

Achievers Can Become Vital Law Enforcement Tools

By Jim Ferber

Can a YMCA Achievers program really keep young people off the streets and keep our communities safer? How about insulating our youth from a life of crime?

The first key component to making an Achievers program benefit the community is partnering with law enforcement. The second is to elevate the program so that it has the attention of senior leadership.

The Central Florida YMCA Achievers Program includes the YMCA Black Achievers Program and the YMCA Achievers Program — Developing Hispanic Leaders. Together, they are reaching out to at-risk and underserved communities. We also refer to it as a parent's best friend, because the program makes great strides to help parents and their kids through often tumultuous teen years.

I'm a true believer that connecting top law enforcement officers with the young Achievers will go a long way to building safer communities and providing positive alternatives to juvenile crime. This is a more focused approach to making sure the YMCA is a place for everyone, regardless of social or economic status.

Our program is well known by the Public Safety Director to the Sheriff to the Police Chief and to all of the law enforcement professionals throughout our region. We have their full engagement.

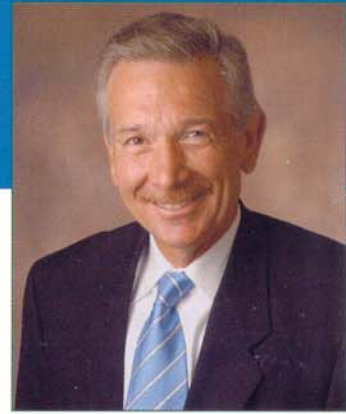
Every student is very familiar with Police Chief Val Demings. In fact, she is an adult Achiever herself, and she regularly clears her schedule in an effort to give YMCA Achievers pep talks, career information, celebrate achievements, and to encourage college tours.

Provide Alternatives

"As a Law Enforcement Executive, I fully understand the need for programs in our communities that provide youth with alternatives to juvenile delinquency. Statistics reveal a significant increase in the number of juveniles involved in violent crime," says Chief Demings.

"But there is hope. The YMCA Achievers Programs focus on academic, social, and career development, and provide a new and innovative approach to building character and potential in today's youth. The Orlando Police Department is proud to partner with the Central Florida YMCA Achievers Program."

She spoke to the students recently, who had gathered for a Saturday morning career cluster. She commanded the attention of the teens with a booming voice that



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resonated throughout the crowd, and her message to them was clear: "Stay in school, believe in yourself, and dream."

Her involvement has proven one of the important elements that can help any group of Achievers really get to know the

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person behind the badge. Nearly 90 percent of the 3,500 students who have participated in the Central Florida YMCA Teen Achievers Program have gone on to enter colleges and universities.

Crime prevention programs are abundant, but teaming up a YMCA Achievers Program with a local law enforcement agency puts two very focused organizations together to accomplish community goals.

Our Achievers Program focuses on assisting black, Hispanic, and other youth and teens in preparing, pursuing, and achieving post-secondary education and career goals of their choice. We want our kids to be exposed to careers that stretch their boundaries.

We do that through job shadowing