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## **Teen Empowerment's Youth/Police Dialogues: The Bridge to Improving Police and Youth Relations**

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# **Teen Empowerment's Youth/Police Dialogues: The Bridge to Improving Police and Youth Relations**

By:

Pamela S. Flemming

A Thesis Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

in

Criminal Justice

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DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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## **Abstract**

Negative youth-police relations are an issue that has plagued the Rochester, NY community for decades. Teen Empowerment is committed to helping change the relational negativity, and build positive partnerships between these two groups. The organization believes that youth-police dialogues are the bridge to improving youth-police relations, which will in turn build stronger communities. The information in this thesis tests whether youth-police dialogues are essential to improving the youth-police relationship. The Methodology for my evaluation included a pre and post survey for Teen Empowerment's youth organizers and participating police officers. Surveys were completed for the Phase I and Phase II dialogue sessions of the implemented program. Analysis of survey results focus group outcomes, and interview outcomes all point to positive consequences from the Youth-Police Dialogues. There were evident shifts in some measures on the surveys showing that participants gained empathy, understanding, and respect. Focus groups revealed some tangible changes in behavior among both officers and youth that indicate they gained new perspectives as well as new skills for how to work together effectively. The policy implications for this research for contemporary youth-police relations include the need for more dialogue sessions, integrating non-dialogue activities, such as sports, or volunteer opportunities, to help the group bond. It would also be beneficial to have youth and officers who are considered to be a problem to each respective group (i.e. bad cops, bad youth).

## Table of Contents

Title Page.....	i
Acknowledgement.....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Table of Appendices.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
List of Tables.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	17
Phase One Surveys and Results.....	24
Phase Two Surveys and Results.....	47
Contrasting the Dialogues Sessions.....	66
Combining Survey Results across Dialogue Phases.....	73
Survey Results Discussion.....	75
Focus Groups Discussion.....	75
Overview of Phase One and Phase Two.....	76
Police Academy Training Center Visit.....	104
Next Steps and Program Changes.....	107
Findings.....	109
Recommendations and Policy Implications.....	111

Reference	
Page.....	115
Appendices.....	119

## **Table of Appendices**

Appendix	Description
A	Youth Pre-Survey
B	Officer Pre-Survey
C	Youth Post-Survey
D	Officer Post-Survey
E	Youth-Police Dialogue Sessions Evaluation
F	TE YP Dialogues Facilitators Session Evaluation
G	Youth Focus Group Questions
H	Officer Focus Group Questions

## **List of Figures**

### **Phase I**

**Figure 1- Number of Police Officers Who Circled Each Word to Describe Youth before and After Dialogues**

**Figure 2- Percentage of Youth Who Circled These Words to Describe Justice**

**Figure 3- Number of Officers Who Circled Each Word to Describe Justice Before & After the Dialogues**

### **Phase II**

**Figure 1- Number of Police Officers Who Circled Each Word to Describe Youth Before and After Dialogues**

**Figure 2- Percentage of Youth Who Circled These Words to Describe Justice**

**Figure 3- Phase Two Youth Description of Justice Before & After Dialogues: significantly Different Results**

**Figure 4- Phase Two Youth Description of Justice Before & After Dialogues: Non-significant Changes**

**Figure 5- Phase Two Officers' Description of Youth Before and After Dialogues**

**Figure 6- Phase Two Officers' Description of Justice Before and After dialogues**

**Figure 7- Significant Differences in How Youth in Phase One and Phase Two Describe Police in Pre-survey**

**Figure 8- Significant Differences in How Youth in Phase One and Phase Two Described Justice on Pre-Survey**

**Figure 9- Significant Differences in How Officers Described Youth between Phase One and Phase Two**

**Figure 10- Significant Differences in How Officers Described Justice between Phase One and Phase Two**



## **List of Tables**

### **Phase I**

**Table 1- Officers' Responses to Statement Prompts**

**Table 2- Youth's Responses to Statement Prompts**

**Table 3- Comparing Pre-Means for Youth and Officers and Post-Means for Youth and Officers**

### **Phase II**

**Table 1- Phase Two Youth Responses to Statement Prompts**

**Table 2- Phase Two Officers' Responses to Statement Prompts**

**Table 3- Officer Pre-Survey Statement Prompts Significant Differences between Phase One & Phase Two**

## **Introduction**

In recent years, much attention has been focused on youth-police relations. This is due to the damaged and fragmented relationship between the two groups. In response to community complaints, and an outcry for police accountability, a number of organizations across the country have developed initiatives and projects for improving relationships between youth and police through the use of structured dialogues. These initiatives are usually government or privately funded. One such project, called the Center for Teen Empowerment, which originated in Somerville, Massachusetts in 1992, branched out to deliver its message of reconciliation and healing to communities and the police department in Rochester, New York.

