

The BJA Executive Session on

Police Leadership

2013

The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership is a multi-year endeavor started in 2010 with the goal of developing innovative thinking that would help create police leaders uniquely qualified to meet the challenges of a changing public safety landscape.

In support of an integrated approach to creating safe and viable communities across America, the project directors recruited 20+ principals from a range of disciplines. The principals, in turn, led national field teams of practitioners focused on the work of policing and the organization of the future.

To gain new insights on leadership, the *BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership* engaged police chiefs in documenting their own paths and invited leaders to participate in various audio and video forums to tell their stories and discuss the future of policing and police leadership.

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The principals are supported in their work by a team that includes project co-directors Darrel W. Stephens and Bill Geller, project strategist Nancy McKeon, and BJA Senior Policy Advisor Steve Edwards.

Five Police Departments Building Trust and Collaboration

Innovations in Policing Clinic
Yale Law School
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Short Version of the Case

by
Alyssa Work



Short Version of the Case

Trust and Collaboration in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Alyssa Work, in collaboration with members of Yale Law School’s Innovations in Policing Clinic

Introduction

Over the past decade in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, an unlikely group of collaborators—police leaders, public defenders, the district attorney’s office, the city Department of Human Services, schools, and faith leaders—developed and established forums and a training curriculum for officers to bring youth and law enforcement together.

Developed in response to Congress’ Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) standard, the Pennsylvania DMC Subcommittee’s Philadelphia Working Group holds youth–law enforcement forums in public schools, youth detention facilities, and facilities for court-adjudicated youth. It has also developed a one-day training program for police recruits at the Philadelphia Police Academy. The forums and trainings give youth and law enforcement officers strategies for defusing contacts that might lead to an arrest, allow them to speak frankly to each other about how they perceive each other’s actions, and change attitudes in a way that will change interactions on the Philadelphia streets of Kensington, Germantown, and North Philadelphia.

What is Disproportionate Minority Contact?

In 1992, Congress made it a core requirement of federal funding for states to identify disparities in rates of arrest, disposition, and confinement between white and minority youth. The DMC standard requires that states attempt to address those disparities by drafting their own solutions and, frequently, partnering with nonprofit organizations to implement their programs. Federal formula grant funding is conditioned on regular reporting and program development. In Pennsylvania, the Minority Youth–Law Enforcement Forums receive a portion of the state’s formula grant funding.

There are limits to what programs focused on communication can accomplish in reducing violence. The designers of the curriculum recognize its limits and are seeking to develop methods of evaluation and improved tools for increasing youth–police communication and trust.

Three general lessons can be drawn from Philadelphia’s experience building and institutionalizing youth–law enforcement dialogue, lessons that could be translated into programs for other police departments looking to build relationships and reduce street-level conflict between police and young people of color:

- First, **invest in collaboration** with institutions that may not appear to be natural allies. In developing, implementing, and conducting the forums, the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD), the Defender Association of Philadelphia, the district

attorney's office, and community organizations have maintained close working relationships that have permitted them to build the program in schools, in the police academy, and in community venues.

- Second, **focus on early intervention**, with respect to both new cadets and to young people. The youth–law enforcement curriculum is consciously focused on changing the quality of low-level street contacts between kids and officers, and on reducing the likelihood that a street stop will escalate into use of force on either side. The trainings reach cadets before their perceptions of kids' behavior in Philadelphia have solidified.
- Third, **recognize the importance of changing perceptions**. How officers on patrol respond to youth behavior, and how youth react to police intervention in everyday life, are highly dependent on how each group views the others' behaviors and motives. Letting police explain to teenagers how they are trained to respond to threats and allowing kids tell how their previous interactions with law enforcement affects their actions lay the groundwork for more productive police–community relationships.

