



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message from
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Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

March 27, 2017

More Partners, Better Outcomes

All CSU 21 Jurisdictions Contributing To Higher Rates Of Youth Success

It all started about three years ago when CSU 21 Director Kevin Meeks decided it would be a good idea for his probation officers to carry police radios when they went on home visits.

A probation officer who had been recently attacked by a dog had to take herself to the hospital to have lacerations and puncture wounds treated, having no means to quickly summon help.

“What really got our partnership rolling was my desire to ensure the safety of my staff,” Meeks says. “The first part of my safety plan was to purchase police radios for POs to use when they are in the field.”

The City of Martinsville Police Department enthusiastically supported the idea...so much so, in fact, that Chief Sean Dunn said the department would partner with the CSU on any high-risk home visit they needed to make. This led to further discussions on how the CSU could work with the community on a more sustained effort.

The partnership that has been forged since then continues to



From left: Ricky Walker, Director of Operations, A New Chance Organization (ANCHOR); Steve Draper, Martinsville City Sheriff; Matthew Brown, Communities Helping Improve Local Lives (CHILL) Coordinator, Piedmont Community Services; Sean Dunn, Chief of Police, City of Martinsville; T.J. Slaughter, Director of School Safety, Martinsville Public Schools; Kevin Meeks, Director, CSU 21; Sheriff Lane Perry, Henry County Sheriff's Department.

strengthen, and to have positive results among the youth served in CSU 21's jurisdiction, which includes neighboring Patrick and Henry Counties.

With the purchase of the radios, Meeks went about creating a safety training program with the help of local law enforcement, the adult probation unit, gang units, dog wardens and veterinarians.

The first significant program to arise from the burgeoning partnership was the Community Reinforcement Program (formerly the Curfew Reinforcement Visits program), an effort to reduce

technical curfew violations through the delivery of incentives.

“We visit homes in the community with the intent of ‘catching’ kids doing the right thing,” says CSU 21 Probation Supervisor Tambrey Hall. Curfew compliance rates went from about 50 percent to 95 percent in just a few months, and has stayed there. The Martinsville Police Department used this data to strengthen a community policing grant proposal they were eventually awarded. One of the larger line items of the grant's funding was to support these after-hour joint community visits. The grant has allowed CSU

21's POs to be paid overtime by the Police Department for the past year.

To help with incentives for the curfew program, area schools were approached to provide free tickets to athletic contests. "We explained to them that students who were home at a reasonable time would likely be more successful in the classroom," Meeks says. They readily agreed to participate.

In recent months, the program has expanded to include checking the homes of truant youth; conducting job readiness groups in tandem with the Workforce Investment Board, and conducting random "recidivism checks" on youth no longer actively involved with the CSU.

"The purpose of recidivism checks is simply to check on the kid, let him know we still care, and to provide referrals to any service the youth and family may need," Hall says. "The youth we have visited in this capacity have been very receptive and thanked us for checking in on them."

A recent presentation by an anti-bullying organization called "Silent Strength" showcased how far the partnership has progressed. Carroll County, VA, resident Doug Reavis spoke to about 200 rapt youth and parents about how his severely mentally disabled brother helped him to understand the profound negative effect bullying can have, and how kind actions can speak more loudly than any words.

Reavis' presentation was months in the making, Meeks says, and could not have happened without the following organizations playing a role:

Court Service Unit – Meeks initially contacted the speaker, and brought the collaboration together. CSU 21 marketed the event on social media, and with an e-mail campaign and paper flyers.

Martinsville Police Department – Led by Chief Sean Dunn, they issued a press release inviting local TV



City of Martinsville Police Chief Sean Dunn presents a food coupon to a youth as a reward for complying with curfew laws. Since the program's inception, curfew compliance has risen from 50 percent to 95 percent.

and newspapers to attend. They brought their Explore Program kids to the event to help, and provided security for the event.

A New Chance Organization (ANCHOR) – Director Ricky Walker secured the venue at the high school and brought their group home kids to the presentation.

Henry County Sheriff – In addition to marketing the event on social media, Sheriff Lane Perry reached out to the faith-based community and other civic groups to help promote the event, and arranged for the local media to advertise the event beforehand.

Martinsville City Schools – Provided for the use of the auditorium.

Henry County Schools – Promoted the event with their electronic messaging system and school calendars.

Martinsville-Henry County After 3 – Provided free pizza and drinks, and created canvas for "thumbprint commitment" booth.

Communities Helping Improve Local Lives (CHILL), Piedmont Community Services – Provided photo booth and deejay.

"The whole idea is to build relationships and have a joint presence in the community," says Western Region Program Manager Robert Foster. "We now have multiple agencies in multiple jurisdictions working together for the good of one community. Without these partnerships we are all working on a specific piece of the engine, but it's not until you put these pieces together does it work. It's amazing what kids can overcome if they simply know someone cares."

"Relationships are the conduit for success," Meeks agrees. "However, the hard work and commitment of our staff make it all work. They are exceptional."



Inspirational speaker Doug Reavis greets audience members after presentation.