

All Children Excel (ACE) – Ramsey County juvenile crime prevention

COST EFFECTIVE CRIME PREVENTION – MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Victoria Reinhardt

We have all read in disbelief, the news stories about young children involved in serious and violent crimes. Ramsey County is working hard to tackle this alarming problem with the help of recently awarded grants from the McKnight Foundation and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

The grant funds were provided for All Children Excel, otherwise known as ACE. It is an innovative effort, targeting boys and girls ages seven through nine, which combines the efforts of family, communities and schools to promote positive relationships and environments that encourage, support and achieve healthy development in children. By preventing crime we make our communities safer. We also use fewer tax dollars because we prevent the very expensive alternatives – court, jail, and out-of-home placement and welfare costs, to name a few.

The purpose of ACE is to use our limited resources most effectively by targeting seven through nine-year-old children at high risk for serious, violent and chronic delinquency. ACE is based on Justice Department research about the causes of serious, violent delinquency and the best strategies to address it. ACE creates an individual, multi-faceted Success Plan for each child with the cooperation of the child, family, and school. Each Success Plan establishes an enduring relationship with the children that will last throughout adolescence. ACE identifies and enhances strengths in children, families, school, and communities that promote healthy child and youth development. We recognize that problems are a part of life and that how and when problems are handled have an important impact on a child's life.

ACE is receiving national attention not only because it uses an innovative, comprehensive and long-term approach to preventing juvenile crime, but also because it stresses cost-effectiveness and accountability. It is a national model for Outcome Based Program Area Budgeting (OBPAB.) This budgeting approach represents a significant change in the way public sector budgets are developed - traditionally done by combining individual department budgets. OBPAB uses private sector budgeting practices and places the emphasis, not on departments, but on outcomes. Because of the program's systematic approach to crime prevention and the budgeting connection to outcomes, taxpayer dollars will be used cost-effectively.

Children are referred to ACE through police reports by schools as well as local police departments. Since ACE's start-up this fall, children from throughout the county have

been referred to ACE. Some of the risk factors for ACE boys and girls, outlined by the Justice Department, include early and frequent delinquency, family violence disorganization, parental chemical dependency, parent and/or sibling already in the criminal justice system, and poor and inconsistent parenting practices.

ACE believes that positive intervention at an early age will increase the chances of a child's success in life. Ramsey County, working together with our police departments, schools and communities, and with the financial assistance of the McKnight Foundation and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, will use ACE to help make our neighborhoods safe.

If you would like more information on ACE you may call Hope Melton, ACE Coordinator, at (651) 266-4202 or Commissioner Reinhardt's office at (651) 266-8363.

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