Background on Philadelphia

Philadelphia is the nation's sixth-largest city.¹ It is poorer than any other U.S. city close to its size—a quarter of residents were living in poverty in 2010.² Minorities make up a majority of the city's population: census data show that 43% of Philadelphians are black, 37% are white, and 12% are Hispanic or Latino.³ Residential segregation is entrenched, with the city's black residents primarily living in North and West Philadelphia. Philadelphia has historically been a “city of neighborhoods”: tightly integrated and close-knit, but insular.⁴

Philadelphia had the highest per-capita murder rate of any American city in 2011.⁵ However, crime has been declining overall in the city for 20 years. In 2010, the total number of violent crimes (homicide, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery) declined to the lowest level since 1989.⁶ Juvenile violent crime is lower than it was in 1995.⁷

Violence is concentrated geographically—in the 24th, 25th, and 22nd districts—and demographically—as youth represent one-third of all arrests.⁸ PPD attempts to focus on

¹ An estimated 1,526,006 people live in Philadelphia. U.S. Census, [State and County QuickFacts](#) (2010).

² Philadelphia's poverty rate was only 18.5% in 2000, by comparison. Alan Butkovitz, Philadelphia Office of the City Controller, [Economic Report: Financial Forecast and Snapshot](#) (Aug. 2010).

³ *Id.*

⁴ See Jerome Skolnick, *Coping with Crime: Individual and Neighborhood Reactions* 23-24 (1981).

⁵ There was nearly one murder per day in Philadelphia in 2011. See, e.g., CBS News, [Philadelphia Closes 2011 With Highest Per-Capita Murder Rate in U.S.](#) (Dec. 30, 2011); [Philadelphia Police Department Crime Maps and Statistics](#), 2011.

⁶ *Id.* at 24.

⁷ See National Center for Juvenile Justice, [Pennsylvania Juvenile Delinquency Analysis Data Tool](#) (2011).

⁸ OJJDP Easy Access to FBI Statistics, [Percent of All Arrests Involving Persons Under Age 18 in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania](#) (last data available from 2008).

these areas through traditional crime-fighting means combined with programs like the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership.⁹

Pennsylvania was one of the first states to implement programs to reduce DMC. In 1990, minority youth accounted for 12% of youth overall, but 70% of youth in secure confinement.¹⁰ Members of the Philadelphia Commission on Crime and Delinquency were influenced by Kimberley Kempf-Leonard’s recent study on “The Role of Race in Juvenile Justice in Pennsylvania,”¹¹ which contends that arrest is the most important point of racial disparity.¹² The PPD made two-thirds of minority juvenile arrests statewide.¹³

As a result, PPD undertook a number of reforms. Twenty years ago, PPD’s Juvenile Aid Division handled all juvenile cases exclusively. Today, officers are assigned on a geographical basis; all officers are prepared to deal with youth.¹⁴ Further, the PPD has created community-focused programs to build relationships with youth—such as the Police Athletic League; the Explorer program, for youth interested in careers in law enforcement; and the CHEERS mentorship program.¹⁵

Juvenile justice stakeholders agree that things are getting better than they used to be, but could still be improved. Tensions remain and flare up during incidents like the youth-driven “flash mobs” (a series of seemingly random mass gatherings, thefts, and assaults) in the summer of 2011.¹⁶ Philadelphia’s Relative Rate Index for arrests—the value used to determine how much more likely a black youth is to be arrested than a white youth—hovers around 1.55.

The Philadelphia Strategy

Creating and Adapting the Model for Youth–Law Enforcement Forums

The Philadelphia DMC Working Group adopted a “coalition model” for a prevention effort bringing police, probation officers, school personnel, city attorneys, and agencies together monthly to discuss potential solutions.¹⁷ Key law enforcement agencies were involved from the beginning.¹⁸ The two driving forces of the coalition have been George

⁹ An intervention project modeled on Ceasefire. YVRP was active in 5 of 24 police districts See Joint Hearing on Youth Violence in Philadelphia, CITE.

¹⁰ Heidi Hsia & Donna Hamparian, *Disproportionate Minority Confinement: 1997 Update*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin 3(1998). Today those figures are 22% and 76%, respectively.

¹¹ Kimberley Kempf, *The Role of Race in Juvenile Justice in Pennsylvania*, in *Minorities in Juvenile Justice* (K. Leonard et al., eds., 1995).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* at 4.

