to be picked up, mentors join them in a game of Ping-Pong, pool, or TikTok dances.”

- The Police Athletic League of North Miami, Florida

“Mentors and mentees meet on PAL campus and always enjoy a meal together. They receive the Growing Leaders curriculum or have a scheduled vendor visit or field trip.”

- Police Activity League of Waterbury, Inc., Waterbury, Connecticut

“We work with youth ages 8 to 17 in our Athletic and Leadership Programs from 3 to 8 PM each day. Our coaches and mentors pour into our youth and help them realize they have the ability to change the course of their lives. We teach the kids that they matter.”

- Martin County Police Athletic League, Palm City, Florida

“We operate the mentoring grant as part of our already established after-school programs. Children come to the program daily (based on schedule determined by their parents) from school dismissal until 6 PM. Everyday consists of program-provided snacks, energy busters (organized outside or gym play), homework time, and enrichment time. The SEL curriculum happens during enrichment time. The mentoring happens throughout the program day as the staff focus on building relationships with the children in the program.”

- EdAdvance BASES, Torrington PAL, Torrington, Connecticut
How does your PAL program center mentoring?

“We steer every conversation toward a positive outcome and how we can help get them there.”
- Vernon PAL, Vernon, New Jersey

“All of our programs have coaches and mentors who deliver value-based lessons at each practice and program we deliver. Eighteen valuable lessons are taught over the course of 16 weeks and it repeats.”
- Martin County Police Athletic League, Palm City, Florida

“It is designated on a day of its own programming, so the kids don’t miss [it]. We have extended it 30 minutes after close, so the mentees can engage with mentors with no other kids [are] here. We take recommendations from our juvenile officer, from the youth that has been assigned to that department. We allow them to join mentoring, assisting them as a treatment plan.”
- Police Activities League, Massena, New York

“The staff are constantly working toward building stronger relationships with the students in the program. We emphasize incorporating Social Emotional Activities into all programming aspects. The SRO comes to the program at least one afternoon per week at the Middle School Program. This helps bridge the gap between students and law enforcement.”
- EdAdvance BASES, Torrington PAL, Torrington, Connecticut

“Mentoring in Waterbury started with 10 youth and 10 officer mentors. It has grown to 52 youth and 16 officer, 2 firefighter, and 5 teacher/school admin mentors. It is one of our fastest growing programs at our PAL.”
- Police Activity League of Waterbury, Inc., Waterbury, Connecticut

Some of the biggest challenges for PAL Programs, shared by PAL staff:

• Family and parent engagement
• Lack of funding
• Consistency of participation as a drop-in center
• Transportation to and from activities for youth
• Retaining youth when families have moved around multiple times
• Restrictive grants
• Providing educational and mental health support to youth
• Staffing capacity when officers already have a large caseload of youth mentees
• Adapting to different learning styles
PAL Program Mentoring Activities
Some of the youth mentoring activities that PAL provides include:

• Youth leadership
• Sports
• Activities
• Community service
• Community cleanups
• Dance classes
• Road cleanup crew
• Volunteering at community events
• Community garden
• Summer activities
• Conversations about success stories of former mentees
• Cooking
• Team-building workshops
• Painting
• Shoulder-to-shoulder discussions
• End-of-year parties for graduation
• Roundtable discussions
• Team challenges
• Tutoring
• Life skills coach work
• Academic games
• STEM programs,
• eSports,
• Critical community conversations with youth
• Diversion and anti-recidivism programs

How does your PAL program center mentoring?

