

Bridging the Divide: Chicago Police Department Initiative

After School Matters Research Brief

Brief No. 2 | October 2018



The International Association of Chiefs of Police¹ emphasizes the importance of positive police-youth interactions in reducing juvenile violence and victimization; improving education, health, and social outcomes for youth; and strengthening communities. Unfortunately, many young people in Chicago report negative interactions with police in their neighborhoods². In an April 2016 report³, the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force described police-youth interactions as “a significant missed opportunity” and recommended training all officers “to engage with youth in ways that are age-appropriate, trauma-informed and based in a restorative justice model.”

To help improve police-youth interactions in Chicago, After School Matters (ASM) partnered with Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers or staff members to run five programs and be frequently involved as program volunteers and guest speakers in two additional programs during the Summer 2018 program session. These programs provided teens with instruction in STEM, arts, or sports and addressed topics related to policing through group conversations, projects, events, and other activities.

Program Participants

As illustrated on the map in *Figure 1*, 110 teens traveled from 35 community areas to participate in these programs. Austin (17.3%) and Englewood (9.1%) were home to the largest proportion of participants. Most program participants resided in high-crime community areas and six out of seven program sites were also located in areas with high violent crime rates compared to the rest of the city. The majority of the teens served identified as male and Black/African American (50.0%) or female and

¹ International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2018). Police-Youth engagement. Practices in modern policing. Alexandria, VA: Author.

² Futterman, C.B., Hunt, C., & Kalven, Y. (2016). Youth/police encounters on Chicago’s south side: Acknowledging the realities. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 2016, 125-211

³ Chicago Police Accountability Task Force. (2016). Recommendation for reform: Restoring trust between the Chicago police and the communities they serve. Chicago, IL: Author.

Black/African American (25.5%). Hispanic/Latinx teens represented 19.1% of participants and were divided evenly between males and females. A small percentage (4.5%) of teens identified as two or more races or as another race/ethnicity (1.0%). Of the 110 participants, 30.9% had participated in an ASM program previously.

