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IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO PREVENT CRIME

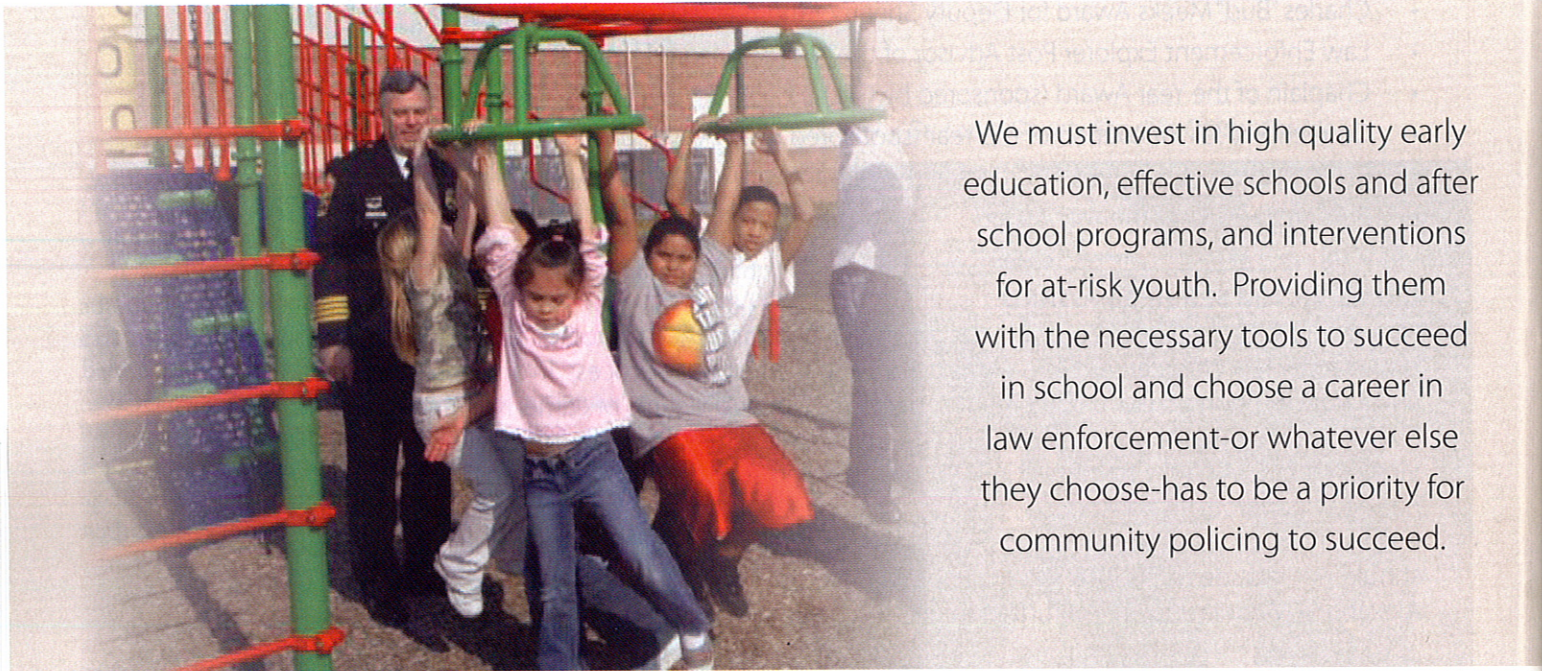


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 Crime Prevention in the Community
 NPLeX Tackles the Meth Epidemic

Racial Equity is Key to Crime Prevention

By Gabriel Morgan, Newport News Sheriffs Office,
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We must invest in high quality early education, effective schools and after school programs, and interventions for at-risk youth. Providing them with the necessary tools to succeed in school and choose a career in law enforcement-or whatever else they choose-has to be a priority for community policing to succeed.

Over the past several days, communities around the nation have commemorated the 50th anniversary of the historic March On Washington, one of the most important days in the history of civil rights. I looked upon these events with a special perspective on how diversity in law enforcement impacts public safety.

That perspective was founded when I was a young child in Brooklyn, New York. In my neighborhood back then, we didn't look on the cops with a whole lot of respect. They were mostly white and we had a few choice words for them.

But there was an African American sergeant in our neighborhood, he took me under his wing and encouraged me to consider a career in law enforcement. We trusted him, and he knew how essential it was to build trust in the people and community he served. He was able to do it better than most, because he looked like us, cared about us, and understood our community.

The law enforcement profession has advanced to new heights as technology has improved, but our best resources are still people our people in uniform and the people in our communities. I learned that lesson young, and have taken it to heart in my 37 years in law enforcement, seven of those as Sheriff of Newport News, Virginia. Our communities today are more diverse than my neighborhood in Brooklyn. Having racially and ethnically diverse officers allows us to make meaningful, empathetic connections to the people we serve.

I know from my experiences as a law enforcement leader that when people trust us, they are more likely to report quality-of-life issues, cooperate with criminal investigations, assist in

informal crime prevention measures, and have a higher amount of respect for us and the work we do. This respect leads to greater safety for law enforcement officers and enables us to be more effective in preventing and addressing crime. The Fight Crime: Invest in Kids report entitled Racial Equity Strengthens Communities and Makes Police More Effective (www.fight-crime.org/racialequity), highlights these findings.

I've taken great strides to improve the diversity of my department in Newport News, and have colleagues across the country doing the same. Expanding recruitment efforts to racial minority groups at colleges and universities and being deliberate when cultivating relationships have paid dividends for our department. Working with young kids from racial minority groups to carefully break through the negative stigma often associated with a career in law enforcement in minority communities is another effective way to garner more minority candidates.

Unfortunately, some kids from these minority communities have not received the necessary skills to qualify for a career in law enforcement. We must invest in high quality early education, effective schools and after school programs, and interventions for at-risk youth. Providing them with the necessary tools to succeed in school and choose a career in law enforcement-or whatever else they choose-has to be a priority for community policing to succeed.

By doing these things, we can improve on the diversity among our ranks and continue to make our communities safer. ✪