“Our roundtable discussions are another way we reinforce our mentoring program. We ask the mentees daily about their day at school and they openly speak to us. If an instance of bullying, bad behavior, or peer pressure arises, we address it immediately and then speak to the parents about it. If need be, we also speak to teachers and school administrators. At times the mentees will speak to the mentors about their day and any issues that they faced.”
- The Police Athletic League of North Miami, Florida

“The meal portion of our meetings allow youth to really get to know/humanize the police. Most of our mentor officers are also assigned as school resource officers so the youth and these officers carry their relationship over to their school day.”
- Police Activity League of Waterbury, Inc., Waterbury, Connecticut

“Daily circle with students that includes ‘Rose and Thorn’ and ‘safe/brave space talk’; life-skills activities including cooking skills, nutrition, and money management; individual student/staff check-ins; and the fact that the staff has relationships/connections to the families and the school. This allows staff to use those connections to follow up on the student’s school day. The SRO at the Middle School Program uses program time to work with individual students or talk to the group about any issues in the school overall.”
- EdAdvance BASES, Torrington PAL, Torrington, Connecticut
What’s special about being a PAL?

“In addition to building positive relationships, PAL offers a range of benefits for youth in the community. Participation in PAL programs can help mentees develop valuable skills, such as teamwork, leadership, and communication, that can be beneficial in all areas of life. PAL also provides a safe and supportive environment for youth to socialize and engage in positive activities, reducing the likelihood of involvement in negative behaviors.”

- Sgt James Flinders

“We have the opportunity to transform lives in our community. Being adaptable to meet the individual needs of our youth that attend our clubhouse. For some, PAL is a second home which is a safe, inclusive environment, and the youth are our family.”

- Police Activities League of Massena, New York

“Youth are not only encouraged, they are allowed to blossom here. Our kids and parents know their kids are safe at PAL!”

- Christopher Hill

“Being involved with PAL is not limited. PAL provides opportunity not just in sports but reach into all types of activities. The truth is once a PAL Kid, Always a PAL Kid. We have grandparents that were in PAL, moms and dads that were in PAL, and now their kids are in PAL. PAL provides that connection to local law enforcement, opportunity to be in law enforcement. PAL is all over the United States and now even in other countries.”

- Police Athletic League of Westfield, INC, Westfield, New Jersey

“Our goal is to make a positive impact in our community by bridging the gap between our community and law enforcement. PALNM has created an atmosphere where our mentees know that PALNM is a safe space. Former mentees (graduates) frequently return to speak to their mentor about issues that they may be facing or to ask for advice. We often say, ‘Once a PAL kid, always a PAL kid. We’re family.’”

- The Police Athletic League of North Miami, Florida
What training do the officers/mentors receive?

Based on PAL program staff responses, training for officers/mentors varies per program. Each PAL program decides the training to prioritize based on youth needs in their communities. Some examples include:

- Leadership
- Youth mental health first aid
- CPR/first aid
- Concussion protocols
- Adolescent behavior
- Child safety
- Beau Biden Shield of Protection
- Crisis preparedness
- Delaware-based PAL mentors access training through their state, on topics such as trauma-informed care and teen suicide.

- Online training provided by NPAL
- Training in youth work, through a website called YIPA
- Practical in-house training
- All mentors are Sheriff’s Office employees or volunteers, so they receive sexual harassment/safe work environment training once a year. Deputies and volunteers receive ongoing professional development training throughout the year.

- The required NPAL training and the State of Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council certifications.
- All of the PALNM mentors are COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) officers. We are active in the communities where our mentees live, therefore, we are aware of the needs of our mentees and their family.
- Social-emotional learning
- Mental health

How does your PAL program connect to the community around mentoring?

Some of the ways PALs build community relationships through youth mentoring:

- Inviting the greater community to PAL programs and events
- Partnering with public and private schools, local and state law enforcement, city government, and the business community
- Community events
- Community service
- Social media campaign
- Individual interactions and conversations
- School outreach events

- Community garden program with the school district
- Teachers and guidance counselors in the schools are invited to get involved
- Outreach to the Parent Teacher Organization
- Gain the support of the mayor and the police chief.
- Sending out flyers about the program
- Toy drives, bookbag giveaways, Thanksgiving giveaway

- Youth help seniors in the community by teaching them technology like how to send an email or even update their computers
- Maintain relationships with many local vendors and businesses and providers to address youth and their families’ needs. We invite them to join our monthly activities and we support their business with food orders and field trips.
- Recruiting mentors who are community leaders
Snapshots:

“One of our partner programs helps the community by providing case management services to at-risk youth throughout the county. Many of our youth are from that program. With the help of that program we are directly helping the youth in our community and connecting them with mentors that can help make a difference in their life.”