¹⁴ Interview with Robert Schwartz, Juvenile Law Center (March 14, 2012).

¹⁵ Interview with Kevin Bethel; see also Philadelphia Police Department, Community Relations Department.

¹⁶ Philadelphia Mayor Talks Tough to Black Teenagers After Flash Mobs, *Washington Times*, Aug. 8, 2011.

¹⁷ Randolph interview.

¹⁸ The SEPTA transit police, led by Deputy Chief David Scott, and the Philadelphia Police Department, which at the time was represented by Kathy Battle, a victim assistance officer in the Homicide Unit, were both involved.

Mosee, Jr., the Philadelphia Deputy District Attorney for the Juvenile Unit, and Bob Listenbee, the Chief of the Juvenile Unit at the Defender Association of Philadelphia.¹⁹

The working group asked officers and youth to join them—and talk. Members promoted an evenhanded approach in which both sides are heard.²⁰ Then, in 2003, they sought and received funding from the MacArthur Foundation. With this grant, they institutionalized the forums and began to develop the training curriculum that would, in 2009, be incorporated into Philadelphia Police Academy trainings. Mosee recalled that the first forums took place in a conference room, around a table. The forums moved to larger venues—schools, detention facilities, community centers—and greater audiences.

Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey has experimented with the youth–law enforcement forum model by involving department leaders in forums and introducing the youth training component to the academy. He and others in the PPD work to ensure that the forums are sensitive to law enforcement’s point of view and include police concerns about public safety and genuine threats. With diverse input, the working group built a curriculum that all of the stakeholders supported.

School Forums

The earliest forums conducted were in area high schools and middle schools, using volunteer officers and enrolled students. The working group went through the department to recruit officers for events.²¹ The structure of the forums looks basically like this:

- 1. Introductions:** The facilitator (in most cases George Mosee) introduces himself, explains the purpose and history of the forums, and introduces the panelists. The student panelists are selected from an earlier meeting with students to determine who has interest.
- 2. Panel discussion and role-play:** The facilitator asks questions to the students and officers on the panel, then to the larger group. They talk about stereotypes—what is a stereotype, what kinds of stereotypes do people carry?²² Officers and students swap roles in a role-play, encouraging each to see the difficulties of the others’ position.
- 3. Tool kits:** An aim of the forums is to give youth and officers concrete tools to use in future contacts. Youth learn how to respond when mistreated or improperly stopped.²³ This means informing attendees about the procedures for filing a complaint and letting them know when to ask for a badge number, who to call, and how to follow up.²⁴
- 4. Small group sessions:** Officers and students form “breakout groups,” where the audience has a chance to speak in a smaller setting. Groups usually involve one law enforcement officer, a member of the working group team, and a few students.²⁵ The groups discuss topics similar to those discussed in the large setting

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Interview with George Mosee, Deputy District Attorney, Juvenile Division (March 13, 2012).

²¹ Interview with George Mosee, Deputy District Attorney, Juvenile Division (March 13, 2012).

²² Interview with Timene Farlow, DHS Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Justice (March 12, 2012).

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ McKitten interview.

²⁵ *Id.*

but emphasize hearing from all students and allowing mentorships to develop between officers and youth.²⁶ In the process, youth learn that officers are concerned about their safety.²⁷

School forums often entail a follow-up session in which officers and working group members come back and talk to youth again to collect information and present on collateral consequences.

Forums for Youth in Detention and Court-Adjudicated Youth

Teenagers in contact with the criminal justice system participate in forums as well. There have been three forums at the Youth Study Center, the city's youth detention facility; two at St. Gabriel's, a residential facility for court-adjudicated youth in Philadelphia; and one at the Glen Mills School, another residential facility.²⁸ These differ from other forums. Time constraints mean there are no small group sessions. Officers adopt a more lecturing tone than in some forums. It is hard for newer officers and community affairs officers to rein in advice-giving instincts. But the more equal the footing, the more effective the forums are in changing perceptions.