**Summer 2018
Police Initiative
Programs & Participants**

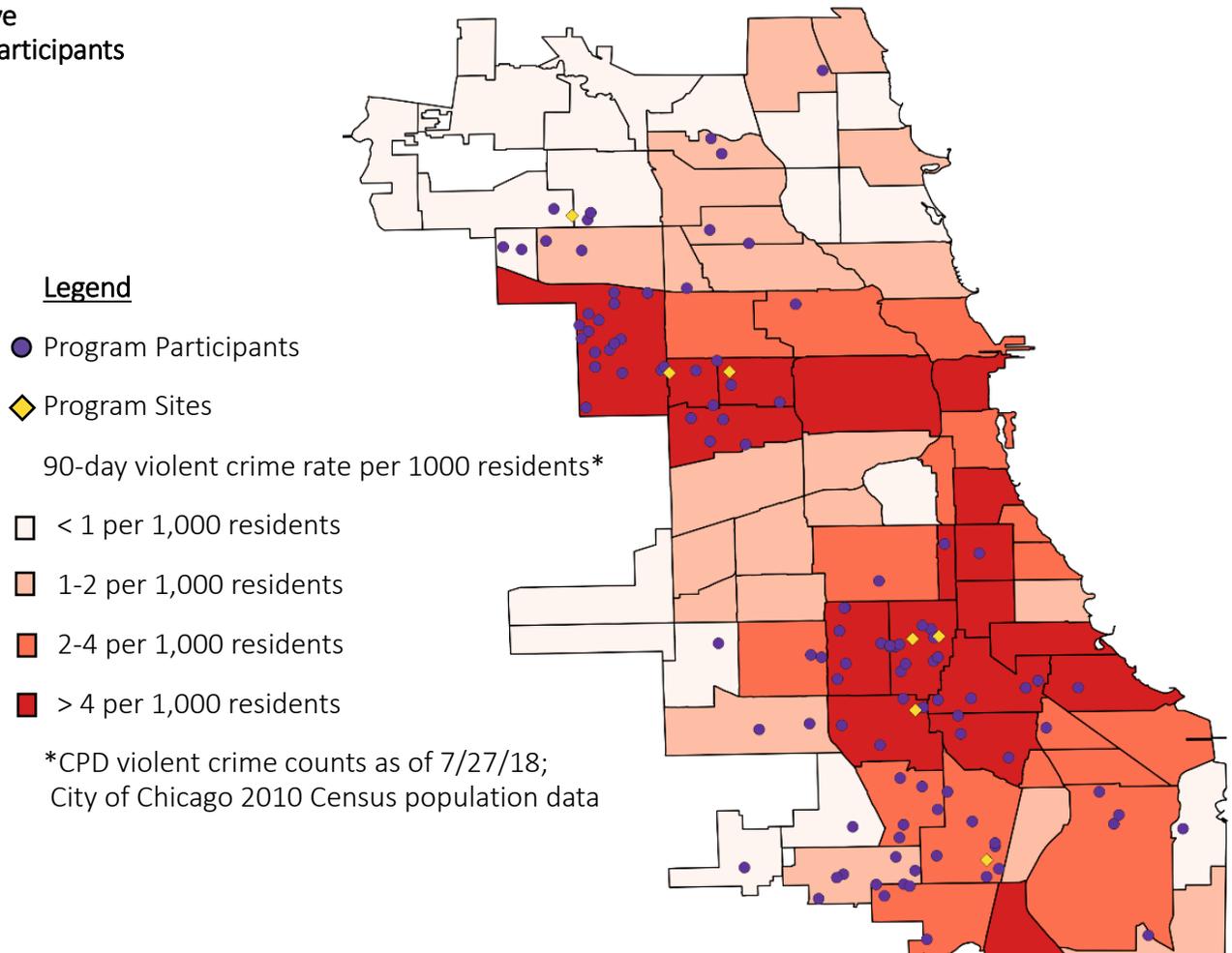


Figure 1

Teen Survey

A total of 58 teens completed the ASM-CPD initiative section of the post-program teen survey, which represents a 52.7% response rate. The ASM Research & Evaluation Department adapted items measuring youth attitudes toward police from the Center for Public Safety Initiatives⁴ and items about recent police contact from the Polling for Justice (PFJ) participatory action research project⁵. These questions asked about recent experiences with police officers and attitudes about police both before

⁴ Dougherty, J., Fleming, P., Klofas, J. (2013). *Teen Empowerment’s youth police dialogues: First interim report*. Rochester, NY: Center for Public Safety Initiatives.

⁵ Stoudt, B.G., Fine, M., & Fox, M. (2011). Growing up policed in the age of aggressive policing policies. *New York Law School Law Review*, 56: 1334-1370.

and after the program. Because all items were optional some attitudinal items in the retrospective pre-post section were skipped. We excluded item-level responses with missing data from the analysis.

An easy way to understand the retrospective pre- and post-test results is by looking at mean ratings for each of the six attitudinal items, as shown in *Figure 2*.

