

Friends of NAFI/NFI



Our Outcomes Help Tell Our Story

This edition of the Friends of NAFI/NFI will outline for readers the importance of measuring our successes through data collection and outcome reporting. It is vital to our agency growth that we regularly assess and review the impact of our services. This knowledge gives us the ability to refine and improve our programming, better serving our clients, consumers and funders alike. We hope you enjoy it!

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President's Welcome

Dear Friends of NAFI/NFI

In helping thousands of consumers each day across nine states, an important but not well-known part of our mission is evaluating and constantly assessing the impact of our work. Treatment plans and progress are documented by our staff, while experts in our corporate and regional offices collect data and assemble reports to assure that our quality of care remains very high.



Developing outcomes on many levels is important for our funders, and especially state officials. They need to be aware of the impact of the services we provide in order to be accountable to the taxpayer. Continually achieving excellence is an important way of building and maintaining support from state agencies and also from the public.

We owe it to our staff to collect outcomes ---those who work tirelessly as counselors, therapists and providers in our programs. They derive much inspiration and satisfaction from noticing and observing the impact of their work on those they serve. In fact, there is a strong correlation between observing the impact they have on consumers and the growth of their abilities and skills. For many, this sense of satisfaction is the driving force of their interest and commitment to working in our field. Finally, we know that our clients need regular feedback about how they are doing. Feedback is an essential tool for them to continue the hard work necessary for self-improvement and growth.

Yet, for all of the numbers we collect and aggregate, statistics are not enough to capture the new growth and changes that occur as our consumers improve. There are no adequate measurements that convey the foundational growth that truly transforms so many of our clients. Even the most

sophisticated data can't bring to light the change that has occurred in young people who were heading toward self-destruction, but with proper help have embraced new positive goals for themselves and their families. For staff, witnessing these changes is the ultimate reward.

The following articles exemplify the often dramatic transformations that we regularly observe. They keep us going and provide us with the energy and interest to continue on our path.

In My Own Words: Former NAFI Consumer Shares His Story



Julio Rivera

I was on my own at 12 years old, surviving on the streets of Palisades Park, New Jersey. The owner of a local pool hall allowed me to sleep on a cot in a back room in exchange for cleaning up at night. Beyond that, I had to steal food and clothing to support myself. I had heard on the streets that an older sister had relocated to Rhode Island and was looking for me. I made my way there and was enrolled in middle school. It was embarrassing to be so far behind my peers. I began getting into trouble and, at age 16, was placed at the Rhode Island Training School, before being sent to NAFI's ACE Program. I was frightened to be placed in a residential program and disappointed in myself. I felt hopeless.

As it turned out, that feeling soon changed. The staff helped me like I imagined parents would. I was treated with respect, accepted and encouraged, held accountable for my behaviors and truly felt like they wanted me to succeed. I decided this was the place for me to start again and began to trust adults for the first time since I was a young child. My sentence was 12 months, but I asked to be allowed to stay longer. My work did not feel complete yet. At ACE, I learned new ways to look at the world. I learned to speak for myself instead of acting out my needs. I worked hard to fill in the gaps in my education. I tried to save my allowance to support a young daughter. When it was time to move back with my sister, the staff enrolled me in the local public school and I eventually graduated. I found full-time work on a third shift and added a second job to help my savings. I saved every penny I could and eventually opened a pizza shop with my sister. In 2006, after more years of dedicated savings and hard work, I was able to buy my first home. I'm proud to say my daughter is now a college student.

I returned to ACE 14 years after my placement there, wanting to give back to others all that NAFI had given to me. I asked to work part-time, so that I could be a role model for kids and show them that you should never give up and never be afraid to ask for help. I was welcomed with open arms and, unsurprisingly, I was given the same respect and encouragement I had received as a rebellious teenager. I am grateful every day to have found a home and family with NAFI and will continue to give back for as long as I am able to do so. I am also proud to now serve on the Board of Directors of NAFI Connecticut/Rhode Island, helping move the agency's mission forward to a new generation of at-risk youth in need of support and care.

-Julio Rivera

Agency Spotlight:

NFI North's Empowerment Fund Supports and Celebrates Personal Triumph

By Paul Dann, Executive Director, NFI North

Video Produced by Karen Cusano, Assistant Executive Director, NFI North

In a time where we focus heavily on metrics and quantitative data it's important to remind ourselves that the people we serve are busy every day rebuilding their own personal narrative. Their individual stories and the way in which we have touched them through our Normative Community Approach strikes at the very heart of what is important in our day-to-day efforts to better the lives of the people we serve. We are so honored to play a role in their effort to develop new understandings of their lived experience and we think you'll agree that there is nothing more powerful than seeing and hearing one's own story of triumph over trauma and adversity.

