

NEWSLETTER

BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
POSITIVE O.P.S. INTERACTION



Christie Lake Kids partners with law enforcement to build safer communities

If there's one thing we've learned at Christie Lake Kids over the past 97 years of working with some of Ottawa's most vulnerable children and youth, it's that forging trust is not always easy, but it always delivers incredible rewards. This is true when it comes to helping disadvantaged children develop positive relationships with police, learning to view them as allies rather than adversaries.

Too often, youth living below the low income cut off have a mistrust or fear of law enforcement. To help create a better sense of community, it is crucial to have initiatives in place to help change negative perceptions and replace them with a sense of positive connection. Helping to establish better relationships between youth and police is a cornerstone of community-based crime prevention.



In several Ottawa neighbourhoods, a new collaborative spirit between residents and police is having great impact on reducing crime, increasing safety and improving community spirit. As a recent Crime Prevention Ottawa report explains, transformation is happening thanks to the focused efforts of people – from social agencies such as CLK to local business to community leaders – who care enough to make a difference and to work together to achieve positive change.



Christie Lake Kids is involved with initiatives that are specifically intended to foster positive interactions between youth and police. These include relationships with the **Ottawa Police Hoopstars**, a program that sees officers interacting with children and youth enrolled in Christie Lake Kids' basketball program. Prior to playing a game, they run basketball drills, occasionally mixing in some policing elements. One drill that the kids had a lot of fun with was a relay race that involved dribbling a basketball across the gym, while wearing police boots and a police vest. After their time together on the court, the OPS Hoopstars and kids sit down together and engage in discussion. At one recent session, Chabine Tucker, head of the Hoopstars program, brought in donated books, which were handed out to the kids after the game.



The success of these basketball sessions at helping to create a more trusting perception of police has inspired a new initiative, which will integrate the OPS Hoopstars into CLK's Hip Hop program. The officers learned a dance with the kids, which was performed at our annual Parliamentary Basketball Tournament in April; the Hoopstars also played a game against the CLK senior basketball team during the halftime show.



In addition to basketball and Hip Hop, hockey has become an important bridge-builder for CLK. For the past ten years, members from the OPS and RCMP have hit the ice annually with CLK kids to have a friendly hockey tournament. We feel fortunate to have a strong connection with both police forces and the officers who come out to play; they help the kids get ready and encourage them during the game. We've had more female officers join us in the last few years which has been an added bonus for our young female players. Not only does it gives the girls someone to look up to who is in an authoritative position; it also provides lasting impressions of strong female role models in whom the kids can see themselves.



By providing children and youth opportunities to engage in positive interactions with law enforcement, they learn lasting lessons. They get a first-hand opportunity to dispel whatever preconceived notions they may have about police officers being mean or scary, and they take this newfound knowledge back to their schools and neighbourhoods, thereby extending the impact of their interactions.