

Community Policing

Through Sport

An Outside Approach for Effective Community Engagement

The Dream Courts Project

Nancy Lieberman Charities



COPS

Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

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This project was supported, in whole or in part, by cooperative agreement number 2019-CK-WX-K016 awarded to Nancy Lieberman Charities by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) or contributor(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific individuals, agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s), the contributor(s), or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

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Recommended citation:

Nancy Lieberman Charities. 2023. *Community Policing Through Sport: An Outside Approach for Effective Community Engagement—The Dream Courts Project*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

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Introduction

The badge, obviously, is symbolic to people. It can mean only enforcement—somebody's coming to get a ticket or somebody's going to go to jail. We've got to accept this has negative connotations in some neighborhoods. Today, it could mean we shot an unarmed black male and no one was held accountable for it. But on this court, it's going to mean something different. It's going to mean police officers came and partnered with Nancy Lieberman to bring a recreation to my community where there was none.

— Former Dallas Police Chief David O. Brown, a driving force behind the creation of the Kids & Cops Dream Courts program that yielded many of the insights in this guide

In 2016, the Dallas, Texas, community and its police department faced one of its most brutal days. That summer, a standoff and shooting in downtown Dallas resulted in the deaths of four Dallas Police Department (DPD) officers and a Dallas Area Rapid Transit officer. The lone shooter was motivated by his perceptions of police racism and brutality toward African American people.

Barely a week after the shooting, then-chief David Brown called Basketball Hall of Famer Nancy Lieberman to discuss using Dream Courts, a core program of Nancy Lieberman Charities that builds state-of-the-art outdoor basketball courts in underserved areas, as a tool to help heal divisions in the city.

The mission of Nancy Lieberman Charities was not originally oriented toward law enforcement. Nancy Lieberman Charities is an education and wellness nonprofit organization focused on assisting underserved youth in the educational field. But as a result of that conversation, we developed our Kids & Cops programming, which has now been deployed in partnership with law enforcement agencies on Dream Courts across the country. The Kids & Cops initiative aims to make basketball more accessible to kids by giving them an inexpensive recreational outlet, a safe place to play, the chance to interact socially, and a path to learning the importance of teamwork and good sportsmanship. It is a sustainable program to help build and strengthen the bond between local officers and their communities.

Our goal is for this guide to give law enforcement agencies an alternative perspective on serving the community as a law enforcement agency or agency partner. Nancy Lieberman Charities is not a task force or law enforcement agency—rather, we are an organization with an outside perspective on positive community relationship building.

Value of Community Policing

What is community policing?

It is, to me, at the very core of law enforcement that we're supposed to be a part of the community—not a separate part, but a part of the community. We're supposed to be almost like a neighbor would be. Even though many of us come from totally different backgrounds than where we police, we still need to be able to make that connection to the fiber of those neighborhoods.

— Former Dallas Police Chief Brown

Trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve and protect is essential: It gives communities a foundation for civil discourse regarding how their statutes are enforced. This century's expansion of communication channels, including social media, has provided agencies many ways to communicate with the community while also creating platforms for those who want to highlight perceived police shortcomings. While the concept of community policing predates these technologies, its precepts provide an approach for addressing the concerns the technologies have intensified. But, in the words of Police Foundation Executive Director Joseph Persichini,¹ “Law enforcement cannot be successful without the faith and trust of the people they serve.”

A 2013 report spearheaded by the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at the University of California – Berkeley School of Law provided some insights into the development of community policing standards. It found that “for the first half of the 20th century, police departments in most jurisdictions in the United States operated under what is generally referred to as a ‘professional’ model of policing.”² This approach involved hierarchical structures within departments and an emphasis on response to crimes. From the 1970s onward, however, philosophies shifted to a more preventative model using direct partnerships between community members and police to address the root causes of criminal activity. The Warren Institute

1. Karen L. Bune, “How PAL Makes a Difference for Cops, Kids, and Communities,” *Police1*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.police1.com/community-policing/articles/how-pal-makes-a-difference-for-cops-kids-and-communities-TwjNpCPyGE94VPN7/>.

