

Youth Safe Haven Aims to Cut Crime Through Learning

Program Will Work With Youth and Adults in the Community to Improve the Quality Of Life

Coliseum College Prep Academy and Roots International Elev8 schools are both located in the Havenscourt neighborhood, one of East Oakland's most violent neighborhoods.

"Nevertheless, it has one fight on campus all school year," Principal Aaron Townsend said, "Thanks to the collaborative efforts of multiple agencies and services that operate at the schools." But off-campus criminal activity has disrupted that sense of calm, threatening the safety of his students and those at three other schools near 66th Avenue and International Boulevard.



Sometimes the chaos breaks out in the middle of the school day. The schools underwent six "lockdowns" in a 12-week period last fall because of gun shots and other incidences of violence in the neighborhood. In December, middle-schoolers from Roots International were outdoors for P.E. when a shooting occurred in an adjacent park. Townsend said, "No one was hurt, but the possibility was chilling."

To combat this problem, the City of Oakland and Oakland Unified School District launched in February an international community policing/mentoring model in the Havenscourt community in Oakland. The Oakland Youth Safe Haven Program, a program conceived by the Eisenhower Foundation, began operations across four schools and surrounding neighborhoods in East Oakland.

"Our goal is to impact kids positively and provide a safe haven," Oakland Police Assistant Chief Howard Jordan said.



Mr. Eddie Banks, Program Officer for Eisenhower Foundation, Mayor Jean Quan, Principals Aaron Townsend and Brandee Stewart, and OUSD School Board Trustee Chris Dobbins look on as Chief Sarna, OUSD Police Department, pledges to keep students safe.



Hayes are three of the 18 CCPA high school students who will work as mentors to younger children in the neighborhood. Ronell Johnson, Luis Reyes Alvarado, and Akeem

In the 1980s, the Eisenhower Foundation merged the American concepts of after-school youth safe havens, youth mentoring and community advocacy with the Japanese concept of neighborhood-based policing to prevent crime and assist citizens in the surrounding community. Current Youth Safe Haven programs supported by the Foundation are at the following locations: [Columbia SC](#), [Irvington NJ](#), [Jackson MS](#), [Providence RI](#), [San Juan PR](#), [Toledo OH](#), [Tuskegee AL](#). The foundation has witnessed up to a 30% reduction of crime in some of these communities.

The foundation's president and CEO, Alan Curtis, said his foundation is carefully evaluating its programs and collecting evidence to show national policymakers how police and community leaders can help residents who need it the most. "If and when the political will in the United States shifts," he said, "the model can be adopted in communities throughout the nation."

Curtis further added, "This is a focus on the truly disadvantaged. We're trying to add

another dimension to the political debate that's so focused on the middle class."

In Oakland, fifty students from the following schools will receive mentoring/tutoring: Coliseum College Preparatory Academy (CCPA), Roots International, Futures Elementary and Community United Elementary Schools. Students will receive homework assistance every day, participate in enrichment activities, learn life skills, and benefit from a trusting, consistent relationship with an adult mentor. Activities will be facilitated by trained police (OUSD and OPD), civilian mentors and high school youth from CCPA.

Akeem Hayes, a student and now Safe Haven mentor from CCPA, said students may begin to see the police differently once they begin to know them as human beings -- "not just as another cop who's going to arrest my cousin and put him in jail for no reason."

Akeem said he wants to convince younger students of the possibilities they can create for themselves if they stay in school and away from crime. "If we can lead by example, they might actually fall in love with being good," he said.

In addition, the Oakland Police Department and the OUSD Police Department will be working closely with families of the schools and neighbors to enhance problem solving community policing efforts in the area.

The Oakland Youth Safe Haven Program partners include: City of Oakland, Oakland Unified School District, OUSD Police Department, City of Oakland Police Department, Safe Passages (lead entity) and the Eisenhower Foundation (funder). For more information on the Youth Safe Have Programs, visit www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/ysh.php.