The following video showcases segments of those who have participated in our services sharing the impact NFI North has had on their lives.

[NFI North Empowerment Fund Honorees Testimonial Video](#)

Did You Know?

NAFI's Youth and Police Initiative Training Program featured in The Wall Street Journal

NAFI has been offering its groundbreaking Youth and Police Initiative Training Program (YPI) for many years in close to 30 communities. YPI is offered through NAFI's Youth Link prevention and early intervention initiative and hopes to bridge the gap between at-risk youth and the local police departments whose officers patrol these kids' neighborhoods. The program recently garnered interest from The Wall Street Journal, who reached out to Jay Paris, Director of Youth Link and asked for an interview. That subsequent interview and article were recently featured in the WSJ and can be found below. For more information on the work being done by Mr. Paris and NAFI, please contact [Jay Paris](#) or visit www.youthlinkusa.org.

The Youth and Police Initiative has helped reduce big-city crime. Its founder sees potential against terrorism.

By Melanie Kirkpatrick



With violent crime on the upswing in the U.S., it sometimes seems that a sprinkle of magic dust could come in handy as police struggle to restore law and order.

But it's another kind of magic—the magic of ordinary human connection—that Jay Paris likes to talk about in describing his work with black and Hispanic teenage boys and the mostly white officers who patrol the dangerous neighborhoods where they live. A training program he developed 12 years ago has helped reduce youth crime and made communities safer. It's "magic," he says, to watch kids and cops come together and "find all kinds of commonalities."

Mr. Paris founded and leads the Youth and Police Initiative, a division of the North American Family Institute, a social-services agency headquartered north of Boston along the Route 128

technology corridor. YPI takes its cue from the strategy known as community policing, which encourages officers to get to know the neighborhoods they serve with the aim of stopping crimes before they happen.

"You can't arrest your way to public safety," Mr. Paris elaborates. "You have to build relationships in the community. One of the most critical points is with teens. If they have an experience that shifts their understanding of what's across the 'blue line,' it can be transformational" for a neighborhood. YPI, he says, helps "kids and cops learn to talk at a more significant level, in a way that starts to build some trust and break down stereotypes." Twenty-five cities, including Boston, Hartford, Conn., and Providence, R.I., have implemented YPI training in housing projects and other high-crime neighborhoods-with encouraging results.

The training is small-scale and targeted, focusing on one group of 12 to 15 teenagers at a time. Participants are mostly boys, and Mr. Paris estimates 98% are minorities-African-American, Caribbean-American, Hispanic. The teens are selected by local schools, youth organizations and, in some cases, parole departments or schools for juvenile delinquents.

One incentive to join is an \$80 gift card each participant receives on completing the program. Another is food, no small attraction for teen boys. Dinner is served at every session. The money "helps get them in the door," Mr. Paris says, but "in the end it's not just the money, it's the idea that they are helping" by sharing their point of view with local police.

The YPI training entails six after-school sessions. In the first four, each boy develops a personal narrative of his life to present to the eight to 12 police officers who will join them for the final two sessions. The kids are asked to speak about "choices they've made in four areas of their lives: peers, school, community and home," Mr. Paris explains. "A boy might say, 'At home, I stole some money from my mother. At home I've been in too many fights with my brother.' . . . We have them practice at every session, standing up and sharing their choices in front of the group."

The youths are nervous at first but soon get past the jitters. "I think they look forward to this opportunity. 'They-the police-are going to hear me.' . . . We all have a powerful need to be heard," Mr. Paris says. "and teenagers don't often have a chance to be heard by adults, to say nothing of the icons of authority in their community."

When the cops show up in Session 5, they're "amazed that these 15-, 16- or 17-year-old kids can actually stand up in front of police officers they've never met and share these intimate parts of their lives," Mr. Paris says. "Then we ask the police officers to do the same. We give them a few minutes to draw a lifeline of how they got from being teenagers to making the decision to join the police."

Like the youngsters, the officers "are generally nervous at first, as they aren't used to sharing that kind of stuff-not even among their peers," Mr. Paris continues. "But the inspiration from the kids really does push the whole process forward, and the officers always delve deeper into their experiences and start really sharing about their lives."