2. Sarah Lawrence and Bobby McCarthy, *What Works in Community Policing? A Best Practices Context for Measure Y Efforts* (Berkeley, CA: The Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy, UC Berkeley School of Law, 2013), https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/What_Works_in_Community_Policing.pdf.

report cited a report from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) that showed that in 2012, 81 percent of the nation's population [was] served by law enforcement agencies that had adopted community policing approaches.”³

Community policing is not a specific tool but a philosophy; law enforcement agencies across the country have different implementation strategies for community policing practices. Agencies have to understand their community as a whole and what the community needs: policing methods in Hampton, New York, may look different than in the wards of Houston, Texas.

Successful community policing begins with organizational transformation and understanding of common goals: to protect, engage with, and keep the community safe. Organizational transformation involves shifting the entire agency towards a community-oriented policing philosophy, from police response to investigations. The transformation involves both sworn and civilian staff. Without this shift, an agency cannot have meaningful change.

Establishing partnerships with the community lets residents know local officers are there for them, to protect and serve; this, in turn, creates legitimacy for the agency. These partnerships include nonprofits, businesses, faith-based leaders, elected officials, hospitals, etc. Sustaining and enhancing a partnership is just as important as establishing a partnership. Once a base of trust and understanding has been established within the community, local agencies must problem-solve to ensure safety and continued confidence while continuing to strengthen relationships with the community. Following a community policing model makes public safety a shared responsibility amongst all involved.

Outside approaches and adaptation

While law enforcement agencies have their own academies, training programs, and policies, real-life hands-on engagement is key to assure positive community relationships and partnerships.

“Community policing cannot be established and enhanced without having officers ready and available to work with youth daily,” writes George Mason University Criminology Professor Karen L. Bune.⁴

3. Lawrence and McCarthy, *What Works in Community Policing?* (see note 2).

4. Bune, “How PAL makes a difference” (see note 1).

Law enforcement agencies use programming such as citizen police academies, food drives, back-to-school giveaways, and holiday donations to help build and sustain these relationships. While there are many ways for community policing to be effective, they all require agency personnel at every level to absorb and adapt to different ideas and practices. Engagement between law enforcement and the community must be sustainable to build a legitimate relationship.

The Nancy Lieberman Charities approach uses sports as our tool of choice, drawing on the unique experiences and knowledge of our namesake founder and our years of programming experience. Bypassing differences of age, race, religion, political view, or economic status, sport can be a great equalizer. Pick any five people from different backgrounds, occupations, or ages and put them on a basketball court; even if they have little to no experience, they will play and engage with each other. We take this model and connect local officers with youth and young adults to build positive relationships.

Sports have helped build bonds with young people. New York Police Department Lieutenant Ed Flynn formed the forerunner of today's Police Athletic Leagues (PAL, now often known as "Police Activities Leagues") in New York City in the early part of the 20th century. He wanted to keep troubled youth off the streets through engagement in baseball.⁵ His ideas eventually spread nationwide, and now local PALs allow officers to mentor children through sports and similar activities. Nancy Lieberman Charities has often created facilities to complement those efforts.

As the liaison between the City of Flagstaff Police Department and Nancy Lieberman Charities, I was personally involved with coordinating activities aimed at building relationships between law enforcement and the youth in our community. Our approach included two of the most popular sports, basketball and baseball. I participated in playing basketball and baseball with the kids and it seemed to open them up to asking more questions about our job, as well as why we take certain actions against people. The conversations increased understanding of policing at the youth level, which I hope would continue as they grow and learn. The ability to work with the Nancy Lieberman Charities in conjunction with the DOJ COPS Office definitely helped bridge gaps between the youth in our community and law enforcement, which will hopefully draw the youth toward becoming community guardians and peacekeepers in their futures.

— Lt. Charles Hernandez, Flagstaff (Arizona) Police Department

5. 146 Cong. Rec. S. 14,091 (1999), Introduction of the Police Athletic League Youth Enrichment Act (PAL) of 1999, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-1999-11-05/html/CREC-1999-11-05-pt1-PgS14088-5.htm>.

