



2009 Youth Scholarship Program First Place Winner

"How Your Father, Mother or Guardian Helps Us Protect Our Community"

By Mara Warnberg

I try to apply my favorite quote, "Be the change you wish to see in the world" - Mahatma Gandhi, to every aspect of my life. I believe this passion for change and standing up for what I believe in comes from those that closely surround me and also exhibit high morals and standards. I see my father apply this to every aspect of life, both in the community, at home, and while at work for fellow citizens.

From a young age, I have always looked up to my father. Not only did I always feel loved, but he made everyone he met seem at home in his presence. Never afraid to reach out to others, he is known for striking up conversations with strangers. He is always ready to lend a hand to someone in need. His choice of occupation attests to this.

My dad's, and all police officer's, dedication to the community provides for an environment where people feel secure. This is imperative to make a functional environment for citizens to work, play, and live in. Many believe that the job of the police is solely to stop crime, but I believe that they play a much greater role in our society. Some police officers, like my dad, volunteer their time in the community in a variety of ways outside of their working hours. My father volunteers in the PAL program, or Police Athletic league, I have witnessed the impact that can be made on young people's lives. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to go with on many of these PAL events. Not only are different sports leagues formed, but trips to the Children's Theatre and Valley Fair give the program variety. I think the overall goal of this organization is very admirable- trying to keep kids off the streets, out of trouble, and involved in productive activities that can last a lifetime. This also gives them someone to look up to as a mentor. Sometimes all it takes to keep a child from a lifetime of hardship is devoting some time and energy to showing an interest in them. This helps keep our community safe as it prevents future crime. I admire this greatly about these devoted people.

The relationships that can develop are valuable, and often have an important impact. Many of the children involved in the PAL program do not have a network of responsible adults to look up to. Seeing police officers interact with other youth and often times their family as well, leads to more respect for police officers. Sometimes, they are feared and young people think they are just going to get in trouble if they interact with police officers. PAL activities can show children that they have no need to fear those that are trying to protect them. These bonds and relationships can have an overwhelming influence upon the community, and especially the youth, which results in many positive outcomes.

The PAL program can also offer enriching experiences for young people. Often, these may be their first experience with the fine arts outside of a school setting. Trips to an art museum or to a production at the theater can introduce kids to cultural events in the community. A productive way to unleash one's emotions is often important in avoiding violence or activities that are otherwise deemed destructive, disruptive, or negative actions. Being involved in an athletic league, drama, or the arts can be helpful in giving purpose or motivation to a young person's life.

I also hold those, like my dad, who are willing to risk their lives to the betterment of others very highly. This shows the very high level of ethics and morals peace officers have. They are willing to die for what they believe in. Furthermore, their willingness to volunteer in activities, such as the Police Athletic League, shows that many of these officers are willing to go above and beyond, to step into the community, and dare to make a difference in a young person's life.