For this thesis, I evaluated Teen Empowerment's Youth-Police Dialogues, which is one component of Teen Empowerment's work. The dialogues were the result of the organization's work with youth in the Rochester community. Staffers identified a strong need for communication and reconciliation between youth and police while doing this work. Teen Empowerment began holding dialogues between Teen Empowerment youth organizers and officers from the Rochester Police Department in 2004. In 2013, Teen Empowerment received funding from the Fetzer Institute to continue these dialogues and to evaluate their impact. The dialogues were scheduled to be conducted in three phases during the 2013-2014 calendar years, with the first starting in July 2013. This thesis will only cover the first two phases of dialogues. The research consisted of a qualitative and quantitative data analysis of survey results, in conjunction with participant observation. The data was analyzed, and coded into categories for clarity. In addition to the evaluation, I also conducted a literature review of past and current research, relating to this very important issue.

Negative youth-police relations are an issue that has plagued the Rochester community for decades. Teen Empowerment is committed to helping change the relational negativity, and build positive partnerships between these two groups. The organization believes that these dialogues are the bridge to improving youth-police relations, which will in turn build stronger communities. The information included in this thesis is evidence as to why youth-police dialogues are essential to improving the youth-police relationship.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Social stratification is described as a social division of individuals into various hierarchies of wealth, status, and power. Law enforcement has been accused of exercising bias based on race, socioeconomic status, and gender when interacting with poor minority inner-city youths. This accusation has been voiced over and over by these youths, and other community members.

There are a number of reasons why stratification exists. The one that closely relates to this topic is conflict. Conflict theory suggests that stratification occurs through conflict between different social classes, with the upper classes using superior power to achieve intended goals. Conflict theorists believe that society tends toward conflict and change, and that stratification systems coerce the lower classes in order to benefit the upper classes. These theorists primarily studied conflicts that occurred between different classes, and concluded that social conflict occurs between those with different principles.

Karl Marx's conflict theory evaluated how certain social interactions occur through conflict. For example, there are laws against stealing and selling drugs. But, some, in particular black males may feel justified in stealing or selling drugs in order to feed their families. Thus, the drug trade is an outcome of inadequate opportunities in the mainstream economy. To many black males, the drug trade is viewed as a legitimate method for obtaining material goods such as

clothing, jewelry, and even automobiles. Being in possession of these luxuries often strengthen one's status and respect within street culture. But, the downside to selling drugs is coming into contact with law enforcement, and the court system.

Cullen and Agnew (2003) explained Shaw and McKay's Social Disorganization Theory as the breakdown of social institutions in a community, such as disrupted families, disorderly schools, the lack of adult supervision or support in youth activities, sparse attendance at church, and ineffective political input (pp. 96-97). They further explained that these occurrences hindered adults' ability to control youths or stop competing forms of criminal organization (i.e. gangs) from emerging. The researchers found that poverty and constant social change, weakens conventional institutions, and encourages a value system supportive of crime. The researchers concluded that criminality is based around a certain neighborhood regardless of who might live there at any specific time. Crime gets handed down from generation to generation, so it is the place, not the people who matter. Their research focused primarily on juvenile delinquents. They believed that people act within an environment that shapes them, as well as being shaped by them. This describes the Southwest quadrant of Rochester, and other areas of the inner-city.