Building this community engagement is even more important in lower-income communities. A 2014 Brookings Institution report concluded that “across all types of personal crimes, victimization rates are significantly higher for individuals living in low-income households.”⁶ Their research suggested “crime tends to concentrate in disadvantaged areas.”⁷

Disadvantaged areas are often underserved by sports facilities. According to the 2020 State of Play report of the Aspen Institute’s Project Play, “Low-income youth played sports on a regular basis slightly more in 2019, up from 21.6 percent to 22.7 percent. There was a 21.6 percentage point difference in 2019 between kids living in homes whose incomes were less than \$25,000 and kids from homes with incomes of more than \$100,000. That gap was 15 points in 2012 and keeps growing.”⁸

At Nancy Lieberman Charities, we want to shrink the gap in sports participation to help kids from low-income households get healthier and avoid negative involvement in the criminal justice system. We address these issues together through the Dream Courts and Kids & Cops programming, which builds the bond between local officers and the youth and communities they protect.

Value of positive play

Kids whose dreams revolve around positive achievements become more productive community members. When they aspire to be athletes, or educators, or even cops, young people may be less likely to take illegal destructive actions that could derail those goals.

In the Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Carmen Perez said, “In the community [where] I grew up in southern California, Oxnard, we had the Police Athletic League. A lot of officers in our communities would volunteer and coach at the police activities league. That became our alternative from violence, from gangs and things like that.”⁹

6. Melissa S. Kearney, Benjamin H. Harris, Elisa Jácome, and Lucie Parker, *Ten Economic Facts about Crime and Incarceration in the United States*, policy memo (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2014), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/v8_thp_10crimefacts.pdf.

7. Kearney et al., *Ten Economic Facts about Crime* (see note 6).

8. “Project Play: State of Play 2020,” The Aspen Institute, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/state-of-play-2020/ages-6-12>.

9. President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), 15, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P311>.

If a kid is playing basketball, they are not shoplifting or vandalizing property and getting apprehended for these offenses. The time young people spend on criminal activity, and the punishment they face for it, can negatively impact their futures. According to the Brookings Institution, “juvenile detention is believed to have significant effects on a youth’s future since it jeopardizes his or her accumulation of human and social capital during an important developmental stage.”¹⁰ Brookings further determined that “those who are incarcerated as juveniles are 15 percentage points more likely to be incarcerated as adults for violent crimes or 14 percentage points more likely to be incarcerated as adults for property crimes.”¹¹ The time police spend with youth in positive engagements can benefit the young person’s life through positive mentorship and coaching, as well as encourage positive citizenship and contribute to a safer community.

Lifting up neighborhoods

Dream Courts are a place for children not just to interact with peers and law enforcement but also to dream big! Opportunities for activities and places for children to go after school, during evening hours, and in the summer are vital for communities across the United States. Keeping children off the street and away from crime scenes is good not only for children but for our cities as well.

The Dream Court makes me feel like I’m on a court in the NBA. It’s also a special place to me ‘cause I feel like it’s ‘my’ court. I just feel at home when I’m playing on it.

— De’Vonte, age 12, from the Ocoee Region Boys and Girls Club,
Cleveland, Tennessee

Programming gives youth the opportunity to learn, be safe, and change the trajectory of their life. Our Dream Courts create sustainable space for children to keep physically active and safe.

The celebrity factor

Through her accomplishments in basketball, Nancy Lieberman achieved a certain amount of fame. She has attempted to use her status as a well-known Basketball Hall of Famer to boost the communities she works with. But she is certainly not the only celebrity with an impulse to help: Civic-minded local celebrities can be a tool for connecting with constituencies. If young people see someone they are already impressed with modeling mutual respect with officers, it can impact their perceptions.

10. Kearney et al., *Ten Economic Facts about Crime* (see note 6).

11. Kearney et al., *Ten Economic Facts about Crime* (see note 6).

One example of a successful celebrity-led outreach is a Shop With A Cop event our charity created in conjunction with NFL player Kavon Frazier. Kavon, Nancy, and Nancy's son TJ (who is also a professional basketball player) accompanied officers to a local Under Armour store where they shopped with underserved kids; each child received donated gift cards to spend. As an African American player for the Dallas Cowboys—a team many kids aspire to play for—Kavon was well-positioned to counter negative stereotypes about police in a way kids would pay attention to.

I wanted to promote the fact that they're human and not all police officers are bad. They have families and they have to put their life on the line to make this community stronger for us. So I just appreciate that fact that they do what they do in this community and that's why I wanted to bring them here with the children to get them involved in that and for them to lean on each other.

