

HEAR ME: PITTSBURGH YOUTH-POLICE RELATIONSHIPS

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Beginning in January 2014, Hear Me partnered with Allies for Children to gather young people's (age 6-20) experiences and ideas relating to the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police. Conducting over 100 interviews using six pre-determined questions, Hear Me interviewed young people about their overall perception of, and interactions with officers, along with their recommendations for the next Chief of Police (more info available at http://www.hear-me.net/take_part). Hear Me edited (for length, not content) the students' responses to short audio clips, which can be found at www.hear-me.net/pghpolice.

EMERGENT THEMES

1. Hear Me asked students to categorize their perception of police officers as "positive" (54 students), "neutral" (35 students), or "negative" (12 students). Of those who initially responded "neutral," 9 students shared stories that indicated a **positive experience** and 23 shared stories that indicated a **negative experience** with police. In our interpretation, these 23 students recognized the role of police officers as **positive public servants, but a negative personal experience** changed their perception to neutral.
2. More than thirty percent of interviewees reported **feeling profiled** by the police on the basis of race, age, or gender. Many students felt targeted by officers, and believed that officers look for reasons to confront them.
"Juveniles are the ones they harass a lot, and they get their way with the juveniles because there ain't much a juvenile can do." (Jamal, 19 - <http://www.hear-me.net/stories/7724>)
3. Similarly, more than twenty percent of students asked that police officers be more **open-minded and empathetic** by releasing prejudices and understanding the context of a crime.
"If you're coming from a home...where you don't have both parents; say you're just being raised by your mom and she's working two, three jobs... you should be able to understand, "ok, that kid, he's kinda hurtin' right now... maybe I should go talk to him instead of push all on him."" (Kelsey, 18 - <http://www.hear-me.net/stories/7635>)
4. About twenty-five percent of students asked for more opportunities to have **positive interactions** between police officers, communities and youth. They identified that school programs and neighborhood officers can be positive influences and can help improve the relationship between police and youth.
"If you're young and they talk to you a lot, you'll grow up and understand that they are there to help you" (Brittany, 18 - <http://www.hear-me.net/stories/7647>)

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of students agreed on the following:

- The job of a police officer is to protect and serve, prioritize prevention of crime and to "get bad guys." (William, 11 <http://www.hear-me.net/stories/7856>)
- Students believe a person will become a police officer to protect people, to gain power over civilians, and for intrinsic rewards, like being "proud that they're out here trying to save people." (Kerae, 12 - <http://www.hear-me.net/stories/7777>)
- For the next Chief of Police, students imagine a leader who is nice but tough, dedicated, respected, smart, open-minded, ready to help the youth and community, and "someone who has a goal for Pittsburgh, see a change in Pittsburgh." (Mia, 13 - <http://www.hear-me.net/stories/7615>)

While a small number of students believe the relationship between officers and youth is so tarnished there is no hope for improvement, the overwhelming majority want to improve this relationship and believe that **including young people** in this work is crucial.

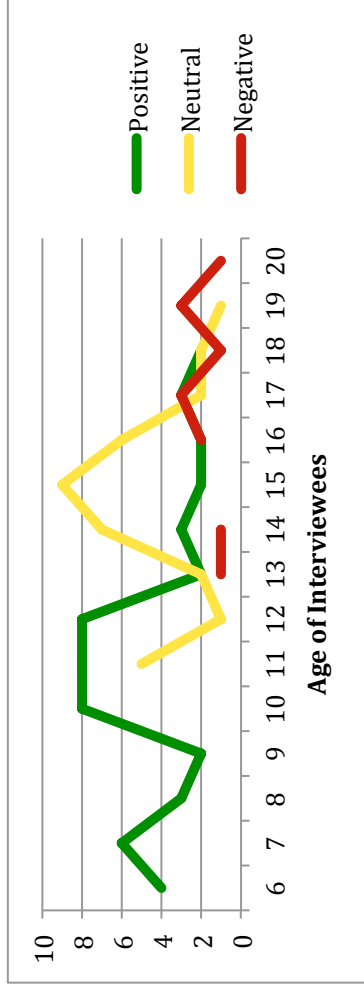
"Young people's voices is... more inspiring than grownups... young people actually see it cause they're the one interacting with the police." - Martaya, 15 (<http://www.hear-me.net/stories/7772>)

For full documentation and report, visit www.hear-me.net/pghpolice

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All testimonials provided by youth participants' in the "Youth-Police Relations" campaign are a self-selected group of individuals. The self-selection process was conducted by the Hear Me Team's outreach efforts to schools and organizations within the Pittsburgh area and the students that were approved to participate. Students of a variety of ages and from a wide-range of neighborhoods across Pittsburgh were asked to participate, although we recognize that this is not a perfectly representative sample. In addition, please be aware that the classifications of youth-police perceptions (positive, neutral, negative) and neighborhood names were directly quoted and owned from the youth participants.

100 students/33 neighborhoods	Pos 53%	Neutral 35%	Neg 12%
Allentown	11	1	
Arlington		1	
Banksville	3		
Beechview	2		
Beltzhoover	1		1
Bloomfield	1		
Brighton	2	4	
Brookline		1	
Carrick		2	
East Allegheny			1
East Hills	2		2
East Liberty	1	1	
Garfield	4	1	
Highland Park		1	
Hill District		1	2
Homewood	5	4	3
Lawrenceville	2	3	
Lincoln	1		
Marshall-Shadeland			
Mt Oliver	1	1	
North Side		4	1
North View		1	1
Oakland		1	
Perry North		1	
Shadyside	1		
Sheraden	1	1	
Spring Hill	1	1	
Squirrel Hill	5	1	
Stanton Heights		1	
Summer Hill	1		
Troy Hill		1	
Uptown		1	
Westwood	1		
Cheswick	2		
Bethel Park			1
Duquesne	1		
Greentree	1	1	
Keystone	1		



Participating Groups

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Kelly-Strayhorn Theater | Youthworks HIRE Me |
| Manchester Craftmen's Guild | STEM Stars |
| PPS Colfax K-8 | Arts Greenhouse |
| PPS Banksville K-5 | Assemble |
| PPS Perry High School | MGR Youth Empowerment- |
| PPS King PreK-8 | Positive Spin |
| PPS Langley K-8 | MGR Youth Empowerment - Arts |
| PPS Allegheny 6-8 | in Action |
| PPS Westinghouse 6-12 | Shuman Juvenile Detention |
| PPS Arsenal 6-8 | Center |
| PPS Schiller 6-8 | Brashear Association -- |
| Northway Church East Liberty | Brashear Kids |