Community Forums

Over the last several years, forums have expanded from institutions like schools and residential facilities to community-based settings in immigrant and ethnic minority-dominated neighborhoods. By linking with community groups such as Congreso, in the Latino community, and officer associations, like the Haitian-American Law Enforcement Officers Association, the forums have been successful in neighborhoods where there has been little historic dialogue with police. There have been three youth-law enforcement forums in Latino neighborhoods, one forum in the Haitian community, and another in Philadelphia's growing Liberian community.²⁹ The panelists are still law enforcement officers and teenagers; however, community forums are also open to parents and community members. Their participation facilitates community education.³⁰ Parents can be more receptive to law enforcement's perspective; when they are not, they are often vocal with feedback.

The PPD officers who participate in community forums are the same officers that patrol the districts in which the forums take place. PPD also attempts to include officers on panels that are representative of the community. Optimally, interactions with officers influence future exchanges. Officers will remember the faces of the youth they saw at a forum; youth may feel less threatened by a face from a community panel discussion. Community forums are beneficial in two additional ways: They let individuals in neighborhoods affected by violence to air concerns in a public forum, and police and community members are able to speak candidly about their concerns and whatever criticisms they have of the PPD. Ultimately, this helps restore some trust between police and that neighborhood.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Bethel interview.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Farlow interview.

Community leaders have been indispensable collaborators. The lead organizer is Edwin Desamour, who founded Men in Motion in the Community (MIMIC), a youth development organization in Kensington offering mentoring and skills workshops. Desamour, who spent more than eight years in prison for participating in a murder at age 16, has credibility with the kids he works with in MIMIC as well as with law enforcement. He organizes and facilitates the community forums.

Curriculum for Cadet Training: Reaching Receptive Trainees

The process of developing a training curriculum around youth–law enforcement contact began in 2003. The first academy visit was in March 2009. A second cadet training followed in the summer of 2009, then one each in November 2010 and February 2011. Now, the academy conducts this training after the number of hired cadets reaches 40.³¹ The curriculum has been used in the training of nearly 500 officer recruits.³²

The training targets cadets rather than veteran officers for several reasons. The first reason is logistics: It would be more difficult to get all 6,600 sworn officers in the PPD to attend a training program than to establish the youth–law enforcement curriculum at the academy. PPD’s ongoing professional development consists of online coursework, which is not compatible with the objectives of the forums. However, in some cities where similar curricula are being developed, departments have trained all officers, as well as cadets, using the youth–law enforcement discussions.³³ A second reason for focusing training on cadets is that they tend to be more receptive to new ideas and information. Changing the standards of one class at a time results in a shift in the police force over time.³⁴

The format of the training builds on the structure of the youth–law enforcement forums, adding several unique components. First, it includes a presentation on adolescent brain development, including a slide-show summary of key changes and development in the teenage brain.³⁵ Facilitators and cadets discuss specific behaviors that reveal underdeveloped reasoning. This section includes discussion of hypervigilance and coping strategies among youth who have been exposed to trauma.³⁶ They also learn about issues common to girls in the criminal justice system—close to 80% of girls in Philadelphia’s criminal justice system have been abused.³⁷ Further, the training includes a session on effective strategies for communication between youth and police. A role-play exercise requires officers to assume the role of youth as well as officer.³⁸

³¹ Interview with Deputy Commissioner Kevin Bethel, Philadelphia Police Department. Hiring freezes prevented any new cadets from entering the department between June 2009 and November 2010.

³² Interview with Rhonda McKitten, Assistant Defender, Juvenile Division, Defender Association of Philadelphia (March 14, 2012).

³³ James Randolph interview.

³⁴ Mosee interview.

³⁵ See Facilitator Manual, DMC Youth/Law Enforcement Curriculum, Philadelphia Working Group of the DMC Subcommittee of the Philadelphia Commission on Crime and Delinquency (MacArthur Foundation Models for Change 2010).

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ McKitten interview.

³⁸ Randolph interview.