— NFL Defensive Back Kavon Frazier

One advantage of reaching out through sport is that, especially in larger metro areas, it is often possible to reach a number of current and former athletes who have name recognition because they have played for the local team. However, the celebrity factor does not have to consist solely of pro athletes. Anyone with elevated status in the eyes of young people can be an asset—local college athletes, coaches, entertainers, and even teachers. And don't forget social media influencers! One has to meet kids in spaces where they're comfortable, and recent generations are digital natives.

Addressing bias

The Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing cited Bryan Stevenson's finding that "non-Whites have always had less confidence in law enforcement than Whites, likely because 'the poor and people of color have felt the greatest impact of mass incarceration.'"¹² The events of the last decade have brought race-based tensions to the forefront of public consciousness.

Nancy Lieberman experienced firsthand how hoops on a neighborhood court can overcome racial barriers when she ventured into Harlem to play in Rucker Park as a teenager. At that time, she competed with men who differed from her in age, ethnicity, and upbringing—and formed bonds with them.

12. Bryan Stevenson, "Confronting Mass Imprisonment and Restoring Fairness to Collateral Review of Criminal Cases," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 41 (Summer 2006): 339–367.

“I’m really grateful to the Black community for loving on me and for trusting me and their kindness to me, because I was this skinny young redheaded White kid and they could have thought I’m a fake or a fraud,” Nancy said. “But the Black community not only embraced me, but they loved on me and they became my family, and so people say, ‘Well, why would you go into the hood?’ I’m not afraid to go in the hood. I have people there. They care about me.”

These experiences formed the foundation of Nancy’s drive to bring Dream Courts and the Kids & Cops program to underserved communities. If a “skinny young redheaded White kid” can find common ground with African American men through basketball, it’s certainly conceivable that members of the police force could do the same.

Importance of communication

Communication is key in every aspect of life, especially between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. The ability to record interactions as they happen and publicize them through social media has led to a growing expectation that any interaction between law enforcement and the community will be negative. Bridging the gap this expectation creates is crucial to maintaining a free yet orderly society. As the Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing stated, “Decades of research and practice support the premise that people are more likely to obey the law when they believe that those who are enforcing it have authority that is perceived as legitimate by those subject to the authority. The public confers legitimacy only on those whom they believe are acting in procedurally just ways.”¹³

The National League of Cities suggested “The community needs to see, know, and feel that the municipality is committed to working with the community to find the right resolution.”¹⁴

Policing can be an imprecise business. Even when officers act in accordance with their duties, they may still be perceived with suspicion.

Are uniformed officers keeping the peace or unlawfully impeding community members’ right to peaceably assemble? Is a detective gathering evidence or seeking a pretext to harass an innocent person? Should law enforcement personnel rigidly adhere to the letter of the law, or should they interpret statutes differently based on the situation? Differing views on what are often emotionally charged situations create barriers to effective communication between police and the public.

13. President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, *Final Report*, 1 (see note 9).

14. National League of Cities, *Municipal Action Guide* (see note 17).

Our Dream Courts and sport in general are platforms to break down those communication barriers. Officers can communicate with people from different backgrounds with different viewpoints. Relationships established in the relaxed setting of a basketball court can facilitate calmer discussion in tense situations.

In accordance with the philosophy of community policing, we encourage officers and agencies to use these positive interactions to build a foundation of trust with their communities. Something as simple as a pickup game of basketball, handing out a winter coat, or just saying hello in passing all help create an atmosphere of trust and to communicate to community members that they have a voice and that they have value. As former Dallas Police Chief David O. Brown told us in an interview, law enforcement “needs your perspective in order to be able to do our job better.” The lines of communication sports opens can help community members feel comfortable keeping police informed of relevant conditions in their neighborhoods.

The communication lines established on the basketball court can stay open online, as well. The Dallas Police Department has more than 350,000 followers. When they post something positive, it has a huge potential audience—both the account’s own followers and external media sources.

The Kids & Cops Program

The Kids & Cops project was supported by a cooperative agreement with the COPS Office. This award allowed Nancy Lieberman Charities to use its community partner organizations and law enforcement agencies across the United States to not only implement Kids & Cops programming but also to gather feedback from agencies on their engagement with and feedback from their communities as well as the barriers, challenges, and successes of the program. In turn, this feedback will allow us to create, discuss, and implement new ideas.