As they get talking, the teens and the policemen move beyond suspicion to find points of connection. The boys discover, Mr. Paris says, that "a lot of officers came from difficult backgrounds that are similar to theirs." The teenagers are astonished to learn that cops grew up with abusive fathers or alcoholic mothers, did drugs, or almost flunked out of school. "The kids are saying: 'We thought you were the goody-good guys-that you were perfect,' " Mr. Paris says. They also bond over another commonality. "If you're drawn to being a police officer, you're drawn to dealing with danger," Mr. Paris says. "You like risk-and we know how teenagers feel about that. It's endemic to being a teenager in virtually every culture that you're attracted to risk." Urban teens see the police as a kind of legitimate "gang"-with their own distinctive uniforms, colors, and weapons. "This is a very attractive and interesting thing to kids, even kids who come into the room thinking 'I hate cops.' "

On the last day the boys and police develop a plan for future collaboration. "In Boston," Mr. Paris says, "60 kids and 40 cops went to a Red Sox game and had a special tour." Some cops give kids their cellphone numbers and encourage them to call. A YPI survey of 1,400 police officers who have completed the program found that 90% formed friendly relationships with at least five teenagers where they patrol.

These bonds between cops and kids are "sustained on the street," Mr. Paris says. He can cite dozens of cases in which potentially dangerous situations have been defused because the officer on the scene recognizes youngsters from YPI and enlists their help. The cop takes the kids aside and asks what's going on, and "they can talk and sort it out very quickly." Officers often become mentors to boys they meet at YPI training. "Police are very tuned into the resources of the community," Mr. Paris says. They help the kids find jobs, direct them to social services agencies, and, perhaps most important, counsel them on personal problems. Many of

the boys are growing up without fathers, and the policemen become powerful influences.

Mr. Paris says that when three groups of boys and officers in a single neighborhood—45 teenagers and 30 cops—have completed the program, it produces "a tipping point." The neighborhood begins to change; violence drops: "Kids are getting jobs. Kids are getting rides. Kids are calling police officers. Kids are actually walking up to police officers in the street and chatting. Word gets out very quickly."

YPI has received rave reviews from law-enforcement leaders, among them the Police Foundation's Frank Straub. He brought in the training while running the police department of suburban White Plains, N.Y., and did so again when he went on to lead the police forces in Indianapolis and Spokane, Wash. "I believe in the power of the program," Mr. Straub says. This kind of "intense work in the trenches" brings results. In White Plains in the late 2000s, Mr. Straub says, YPI helped reduce rates of serious crime to the lowest levels in 42 years.

In Boston's high-crime Franklin Field housing development, 110 teens and 80 police officers completed YPI training between 2007 and 2010. Violent crime dropped 43.5% during that period, according to a survey by the city's police department and housing authority. In nearby Chelsea, Mass., Mr. Paris has begun a Spanish-language program to improve ties between immigrant parents and police. He hopes to extend YPI's reach through a train-the-trainer program, in which local police officers are taught how to conduct YPI sessions in their own cities.

There are also opportunities in counterterrorism work. Mr. Paris has applied the YPI model to a training program with Muslim teenagers in Boston. If you can build trusting relationships between police and Muslim communities, he says, "it's a good way to flush out terrorists."

The 68-year-old Mr. Paris had a long career as a photojournalist before moving into social services 17 years ago, when a friend asked him for advice on reforming a struggling school in Boston. An early influence dates to the summer of 1968, when as a rising sophomore at Princeton he received a grant to work at a school in the troubled Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. During the 1965 riots there, clashes between African-American residents and mostly white police officers left 34 people dead. The summer three years later was the first time Mr. Paris remembers experiencing racial bias or living in a community where residents and police didn't trust each other.

An FBI study released last month reinforces the importance of trust on both sides of the blue line. It found that law-enforcement officers in many places see "defiance and hostility" as "the new norm." Some have become "scared and demoralized" and now "avoid interacting with the community." The study also found that of 50 incidents in which cops were killed in the line of duty last year, 28% of the assailants had "expressed a desire to kill law enforcement officers prior to carrying out their attacks."

Mr. Paris is undeterred. "As tough as things can get between police and communities of color," he says, "I really think there's a big opportunity to bridge that gap. . . . But you've got to bring it down to the humanity of both groups. If you have a way to do that so that communication builds, people can develop some empathy and mutual understanding. It can rip along at speed. That's what motivates me to keep doing this."

Ms. Kirkpatrick, a former deputy editor of the Journal's editorial page, is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and author of "Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience" (Encounter, 2016).

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