

Virginia Law Enforcement: A Commitment to Community

Virginia Law Enforcement officials provide and enhance a community in many, various ways. The citizens of any community expect law enforcement officials to ensure a safe environment. One of the most important ways for law enforcement officials to become committed to the community is through the education of children. Education of the children in the community is important because the future of the safety of the community lies in the hands of the children. If the children are educated and aware of every day dangers, then the future of the community will be secured.

Beginning at the elementary-school age, children are exposed to police officers. The children are taught that police officers are there to help and to look out for the safety of those around. If not taught at home, kindergarten and first-grade teachers emphasize the importance of law enforcement officials. All children are taught to "Call 911", if they need help, are in trouble, or see someone else in trouble. McGruff the Crime Dog is brought to community outings. McGruff is used to attract young children and to teach them to "Take a bite out of crime." McGruff teaches the children about dangerous situations and how to avoid them. McGruff helps emphasize the fact that law enforcement officials are there to help. DARE, a program instructed by law enforcement officials, is another tool in which elementary schools across the nation are using. DARE, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, educates children about the dangers of drugs, how to resist temptations, and how to use self-discipline in certain situations. This program provides children with a good sense of their morals and ideals before entering middle school. Virginia Law Enforcement officials implement these programs into elementary schools in order to start the education process of how to create a safe environment and community. By starting early, these

officials have instilled in the youth of the community a good sense of what is right and what is wrong.

When children enter middle school, along with the awkward stage of life that is bearing down on them, also comes more temptations. Especially in a public school, middle schoolers are faced with temptations of cigarettes and other drugs. Hopefully, because of the DARE program, students are able to resist these temptations and make smart decisions. In Chesterfield County, the Chesterfield County Department of Police has taken further measures to ensure the safety of students. In each public middle school and high school, there is a Student Resource Officer. Mainly, these officers are in the schools to increase student awareness of the role of these officials. As a high school senior at a public high school, I have noticed a significant decrease in violence at my school as compared to my freshman, sophomore, and junior years. Notably, there are fewer violent confrontations between students. Also, in light of the Arkansas shootings, the students have a better sense of safety when they enter the school building. The presence of drugs in middle schools and high schools has also decreased. When students are aware that there is a Student Resource Officer present in the building, they are less likely to do something that is wrong. Their presence influences students in a positive way.

In high school, especially tenth and eleventh grade, law enforcement officials affect students. In either tenth or eleventh grade, students will begin driving. In Virginia, in order to receive a driver's license, one must complete a driver's education class. This driver's education class provides students with the basic laws and regulations concerning operating a motor vehicle. This education is important, yet, to most students it seems kind of superficial, nothing they can really relate to. However, in tenth grade, my father, a Chesterfield County Police Officer, came in to talk to all of the driver's education classes at Clover Hill High School. As a member of the Crash Team, a team that investigates the county's worst and fatal accidents, he provided the students with the real dangers of driving that no textbook could portray. Through his experience, knowledge, and driving tips, he gave the tenth graders and future drivers perhaps, one of the greatest things anyone can give, a second chance. One of the best tips that he gave was to wait at a stoplight for two extra seconds after it has turned green. This extra waiting accounts for

those other drivers who run through the red light. My father has had students come up and tell him that even months after his lecture, they still remember to wait. This waiting has saved many lives. He also visited other area high schools to promote the same message.

Virginia Law Enforcement officials, like all law enforcement officials, provide the community with a sense of safety. However, Virginia's officials take many extra strides in order to ensure this safe environment. By starting at the elementary schools, law enforcement officials begin their education of the youth. The officials use techniques to attract children and promote safety. In middle school, the youth are faced with temptations, and one hopes that they will make the right decision based on their values instilled upon them from their parents and law enforcement officials. In high school, driving becomes a major issue. By having guest law enforcement officials enter the classroom to share their experiences and knowledge, future drivers become aware of the dangers that driving precludes. Educating the youth is key to the community. By educating the youth, law enforcement officials are ensuring that their goals are carried out through future generations of citizens. This commitment to the community begins with the youth and ends with the safety of all.