These trainings generate distinct concerns. For example, there is concern over whether advising that officers “pause” to consider if youth behavior is dangerous would put those officers at risk of harm. Similarly, some youth leave trainings because they are concerned about being labeled snitches—and subjected to retaliation.³⁹ The working group addresses such concerns carefully and quickly.

Meanwhile, other jurisdictions are adopting and tailoring Philadelphia’s curriculum to fit their cities. They use several guides: a two-day train-the-trainers manual, a facilitator manual, and a participant manual.⁴⁰ The current working group has been engaging in train-the-trainer sessions with future trainers in Pennsylvania’s Allegheny County and Lancaster County.⁴¹

Three Principles for Success

- 1. Invest in Collaboration:** The forums have always been a collaborative effort. The diversity of perspectives within the working group allows members to address the concerns of all organizations involved. When law enforcement leaders expressed concern that police officers would face undiluted criticism at youth forums, the working group ensured that officers had time to share their perspectives.⁴² The working group collaborated with the PPD to determine that the benefit of the forum for law enforcement would be helping prevent officers from being exposed to dangerous scenarios.⁴³ Law enforcement leaders’ willingness to convey their concerns openly and honestly—and the working group’s responsiveness—kept the parties engaged and invested.⁴⁴

On Changing Perceptions:

“[The impact for the kids is [that] you’ll see the officers that will pass you on the street, and they will know that you’re a person, you’re intelligent and you have things to say.”

Rhonda McKitten, Juvenile Unit, Defender Association of Philadelphia.

Building a sustainable project required personal collaboration among city and state organizations and law enforcement agencies—as well as outside funding and management. The program received a three-year grant from the MacArthur Foundation in 2008 as part of its Models for Change program, followed by funding for program evaluation. The DMC subcommittee became a 501(c)(3) corporation in the past year, which allows it to apply for funding from non-government

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ McKitten interview.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² McKitten interview.

⁴³ Mosee interview.

⁴⁴ Anne Marie Ambrose interview.

sources.⁴⁵ It is building partnerships with new facilitators to foster more forums across the city.

- 2. Focus on Early Intervention:** The forums aim to minimize arrests of youth and assaults on officers. They focus on low-level stops and reaching youth before their first interactions with the criminal justice system.⁴⁶ Law enforcement’s understanding that the intervention is focused on *early* deterrence is key to officer buy-in. Officers know that “if a crime is in progress, this doesn’t apply.”⁴⁷ Another way in which the early intervention principle plays a role in the program is in teaching cadets while they are relatively impressionable—so that their first encounter with the issue of police–youth communication is in a neutral, controlled environment where open dialogue takes place.⁴⁸
- 3. Recognize the Importance of Changing Perceptions:** The goal of the forums is to stimulate conversations between youth and cops to improve communication around stops. As nearly every person involved in the forums has said, “Both sides need to hear from each other.” The forum designers emphasize that youth and cops are on equal footing, and both sides have a lot to learn from each other. If officers try to tell youth what to do, the intervention loses some of its value.

Room for Improvement

Despite enthusiasm and anecdotal evidence of success, youth–law enforcement forums are “preaching to the choir” in some respects. Going forward, organizers could benefit from institutionalizing the forums more widely within the PPD and broadening participation to reach those who may be less receptive. Moreover, the group must employ methods to formally evaluate the program. There is currently no means of determining what tools officers and youth retain from the forums.

Forums and trainings are difficult to assess using data-driven methodology. It is hard to determine whether a youth acted respectfully during an interaction because of an intervention or for other reasons. The city’s methods of counting youth, particularly in the Latino community, must also be improved—in quality and frequency—before a study can be done. The effect of the type of intervention that the forums attempt, focused on communication and perceptions, can only be measured with qualitative surveys. An evaluation of the MacArthur Foundation grant is in progress; however, this effort focuses on school forum follow-up. This strategy captures effects on youth but not officers. In the future, data about the frequency and outcome of stops of youth after cadet trainings could prove a useful measure.