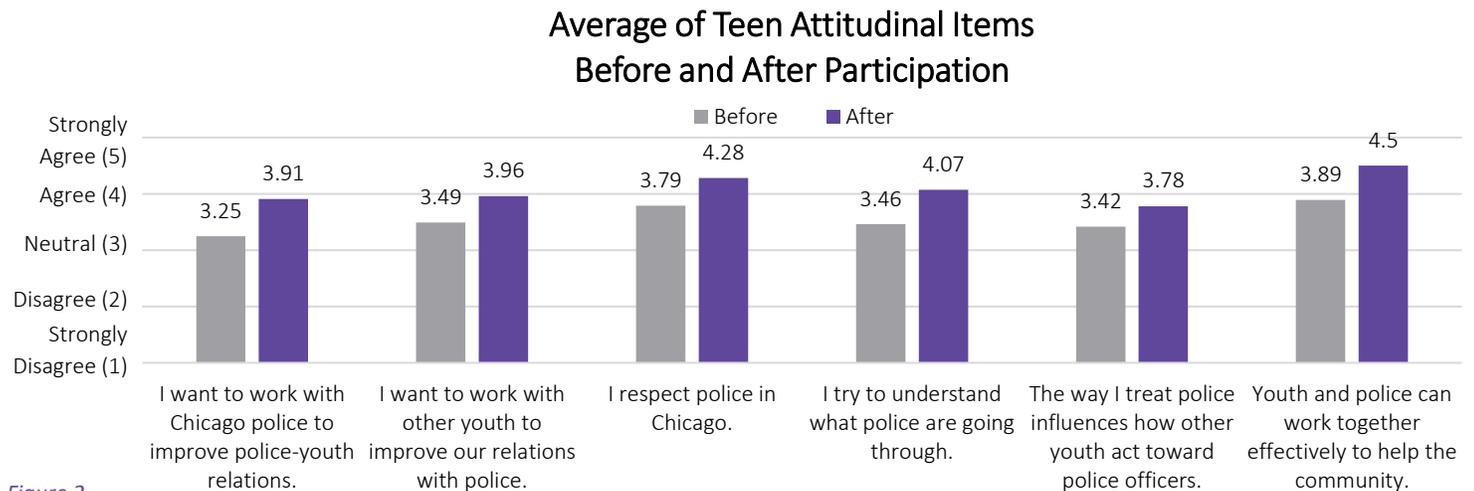


Figure 2

One additional attitudinal item was asked separately: “How much do you agree with the following statement? After participating in this program, I have a better understanding of how police officers feel.” Over 81.0% of respondents indicated they either “agree” or “strongly agree” with that statement. Of those who did not agree, 10.3% were “neutral” and the remaining 8.7% indicated they “strongly disagree”.

When asked “In the six months before beginning this program, have any of the following happened to you? Check all that apply.”, more than half of teens reported experiencing at least one of the eight listed police interactions in the six months prior to beginning the program. By far the most commonly reported interactions were positive: being helped by a police officer (61.3%) followed by receiving a “second chance” or “warning” (32.3%). However, participants who had interactions in the last six months also reported negative or disruptive interactions such as being stopped for questioning (22.6%), being told to move in a disrespectful way (19.4%), being frisked or having personal belongings searched (12.9%), or being threatened or called a name by police (12.9%).

Teen Focus Groups

Focus groups were planned and led by an ASM teen who was interning with the Research & Evaluation department this summer. Focus groups were purposefully held at the program sites that employed CPD staff or officers as program instructors. Twenty teens participated in focus groups. A comparison of survey and focus group samples and the population sample is included in the *Appendix*. Discussion topics included: why teens chose to participate in the program; the program’s effect on teens; potential program improvements and teens’ opinions of law enforcement officers and policing.

Prior views of police. Most focus group participants did not find out that their instructor was going to be a CPD officer or staff member until after they had applied to their program. When their instructors revealed their affiliation either during the interview process or on the first day of programs, participant reactions varied. The majority of respondents indicated that they were surprised or even shocked. Several of the young people explained further:

“When I found out I was shocked honestly. My experience with police officers is they had a power trip and forcing their authority for no reason....But at the same time I would expect the police officers to...push the community further and teach about their talents as well.” (Black/African American, male)

“It was surprising cause they pretty cool and laid back. They let us be us. If you didn’t know you wouldn’t think they’re police. It’s cool you get to see a police as a regular person outside of uniform.” (Black/African American, female)

When asked how they perceive the relationship between youth and police in Chicago, many participants shared that their interactions were negative and the relationship was “distant” or “rough”. A few characterized their prior view of police officers as changing over time due to different influences and experiences. Several young people articulated that flawed systems, social media, pop culture, and a lack of understanding on both sides contributes to the strained relationships. For example:

“I think it’s kinda distant. Like cause if you see on social media you probably don’t want to interact with police at all. Probably be scared ‘cause [the police will] probably think they’re doing something wrong and they think they’ll get killed or something.” (Black/African-American, female)