- The Rocket Teen Center, Belen, New Mexico

“We work closely with Torrington PAL. PAL works with the community to seek out community needs and helps us with community service project ideas and transportation. Torrington PAL also provides a leadership academy model for the Middle School Program, which takes the students on different trips around the community. We also attend many community events, including the Torrington Summer Fest (handing out back-to-school backpacks and supplies).”

- EdAdvance BASES, Torrington PAL, Torrington, Connecticut

“PALNM mentor/mentees participate in all city functions that involve family engagement. We visit the schools and parks frequently. [For] any calls that involve a youth in crisis, patrol officers are advised to contact a COPS officer to assist. If an officer comes in contact with an ‘at-risk’ youth, they refer them to PALNM.”

- The Police Athletic League of North Miami, Florida

“Our PAL has two big community events (back-to-school and Halloween) where staff, mentees, and volunteers work together to help our community.”

- Pinellas County Sheriff’s PAL, Florida
LOCATION
Positivity and Love Mentoring located in Corning, California. We are in a mainly rural and agricultural part of the North State region.

A TYPICAL DAY AT PAL
A typical day consists of the program coordinator preparing and packing for the group, and then transporting the youth to and from group sessions. Each group is hosted on different school campuses. Being mobile requires us to do a lot more coordinating to make sure that all activity supplies, snacks, waters, and any documents we need to distribute or collect are on hand for each group session.

We customize each group’s curriculum activities to address the mentees’ current concerns or life experiences. To be able to do this, it requires the program coordinator to have weekly meetings with the mentor team, to be able to case manage and customize curriculum for the youth enrolled in each group. The program coordinator provides transportation for all mentees, peer mentors, and adult mentors, if needed. This not only ensures attendance but also provides a much-needed service to support the youth and families we serve.

PRIORITIZING MENTORING
Our program is unique because we have created a special environment for youth that cares for other youth. We have a strong peer mentor leadership program that allows high school students to serve as mentors for elementary-aged youth. In turn, the peer mentors are also mentees and receive their own customized weekly mentoring sessions aside from their mentee’s sessions.

Having a lesser ratio of mentees to mentors is a tool we use to prioritize mentoring. This allows for the mentors to have fewer distractions and a more centralized focus on the two to four mentees they are responsible for. Recruiting more mentors than needed is another great tool we use. It allows for each youth to have more than one mentor, which creates a more inclusive experience for the mentee. In our opinion, youth can never have too many caring individuals in their life. Having more than one mentor gives more support, attention, and education to each mentee.

Community service projects are a core foundation of our program. During the CSP events, the peer mentor team works alongside their mentees. Creative curriculum implementation is key in providing the space and opportunities for the mentees and mentors to engage and build long-lasting, trusted relationships. It is necessary to implement curriculum activities and CSP events that will allow them to work together or be engaged with one another. This creates natural bonds and a team mentality.

The mentees naturally feel they can trust and are safe with their mentors and see this program as a family to which they belong. The program coordinator facilitates and models the behaviors and techniques for the mentors to help assist and guide the relationship-building process. This is necessary to ensure quality control and to prioritize mentoring.