When it comes to training law enforcement officers on adolescent behavior and youth culture, the strategy is top-down (from Deputy Commissioners Bethel and Ross) and bottom-up (from the current academy cadets). With hiring slow within PPD in the past several years, there is a definite limit to how many officers can be trained using the forum

⁴⁵ Interview with Autumn Dickman, Project Manager, Models for Change (March 14, 2012).

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ Mosee interview.

⁴⁸ Bethel interview.

method, meaning that it is difficult to assess whether the trainings are reaching middle-rank officers. But if the department wants to change officers' perceptions as well as those of youth, it should reach beyond voluntary participation by interested officers.

PPD could address training-relevant topics, like adolescent development and youth culture, during roll calls; or it could train members of the department in groups that are organized to minimize the inconvenience to bureaus and departments. The drawback would be the additional logistical planning required to design such a schedule. The department could also require participation by middle-rank officers once a year or offer incentives to officers who have not attended a forum before. PPD records indicate which officers might benefit from exposure to youth-law enforcement communication trainings; those officers might be asked to attend community forums within their districts as part of their duties.

The partnership among the PPD, juvenile defenders, and the district attorney in Philadelphia made the development of the forums possible. Collaboration was crucial.⁴⁹ Police leadership can tell officers to go to the trainings, and only they can establish a dedicated day of academy training. The school district and community stakeholders ensure access to youth. Although these relationships existed already, the working group organized stakeholders to meet regularly, discussed concerns, and brought in new people (like Commissioner Ramsey, appointed in 2008 to lead the PPD) who were critical to the success of the project. Increasing the number of leaders able to facilitate trainings would permit weekly forums and reach greater numbers of youth and officers.

More Lessons Learned for Building Trust and Collaboration

- **Don't expect immediate trust.** Many black and Latino youth in Philadelphia have tense relationships with police because of past stops or arrests, and the most effective interventions do not pretend those incidents did not happen. Instead, officers have a better chance of getting kids to pay attention if they first listen and attempt to understand those past experiences before explaining law enforcement's point of view. The same goes for kids listening to law enforcement.
- **Include top brass in forums and trainings whenever possible.** Trainings and forums have overwhelmingly been more effective when Deputy Commissioners are present and/or participating. Their presence signals to line officers that the leadership has bought into the project and is prepared to stand by it. Leadership presence also signals to the youth that they have allies among the decision makers in the department.
- **Aim at low-level street stops to ultimately reduce violence.** Police leadership and working group members agree that the tools they are giving to officers—including using the knowledge learned from training to determine

⁴⁹ Mosee interview.

whether youth are acting dangerously or just behaving like normal adolescents—are applicable on routine patrol, not when crime is in progress. But all those involved stress that one of the ultimate goals of the trainings is to reduce the likelihood that stops will escalate into an assault or an arrest.

- **Give youth and officers concrete tools going forward.** Officers and forum facilitators tell kids that if they encounter mistreatment, they “won’t win on the street.” Instead, they give kids information about reporting complaints afterward, and instruct them on how to follow up. Conversely, the cadet training offers recruits specific methods for communicating with teenagers and identifying responses to trauma and/or sexual assault.
- **Follow up.** In schools, officers have the opportunity to follow up with attendees to determine how much of the trainings kids remember and ask whether they have used that knowledge in their contact with law enforcement. Follow-up on an individual level has led to mentoring relationships between officers and teens. The department could, and should, take a similar approach among cadets—following up with cadets on the training they receive to ensure that they receive repeated reinforcement.

The Yale Law School Innovations in Policing Clinic is made up of Rebecca Buckwalter-Poza, Kyle Delbyck, Jamil Jivani (lead author for Milwaukee case study), Jeremy Kaplan-Lyman (lead author for Seattle case study), Jessica So, Trevor Stutz (lead author for High Point case study), Carolyn Van Zile (lead author for Charlotte-Mecklenburg case study), and Alyssa Work (lead author for Philadelphia case study).

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The principals on our team include John Crombach, Gail Christopher, Darrel Stephens and James Forman, Jr.

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