“...and music today there is a lot of negative things said about the police that can influence children that haven’t had a negative experience...it makes them automatically think all police officers are bad. But when you look at police – they do bad things. So if there weren’t any flawed systems in the police system we wouldn’t have any negative things to say about them. We wouldn’t have to put that in our art.” (Black/African American, male)

The stories focus group participants shared about their interactions with police prior to their participation in an ASM-CPD initiative program skewed slightly more negative than positive. At least two youth shared that their family members were police officers and additional participants recounted positive experiences at school or feeling that a police officer had protected them from an instance of danger. The most common negative experiences shared were group stops. Youth participants shared that they felt misunderstood when they are stopped as a group and that police officers should be able to tell the difference between a gang and a regular group of kids.

Experience in the program. The four programs represented in the focus groups each integrated activities related to policing and exposure to other CPD staff and officers in different ways. One program was located at the local district police station one day a week and used that day to analyze police incidents and discuss policing. Another program frequently convened a discussion circle to talk about current events and ask questions of the officer who led their program. One teen shared,



“We always have open discussions about current events and policing always comes up. Cause you know [my instructor] is a police officer so we look to him for guidance because he knows what’s going on. And sometimes he agrees with it because he knows the standard practice of police and sometimes he doesn’t [agree]. We always have that healthy discussion from both sides of the coin. We always learn something from him and he learns from us.” (Black/African-American, male)

The participants reported that interacting with police officers and staff in these programs helped change their views. Most frequently, the youth shared that the programs helped them see police officers as individuals with families and interests outside of their job. Because of their discussions about policing, several young people reported greater respect for and comfort around police. One young person eloquently shared,

“They’re not just these almost like robots programmed by the city to serve and protect. They’re real humans with emotions and feelings, thoughts just like us. They are not all the same. We can impact their lives just as much as they can impact ours.” (Black/African-American, male)

Future implementation. All focus group participants indicated that they would participate in their program again and would recommend their friends to participate as well. Many of the young people shared that they think ASM should implement more programs like this, especially in areas with a lot of gang violence. They reported valuing the exposure to police officers and learning about them as people. Several young people noted that the real advantage of interactions in programs like these is having time to build an authentic relationship. One teen shared, “It takes time. You shouldn’t push it. We see it day by day how they really are and we learn from it and we see them as different.”

Recommendations

Both the quantitative survey and qualitative focus group data support that these programs have been effective in changing participants’ views by providing a better understanding of police officers. This is true even among young people who have been arrested themselves, experienced police misconduct, or had a family member fatally shot by a police officer. Based on the results of this implementation evaluation, we recommend that the ASM-CPD initiative continue to involve police officers as instructors in future programs as a way to bridge the divide between youth and police in Chicago.

“Mindsets are hard to change, especially with everything that has happened. But opportunities to interact with police officers one on one on a personal basis when the officer is not on duty will make it easier and more likely for a teen’s mindset to change towards police officers.”

– Hispanic/Latinx, male participant from Roseland

Appendix:
Comparison of Population, Quantitative Sample, and Qualitative Sample Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Population (n=110)	Quantitative Sample (n=58)	Qualitative Sample (n=20)
Gender			
Female	37.27%	31.03%	40.00%
Male	62.73%	68.97%	60.00%
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.91%	0.00%	0.00%
Black/African American	75.45%	86.21%	65.00%
Hispanic/Latinx	19.09%	10.34%	35.00%
Two or More Races	4.55%	3.45%	0.00%
Grade			
8th	0.91%	0.00%	0.00%
9th	33.64%	29.31%	25.00%
10th	30.91%	31.03%	25.00%
11th	20.00%	18.97%	35.00%
12th	10.91%	15.52%	10.00%
College Freshman	3.64%	5.17%	5.00%
Previous Participation			
New	69.1%	65.5%	70.0%
Returning	30.9%	34.5%	30.0%