

## NEW POLICE TRAINING

*incorporates*

## YOUTH, COMMUNITY CONNECTION

**T**raining programs often conjure images of beige conference rooms, stale coffee and lengthy lectures. But a new interactive program provides an opportunity for law enforcement officers to engage directly with the communities they serve.

A multi-year initiative of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids' new Police Training Institute (PTI), "CYCLE: Connecting Youth & Communities with Law Enforcement," is a sixteen-hour training program covering many contemporary issues facing law enforcement today.

What makes the CYCLE curriculum unique is that it was created by law enforcement professionals who also lead the training session. It strategically engages community members, specifically youth, in the process. Doing so helps everyday people understand the challenges that law enforcement officers face on the job and the lengths that they have to go to protect public safety.

"Involving the youth in the process up front allows us to shape the next few days of conversation around what is actually happening in the community. It's also an opportunity for law enforcement and the community to brainstorm solutions and ways to make their city a better place to live,"

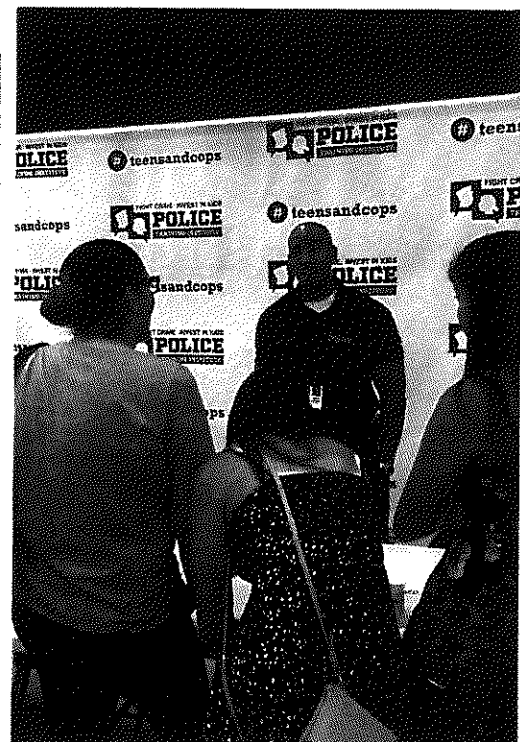
said John Shanks, Director of the Police Training Institute. Shanks worked in law enforcement for over 35 years and knows firsthand the benefits of bringing community and law enforcement together.

CYCLE strives to give academy recruits, patrol officers and deputies a fresh perspective on the issues residents are facing while offering a variety of strategies appropriate for managing stressful situations.

The conversation has been honest and emotional. In one session, after a youth participant declared that he "knew how to roll a blunt but never learned how to tie a necktie." Several officers stayed late that night to conduct an impromptu necktie training for the young man and his friends.

At another session, students claimed they were often targeting for "standing around" but if the officers took the time to get to know them, they would realize that the youth have nowhere else to go. Officers on that panel listened thoughtfully and one asked the audience to consider both sides of the story:

*"I'm often responding to a crime in progress with very little information as to what has happened or who I am seeking. If the*



*dispatcher tells me the perp is wearing jeans and a black t-shirt, well, lots of people wear jeans and black tees. I have to proceed with caution because my life — and yours — may be on the line.”*

Another officer shared his personal struggles balancing kindness with doing his job to keep schools safe. He said, “We give youth clothes, food . . . because we want to help them succeed. But one time when I broke up a fight, I was on the ground wrestling one of the students off the other, another student came and kicked me in the eye, fracturing my eye socket, almost ending my career.”

The CYCLE curriculum incorporates group activities, interactive exercises with facilitated discussion on important topics such as adolescent brain development, de-escalation skills, implicit bias and trauma-informed response.

While still quite new, there have been early indicators of success. When surveyed, youth participants reported that the dialogue did change the way they viewed law enforcement in their communities. Officers from all agencies indicated that the experience will be helpful in their daily interactions with youth in the communities they serve.

“In the end, we hope to encourage more positive interactions between officers and young people, and opening up the channels of communications is a good first step in that process,” said Shanks. “The ability to de-escalate personal conflicts and foster positive relationships with the public is perhaps one of the best crime-fighting tools around.”

PTI has presented the CYCLE curriculum in communities across the United States, including four sites in California and is currently wrapping up the second cohort of training. After this round, PTI will conduct an extensive evaluation process to measure both immediate and

long-term outcomes of the program. If you would like to bring the CYCLE training to your department, contact John Shanks at 202-253-4516. ■

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