We have been able to retain most of our mentees and mentors over the past seven years. As the elementary mentee’s age, they transition into Jr Mentors in Middle school and later become Peer Mentors themselves in high school. As our Peer Mentors graduate high school, many have transitioned into adult mentor volunteers. Our program invests the time and effort to ensure that authentic, genuine mentoring occurs in a safe, reliable, and quality program for every youth we serve. Kids and adults choose to remain committed long-term as they feel invested in the program and find it of value in their lives. This outcome shows us that the mentoring we implement matters to the youth we serve and has a long-lasting impact.
ACTIVITIES THAT REINFORCE MENTORING

Each week we implement activities that allow the mentees and mentors to organically interact with one another. One of the best ways to do this is through team challenges. This provides an opportunity for the mentor to have more personal and private interactions, while still being in a room filled with many other mentees and mentors.

An activity we did just this week was called “Peeps War.” The mentors and mentees paired up against other mentees and mentor teams to knock each other’s candy Peeps down with a plastic Easter egg. Not only was everyone having a blast, but it also gave the mentors a moment to engage with their mentees in a positive, supportive activity while being a unit that laughs and plays together, all while learning the skill and lessons of teamwork, strategy, and integrity.

Having so many of our youth that have been enrolled for multiple years forces us to continuously create new activities, using the same curriculum material. This also keeps our program fresh and exciting, which aids in retention. We aim to balance the curriculum implementation with a mix of more intensive/personal/heavier lessons with more fun and lighter-going activities.

Always being flexible and making space for mentees to deep dive into their emotions and issues at any time if called for. It happens all the time, we have the best activity planned and when we arrive on campus, the mentees just want to sit and process what is happening with their lives. In those moments, no activity is needed, just being present and providing a safe space and trusted mentors to listen is what the situation requires. Through these organic conversations, curriculum topics pop up like wildflowers. Having the ability to listen with intention and find the lessons that best serve the situation, and being able to weave that into the conversation, ensures mentoring is happening simultaneously with education.

All curriculum activities are planned together by the mentor team. This takes the pressure off anyone’s mentor and allows for flexibility when one mentor has other life obligations that make their participation not as available. Given that we have so many peer mentors, the program coordinator will often have to initiate a topic and activity suggestions based on the case management that we do as a mentor team. The mentors then take the lead and report back to coordinator to get supplies and details worked out.

An example of a community service project that we implement four times a year is a collaboration with the City of Corning, for the Food Truck Tuesday events. At the event, the PAL Mentoring team
implements a Kids Zone filled with prevention games and fun. These events give the mentors a chance to have their mentees work alongside them implementing the various games and activities at each event. The mentor’s model for their mentees how to be representatives of PAL Mentoring, how to engage with the community, and most important, how to be of service. It teaches youth commitment and teamwork. With multiple activities happening all at once, it requires the mentees and mentors to be somewhat of a symphony. Everyone flows in harmony and in a sequence that supports each other, is effective, and best yet, fun! The most significant part is the outcome of the events, each youth feels connected to their community and their fellow mentors and mentees. Again, it comes back to creative curriculum implantation, incorporating mentors in case management and planning. This all leads to positive outcomes and real experiences in mentoring on a consistent, weekly basis. It’s also A LOT of work, but results in even GREATER mentoring moments.

TRAINING FOR OUR MENTORS/OFFICERS

All mentors, whether adults or peers, receive the same training. We created a Mentor Handbook that is 88 pages long that each mentor receives and is thoroughly gone over in a training workshop. The topics included are:

- Mentors Create Real Impact
- Goal of Training
- Mentorship Matching Process
- What Is a Mentor
- What Is Expected of You as a Mentor
- Length of Time Required
- Recommended Activities
- Reporting
- Qualities of Successful Mentors
- Characteristics of a Mentor
- Setting Expectations
- Setting Boundaries
- Working with Parents
- A Mentor Should
- A Mentor Is Not
- Communication Skills
- Active Listening Skills
- Trust-Building Skills
- Tips from Past Mentors
- Guidelines for Setting Effective Limits
- Helping Young People with Decision-Making Skills
- Stages of Mentoring Relationships (Developing Rapport and Building Trust)
- Making a Connection
- Transitioning Out of Mentorship
- Ending a Relationships Before the Term Is Complete
- 40 Developmental Assets
- The Cornerstone of the Good Mentoring Relationship
- Characteristics of Healthy Youth
- Developing Self-Esteem in Young People
- Helping Teens Delay Pregnancy
- Characteristics of a Sexually Healthy Adolescent
- What Works
- Concerns that Discourage Communication About Sexuality
- Child Abuse and Mandated Reporting
- Warning Signs of Child Abuse
- How to Report Child Abuse
- Mentor Self-Evaluation Questionnaire and Reflection
- Important Contact Information for the Program and All Local Law Enforcement and Reporting Agencies
Each mentor also receives a Special Needs training manual along with a workshop, which covers what special needs are; how to properly address a child with special needs; the various types of mental and physical special needs along with common traits and symptoms; the spectrum of disorders in autism and Asperger Syndrome; ADHD; mental illness, such as anxiety, mood disorder, psychotic disorder, eating disorder, impulsive disorder, personality disorder; and PTSD. Understanding special needs, accommodation strategies, behavior management skills, and the mentor’s role is key.

Every year we coordinate a training workshop for our mentor team from our local Child Protection Services Agency. A representative will come and bring handout materials, and thoroughly go over reporting and what is and what is not legal regarding youth. We also provide trauma-informed training each year for our mentors along with continuous modeling from our program coordinator. We also get our mentor team enrolled if they want to participate in any training provided by our community partners, such as Expect More Tehama and the Tehama County Department of Education. Providing continuous training for our mentors is essential to their success and the quality of the experience for the mentees. We will offer any opportunities that arise over the year, if available to our mentor team.

CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY AROUND MENTORING

We are lucky to have the support of the school districts, city officials, and community partners such as the Tehama County Department of Education and Tehama County Health Service Agency who all see value in mentoring and have observed firsthand the impact of our program. Doing collaboration projects with several community partners allows them to experience the program and to personally assess the impact it has on the youth we serve.

We are an independent nonprofit youth mentoring organization. The school districts refer youth, allow us to recruit youth on their campuses, and host groups on their campuses. The high school principal allows us to take the peer mentors out of school 20 minutes early each week so they have less of a time gap with the elementary school, which gets out 30 to 40 minutes before the high school.

City officials personally ask for the mentor team to participate in their events. The city manager has given many letters of recommendation to the PAL Mentoring youth after getting to know them at these events and seeing the quality of work these kids put out in our community.
We have the full support of our police chief and his department. While we have not been able to get an officer to commit to weekly sessions due to their time constraints, the chief always sends officers to any event or group session whenever he can or is asked, provided they have one available and an urgent matter is not unfolding.

The district attorney is a supporter and is a guest any time he is invited. He also aims to connect our program to any resources or partners that could benefit us.

We are a small community where poverty thrives as much as drugs and crime. Our county is vastly spread out among agricultural lands. Many children must commute up to one hour to get to the nearest school. Our crime rate is substantially higher given our small population. Our police chief, our city officials, our administrators of partnering organizations, and our program coordinator have all grown up in this community. Somehow, with a lot of luck and support, we were able to get an education and skills that are enabling us to now give back to our community and help others. Connecting our youth with our community is of great importance. We aim to bring resources, skills, and jobs from their community connections. Most importantly, we strive to make each youth we serve to feel connected and a part of their community.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR OUR PAL PROGRAM

The biggest challenge is being mobile and not having a building to call home. It creates a lot more work and time. Transportation is another big challenge. Sometimes we have a few adult volunteer mentors who can help transport, but often it is our program coordinator who must budget many hours each week to transport youth to and from group sessions and events. Only having a vehicle that seats six passengers forces the coordinator to make multiple trips to pick up several youths.

This also requires that we secure a school staff member to supervise the youth in the classroom while the second and third groups of youth are being picked up and dropped off. While it hasn’t happened yet, we are optimistic that someday we will get permanent space on one of the school campuses or get funding to secure a building of our own. The school district is willing to help with transportation, but it is very limited and not consistent.