The 2018 award enabled more than 90 events or programs to be hosted by our partnered Dream Court sites, with approximately 130 hours of programming and engagement with officers. Roughly 200 officers from 10 different agencies participated in the program alongside approximately 3,890 young people. Most of the program interaction between local law enforcement and community youth took place on or around our Dream Courts, but activities, events, and programming looked different at every site. Every law enforcement agency knows its community and what will resonate with its members to build positive and impactful relationships.

And each of those relationships is a two-way street: for the youth engaging and building trust with law enforcement and for the officers learning about the communities they serve on a more personal level.

Our officers patrol the streets every day, and I don't know how often they actually interact with the youth in our community unless it's for cause. Having this program has allowed us to get out, meet the children we see playing, and learn their wants for their community. There has been better communication with our staff and the southern community than I have seen in many years.

— Officer Devalon Lee-Arkansas, Dallas (Texas) Police Department

The Dream Court is special to me because it's one of the things I look forward to the most every day when I come to the club. It's a safe place to play and it is also the reason my neighbors signed up to come to the club with me.

— Ethan, age 11, from the Reba M. Powers Unit Boys and Girls Club in Phoenix, Arizona

This relationship-building helps influence young people toward a positive outlook on officers—something many children in the underserved areas of our Dream Court sites do not have. With the prevalence of social media, it is easy for anyone to see headlines about tragic events in our country—and if that is all we see, we assume that is the only kind of story happening. It is also easy to encounter misinformation or to misconstrue real events—and for youth, it can be especially hard to tell what is real from what is fake.

Without the uniform and badge on, each and every law enforcement officer is a dad, mom, brother, sister, son, daughter, and so on—they are human beings, just like everyone else, performing a public service. Through in-person, real-life communication, children can see first-hand all of the good local law enforcement provides for their community.

It's courts like this that allow police officers to come out into the community and interact without having been called, without something bad happening.

— Dallas Integrated Public Safety Solutions Officer David Pughes

Key Characteristics of Effective Outreach

Although each law enforcement agency knows its community makeup better than any outsider, there are still key universal areas to focus on when reaching out to the community:

- **Respect.** To make the world and our country a more civil place, learning to respect others is essential. It doesn't mean we agree with everyone on everything, but it does mean being open-minded enough to respect others' viewpoints.
- **Ethics.** Upholding the principles of doing the right thing in any given situation is crucial when making decisions on- or off-duty. For your message to resonate with the community, you have to "walk the walk" as well as "talk the talk."
- **Common sense.** Being able to "read the room" is important for officers. Knowing the right situation to say something can be the difference between a relationship made and a very bad ending.
- **Civility.** In policing, civility is crucial to overall success. Officers who have appropriate "bedside manner" with community members avoid many of the verbal and physical hazards prevalent in policing. Civility is not a sign of weakness, and properly exercised, it can enhance officer safety.

Accountability for a strong legacy

Agency leadership plays a pivotal role in allowing the philosophy of community policing to flourish. If leaders do not implement, teach, encourage, or believe in the positive effects of community policing, then why should the agency's officers? Communication and implementation start at the top. Chiefs', captains', lieutenants', and sergeants' communication to their officers and their involvement in the program is key.

The leadership that communicates the action plan to engage with youth and residents must also practice what they preach. To gain trust with your community, you must first gain trust within your agency. Once you have a solid action plan to implement community policing, officers must then go out to engage with people.

Nancy Liberman Charities facilitates this interaction through sport, shopping events, coffee talks, and other programs of similar nature that strengthen the community's relationship with its officers.

Perspectives from the Field

Results and feedback

Programs, events, communication, and activities surrounding community policing will look different in different communities. It is important for your agency and its officers to understand the community with which they are engaging to make the most impact. The community responses described here showcase the variety of forms community policing through sports can take in law enforcement agencies across the United States.

Cleveland, Tennessee

A Dream Court donation at first glance looks like a basketball court, but there is so much more to the court and what it stands for: a place for community togetherness, inclusion, and relationship building. The Boys and Girls Club of Ocoee Region in Cleveland, Tennessee, is one of our partnered sites. Before the installation of the Dream Court at their club, there was no access to any outside play areas other than a small field for games, and basketball is one of the more popular activities in their community. The Dream Court is now the center of their programming for both health and wellness and education. Since 2016, it has served as a multipurpose play space for tennis, basketball, and a wellness program that consists of yoga, Body Boot Camp, high-intensity interval training classes, and various other physical activity programs for adults and youth. Through the COPS Office award, local law enforcement was able to join young people in these and other activities.

