

‘Summer of Healing’ Grant Supports Development of Student-led Safety Plan at Perry High School

*Inaugural microgrants from The Hear Foundation also supported
Center for Victims resiliency workshops, and camps
engaging youth and police*

PITTSBURGH (October 10, 2022) – Students at Pittsburgh Perry High School have completed the development of a student-led safety plan at Perry High School with support from a \$21,600 grant from



Perry High School Student Safety Ambassadors Alishiah Campbell (left) and Geoni Lee (right)

The Hear Foundation’s Summer of Healing grant program. Launched in June 2022, The Hear Foundation is dedicated exclusively to fostering collaboration between law enforcement, city officials, community groups, and residents in order to build a safe, thriving community for all.

Working in conjunction with a school social worker and the violence prevention nonprofit Infinite Lifestyle Solutions, four **Student Safety Ambassadors** (SSAs) from the community spent the summer developing a plan to address conflict and ensure a safe and conducive learning environment for students at Pittsburgh Perry.

The project also provided a workplace experience for students. SSAs attended sessions presented by guest speakers on topics that included planning school events, cyber bullying, restorative practices, trauma-informed practices and selfcare,

relationship-based policing, violence as a public health issue and financial literacy. During the school year, SSAs will inform peers about resources, encourage peers to use safe ways to resolve conflict, assist with organizing and hosting school events, and promote community wellness events. SSAs are also creating a safe passage plan to ensure students stay safe when they leave the school building.

Safety Ambassador goals for the year include organizing a school-wide summit for students and participating in mentoring and additional trainings. SSA leaders also designed t-shirts featuring inspiring quotes. SSAs wear the t-shirts when they are hosting or co-hosting events for the school or in the community, and when they are representing the group for activities. The quotes students selected are:

"Do not let the behavior of others destroy your inner peace"; "You don't get what you wish for you get what you work for"; "Peace begins with a smile"; and "Creating Peace".

"These students went through a 10-week program where they learned about trauma, about policing, and about how to create a stronger sense of community," said The Hear Foundation Co-founder Leon Ford. "During this program, they developed and designed a plan to transform the culture of their school. The more we invest in our youth, the more people will step into leadership roles. It's powerful, and it provides another way forward in transforming our city."

The Pittsburgh Perry Student Safety Ambassador program is one of three inaugural community microgrants awarded by The Hear Foundation this summer with the support of a \$75,000 grant from



Heal America. *Summer of Healing 2022* projects also included **Voices Against Violence, Hope 4 Tomorrow**, and **Youth Enrichment Services** summer camps. Each six-week camp included resilience workshops presented by Imagine Further Collective on equipping youth ages 8-16 with methods for handling the effects of adversity, finding and building strong support systems, developing healthier coping skills, and nurturing resiliency. Community police officers also attended the camps, engaging young people in discussions on topics such as police reform, public safety concerns, careers in law enforcement, processing prior police encounters, and media portrayals of police and youth.



Community police officers engaged with Pittsburgh youth during The Hear Foundation's Summer of Healing.

"These camps provided the opportunity for kids to meet and get to know police officers from their neighborhood in a neutral, positive setting, and in a space where they are supported by their counselors, their peers and their teachers," said Tiffany Kline-Costa,

sergeant, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police Community Engagement Office, and board member of The Hear Foundation. "One of the foundations of our unit is relational policing, and we see time and time again that kids share when they know you are listening. We love what we do, and we are dedicated to being present for these kids.

“We also recognize that seeing an officer may trigger stress or trauma from prior experiences, from media displays, or from something they’ve learned from a family member that may be incredibly negative. Having conversations with the kids, seeing them in various settings so they get to know us as people and recognize us when they are out in their neighborhoods or downtown – these efforts build relationships and change perspectives. The opportunity to spend time with youth, to talk with them about making good decisions, about how to have safe interactions with police is priceless, and we know it is having an impact.”

Reflections from youth engaged in the camps included the following:

- *“I learned that it is good to have a support system that you can trust and talk to.”*
- *“I learned to keep my body safe and clean. I also learned to work in a team better.”*
- *“Now, I know that how I feel is okay and that I don't have to be embarrassed or ashamed.”*
- *“I learned that I can talk to my support system and that I can have red and green people in my support system.”*

The Hear Foundation also supported [Healing Rivers workshops at the Center for Victims](#). This summer, local clergy and spiritual leaders joined City of Pittsburgh police officers from corresponding neighborhoods to participate in five workshops, with an additional eight workshops ran with community leaders, mothers of sons lost to violence, and nonprofit practitioners in Pittsburgh.

“The Healing Rivers Project at the Center for Victims offers members of the community an opportunity to uncover the impact of trauma on each one of us as it impacts our brains, our bodies, and our emotions,” said Rabbi Ron Symons, Senior Director of Jewish Life, Director, Center for Loving Kindness, JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, and board member of The Hear Foundation, who participated in the sessions. “Bringing together police officers and spiritual leaders offered us the opportunity to also explore the impact of trauma on our spirits. All of us experience trauma in our lives. Trauma happens when the circumstances around us overwhelm us with the resources that we have on hand.”

Rabbi Symons added: “It doesn’t take a great imagination to know that police officers experience trauma on a daily basis. Equally, we have an appreciation that spiritual leaders experience trauma regularly. By putting police officers and spiritual leaders in a safe space to reflect on the traumas that have impacted their lives, we create a shared sense of humanity around who we are in relationship with one another, and what we can do to strengthen the fabric of community.”

The Hear Foundation’s next event will take place in November, marking the 10-year anniversary of the shooting of [The Hear Foundation co-founder Leon Ford](#) by police. Additional detail to come.

The Hear Foundation is supported by The Buhl Foundation, The Forbes Funds, Heal America, the Elsie H. Hillman Foundation, Jones Day, Jones Day Foundation, and the Richard King Mellon Foundation, with fiscal sponsorship by the POISE Foundation. To learn more or to sign up for news and updates from The Hear Foundation, visit hearfoundation.com or email hello@hearfoundation.com.

Media Contact: Laura Ellis, lellis@veritaspr.com / 412.952.7844
 Bob Butter, bbutter@veritaspr.com / 412.736.6186