Funding is always a challenge. We are appreciative of the funds we receive but could always use more. Restricted funds limit what you can do. We also must incur additional costs for the NPAL registration fees for the training conference as well as the youth summit. These are big
expenses for smaller organizations to have to assume. We fund raise and are forced to use those funds to go back to NPAL for things we are required to do. It adds a big strain on our smaller budget and takes away from the youth.

We appreciate being able to attend the training and youth summit but do also feel the negative impact it has on our outside funding budget. In the past, these were reimbursable costs, but this changed a few years ago. Not being able to use grant funds to pay for all grant requirements is a challenge but, again, we are thankful to have the funds we were awarded and the events to participate in.

**WHAT’S SPECIAL ABOUT BEING A PAL PROGRAM?**

Being a PAL is special because we are part of a unique and caring organization that connects mentoring, community, and law enforcement. Merging those components allows us to create lasting memories and experiences for our youth and positively impact their lives. PAL is a family.

We are given the creative freedom to implement programs that are customized for our youth and community. Over the years, there has been lots of changes at NPAL, yet one thing has remained: the family and support that they give their chapters. Whitney has made the most positive impact! PAL represents fairness and connection.

Being able to expose our youth to law enforcement in a positive way is life changing. Our community is heavily populated with substance users, people convicted of crimes or felonies, and migrant workers. Seasonal migrant workers come here from Mexico and choose to remain and raise their families. It is more common than not for the youth we serve to have undocumented families or be undocumented themselves and/or have family members who have been convicted of a crime or felony. This creates a huge fear of law enforcement in our youth.

I have seen firsthand the positive impact being in the PAL program has had on many youth and families. To have an opportunity to engage with police officers and not be in fear that they are going to arrest or deport you or your loved ones can be significant for these youth. We create opportunities for police officers to come to our group sessions where they will engage and play with the youth in a safe and trauma-informed environment. Last summer, an officer stopped by our summer camp and ended up having a huge water fight with the youth. One officer against 65 youths. It was the best memory for these young people. The officer fully embraced the play and the
chance to leave a lasting impact. To this day, the youth still say, “Ms. Dusty, you remember when the officer came and had a water fight with us, it was so much fun!” We hosted a Kids & Cops Carnival this past year as well. The entire event was a fun explosion for the youth and officers. Every year, the PAL Mentoring youth make a gift for every law enforcement officer in Tehama County, a total of more than 300 gifts. Then they give tokens of appreciation to the officers at each branch. This event reduces the stigma of separation and is enjoyed by all. For many youths, their past interactions with law enforcement have been negative. To have an experience where officers are not only happy to see them but also thankful for them and their time together is a rare treasure. It can provide a space for a positive interaction with law enforcement to replace a negative one. I have a group of high school boys that all love basketball.

PAL gives that special connection and validity to be able to reach out to Chief Sanders, at Red Bluff Police Department, and Chief Munch, at Probation to ask for officers to come to play a game against the youth. Any other youth organization may not have that same access. By incorporating law enforcement, PAL creates an opening within the departments. This is what we as educators need, direct access to police officers to create opportunities for youth engagement and prevention.

**Only PAL can offer a program that connects our youth to our law enforcement and community with intention and purpose and results in positive impacts.** The other side of this is that we are giving youth exposure to a future career opportunity in law enforcement. One of my peer mentors recently entered the police academy. Her inspiration was PAL after meeting Chief Fears, Corning Police Department, at a mentoring event. She is a political refugee from India. Her family came here when she was in the sixth grade. They did not speak English or have any money or resources. She and her sister joined my program. Last year, the entire family received their citizenship after seven years of a hard journey. They recently bought a house and started a family business. Both girls have graduated from high school and entered higher education. The girls and their parents attribute their success to PAL and that is what makes us special!