Dallas, Texas

The City of Dallas and Dallas Police Department kicked off the Kids & Cops Dream Court program back in 2016 with Nancy Lieberman Charities. Our city now has over 15 Kids & Cops Dream Courts where DPD engage with local youth. The program has given our youth opportunities to play in their communities as a way of preventing youth criminal activity. Our department has seen the positive interaction and dialogue with officers across the board and the impact of a celebrity athlete like Nancy Lieberman, believing in them, has allowed local Dallas youth to chase their dreams.

— Officer Devalon Lee-Arkansas, Dallas Police Department

In 2012, Chief David Brown tasked me with growing DPD's youth outreach efforts by starting the Youth Outreach Unit. That summer, [the] DPD experienced a shooting in a rough neighborhood that had the potential to cause significant problems between officers and the community. If it weren't for the efforts of two patrol sergeants, the incident could've escalated into a riot. The next day, my sergeant and I asked our bosses if we could get youth programming started in the Dixon Circle neighborhood as soon as possible.

Within weeks, we started an elementary age after-school program in partnership with Dallas Parks and Recreation at the Larry Johnson Rec Center. We offered basketball training, played board games, and helped the kids with their homework. While we were working with the kids, we had an audience of young men (mostly 18–25 years old) from the neighborhood. They wanted to make sure we really were there to work with the kids and not just there for show. That led to my officers asking those young men if they wanted to play some basketball against the officers.

Next thing we know, we are having some lively basketball games and asked more officers to join in. One day when I was there, I asked one of my troops if we were making a difference in the community. As we were talking, one of the young men started a fast break with one of my officers got on his heels. I've watched enough basketball to know that to stop the easy layup, my guy was going to have to commit a hard foul on that poor kid. I've also watched enough basketball to recognize that hard foul had the potential to initiate a lot of pushing and shoving or worse. I felt like I was watching a train wreck unfold before my eyes!

As I'm planning my explanation to my bosses about how we had a brawl break out at our basketball game, sure enough, my officer rips that kid out of midair and takes away that easy basket. Both players crashed into the wall at the end of the court pretty hard. It was obvious that the young man did not take kindly to having that layup taken away from him and immediately bowed up to my officer. My nightmare was becoming a reality but then, my officer put his arm around the young man's shoulder and began to joke with him. The young man immediately relaxed and started joking back with my officer. Situation

defused! I turned to the officer I'd been talking with and she answered my question - "Yeah, we're making a difference here." I definitely had to agree with her!

In the months to come, those basketball games changed a little. It morphed from officers against young men to integrated teams consisting of officers and those young men playing as teammates. The games were still pretty lively and there was some serious trash talking but everyone was just enjoying a basketball game.

— Lieutenant Sally Lannom, Dallas Police Department (retired)

Durant, Oklahoma

In June of 2018, we opened a court in Carl Albert Park in Durant. Here's what their chief of police had to say about how they've used it:

Nancy Lieberman Charities has made a huge impact in our community policing efforts. The Dream Court and police logo basketballs allow officers to engage children of all ages and their parents in a positive atmosphere. The avenue of sport has allowed us to build relationships in our community which have improved the quality of life in our parks and enhanced relationships in a healthy way.

— Chief David Houser, Durant (Oklahoma) Police Department

Plano, Texas

Nancy Lieberman Charities' Dream Court has allowed the Plano Police Department to forge relationships with our youth that will last. This program is built on transparency between the youth and officers that has allowed trust to be the foundation. We are thankful for this opportunity to get to know each of these wonderful young women and men and this was made possible by Nancy Lieberman Charities.

— Andrae Smith, Plano (Texas) Police Department

Social justice lecture series

We recently started a lecture series in conjunction with The Sumners Foundation. We use basketball to teach lessons about civics and responsibility, incorporating angles of diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Why is this important for agencies? Police action is the method by which the rules of civil society are enforced, and community members need to understand why cops do what they do.

The live presentation for these lectures begins with a pair of introductory videos explaining the series and the concept to be covered that day. We then have community leaders provide their perspective and engage in discussion with the young people in attendance. The complete curriculum is still in development, but one finished video covers “Respect, Regard, Authority In a Civil Society.” It’s especially relevant for this exercise because it discusses working out one’s differences in a respectful manner and uses the Kids & Cops Dream Courts program as an example. Here’s the script to the video, which you can watch at https://youtu.be/XJKJu4_fJAc.

Nancy Lieberman Charities builds Kids & Cops Dream Courts. We work with police departments and community centers to build basketball courts where kids can play safely. And where officers can sometimes join them. We think the structure of sports, with rules and teamwork and achievement, encourages one person to regard another with respect.

In a civil society, residents default to treating each other with respect – even if they come from different backgrounds; even if they don’t look alike; or even if they don’t like actually each other.

Instead of challenging each other to a duel or calling the other person a cotton-headed ninnymuggins on social media, they work out their differences in a respectful manner.

That’s especially important when it involves people in a position of authority – like police officers. And as we know, sometimes those interactions become the opposite of respectful.

Would it be better if kids and cops could see each other in a new light? So civil – as opposed to uncivil, disrespectful, or even violent – dialogue can begin.

You like to be treated with respect. So do other people.

Conclusion

Boxing great Muhammad Ali is credited with coining the phrase in the late 1970s, “Service to others is the rent you pay for the room here on earth.”¹⁵ By that time, a young Nancy Lieberman had already met the fighter, who would become her lifelong friend and mentor. She often cites that quote in her dedication speeches at Dream Courts, and she credits Ali with stoking her philanthropic mindset.

Ali, then known as Cassius Clay, fell in love with his sport at the age of 12 when he began fighting at the Columbia Gym in Louisville, Kentucky. A police officer named Joe Martin ran the gym and invited Ali to join their programs after the young Clay had asked his help in filing a police report about a stolen bicycle. Martin coached the champ throughout his amateur career and mentored many young athletes throughout his life and long police career.¹⁶

The young people you influence may not become The Greatest, but you can help them become great community members through community policing and sports.

Community policing can look very different in different agencies. We have shared what has worked for our organization, but building a framework for impactful and successful community policing requires critical thinking about your own community and its relationship with law enforcement. We hope the examples, real-life stories, and information in this guide will help your agency and its officers create a lasting community policing legacy to bridge the gap between law enforcement and those they serve and protect.

15. “30 of Muhammad Ali’s best quotes,” *USA Today*, June 5, 2016, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/boxing/2016/06/03/muhammad-ali-best-quotes-boxing/85370850/>.

16. Melissa Wickes, “How a Sports Organizer Shaped the Greatest of All Time,” *LeagueApps*, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://blog.leagueapps.com/sports-organizer-shaped-muhammed-ali/>.

About Nancy Lieberman Charities

Nancy Lieberman Charities focuses on improving outcomes for underserved youth in the areas of education, health, wellness, and career/life preparedness. We look to create impactful programs that not only achieve their goals but do so in ways conducive to fostering inclusive attitudes regarding racial/gender equality, social justice, and civic engagement. Initiatives like our Dream Courts, educational college scholarships, basketball camps, civic responsibility/social justice lecture series, mentorship, and STEM/technology programs contribute to the health, self-esteem, and career success of the young people we serve.

We believe in bringing people together, and nowhere is creating bonds of congeniality more important than in neighborhoods between law enforcement personnel and those they serve. Our Kids & Cops Dream Courts program provides officers multiple ways to connect with youth and pave the way for productive interactions throughout their lives.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than \$20 billion to provide training and technical assistance, enhance crime fighting technology, and add more than 136,000 officers to our nation's streets. COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.

The early 21st century saw significant mainstream attention paid to the longstanding problem of community distrust of police, especially among underserved populations, and its consequences. Nancy Lieberman Charities has responded by working with law enforcement agencies in U.S. municipalities to create neighborhood courts and accompanying programs to build bonds with at-risk populations. This paper explores lessons learned through the experience, as well as outside research, to establish best practices for how such initiatives may be able to enhance existing community policing concepts. The findings indicate that elements of the Kids & Cops Dream Courts program can be applied to departmental initiatives in multiple ways and lessons learned from it can provide ready examples for departments interested in expanding community efforts.



COPS

Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

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To obtain details about COPS Office programs,
call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at cops.usdoj.gov.