Robert Sampson and William J. Wilson (1999) wrote about "cognitive landscapes," and explained that inner-city children are exposed to violence, such as murders, or seeing relatives or neighbors get shot, assaulted, and/or robbed, almost on a daily basis. This exposure, in turn, causes some children to copy what they have witnessed. Some may even feel like they are expected to commit violence, sort of as a rite of passage or entitlement. In contrast, in most suburban neighborhoods, youths are not exposed, and do not witness violence anywhere near what inner-city youth come in contact with, so they do not feel as though they need to mimic such behavior. The above mentioned criminologists also reported one factor that underlies the crime inducing cognitive landscapes that are found in inner cities as "social isolation." To

persons who live in the inner-city, social isolation means the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society (p. 111).

Sampson and Wilson further reported that African Americans residing in many major cities are racially segregated. They explained that in disadvantaged urban communities, youths live in segregated housing, attend schools in which virtually every student is a minority, and rarely travel outside the boundaries of their immediate neighborhood. Sampson and Wilson (2003) explained that “youths feel like they are cut off from the kind of daily routines that kids in more affluent areas witness, take for granted, and learn from”. Teen empowerment youth organizers have expressed these very same feelings. They feel separated, or alienated from the youths who live in the suburbs. To some inner-city youths, it is like an “us” and “them” situation.

Sampson and Wilson (2003) believed that social isolation is the result of persisting racial inequality. They described racial inequality as “the product both of conscious political decisions (i.e.) home purchasing decisions), and “ghettoizing” minorities in high-rise public housing located in geographically isolated areas” (p. 112). This has resulted in minorities being isolated in neighborhoods marked by extreme poverty and social disorganization, and has cut residents off from mainstream American society. Elijah Anderson (1999) mentioned this when he talked about the profound sense of alienation from mainstream society that many poor inner-city black people feel, particularly the youths (p. 34). Robert Sampson (2003) explained that the combination of urban poverty and family disruption concentrated by race is particularly severe in the inner-city.

### *Literature Review*

There have been several books written, and a number of articles published regarding youth and police relations. For example, Rod K. Brunson and Ronald Weitzer (2011) published an article describing how African-American youths are advised by their parents, and other adults

on how to respond during encounters with law enforcement. This “etiquette” (so known) is viewed as a means to keep youths out of trouble during interactions with police, since many youths who reside in high crime inner-city neighborhoods tend to be the “subject” of frequent and unwelcomed police interactions. According to the researchers, youths are taught a set of conduct “norms” to follow which are reportedly passed on from generation to generation (p. 425). This intergenerational socialization is viewed as an armoring strategy to help black youths maneuver through unwanted and uncomfortable encounters with police. Armoring is described as a process by which black parents socialize black youth to be resilient and emotionally tough when they encounter racism. It is believed that youths will develop a protective shield against unsavory elements of the outside world, such as the police (p. 427). The goal is to come out of these encounters unscathed. The majority of Teen Empowerment’s youth organizers felt like they had to act a certain way with the police in order to prevent from being harmed. Many also voiced feeling unsafe around police officers.

Some of the deep seeded disdain that many youths have for the police is generational. These feelings have been passed on from generation to generation. Many youths report not knowing exactly why they dislike the police themselves, and tell of mimicking the feelings from other, usually older family members.

In another article, Brunson (2007) discussed the “cumulative impact” of racial discrimination, and how its effects account for the way blacks look at, and evaluate their experiences during public encounters. He cited encounters with law enforcement, and how descriptions of mistreatment of black citizens by the police are abundant in some African-American communities. This knowledge resulted in residents viewing local policing strategies as racially biased. In his examination of racial discrimination, Weitzel (2002) found that blacks not only draw from their own experiences, but also from patterns of events they are exposed to in

their communities, and knowledge imparted by members of their racial group. Many youths participating in Teen Empowerment's Youth-Police Dialogues, formed their opinions of the police from patterns of events they are exposed to in their communities, and knowledge imparted by members of their racial group. This is evidenced in some of their responses on the surveys. Brunson also noted that aggressive policing strategies are more prominent in disadvantaged African-American neighborhoods.

In his 2007 study, Rod K. Brunson conducted in-depth interviews of 40 African-American adolescent males in an unidentified disadvantaged urban community. The goal of the study was to investigate the adolescents' range of experiences with the police. The research focused on urban young black men because according to Yolander Hurst et al (2000), they are disproportionately suspected and stopped by police. The goal of the study was to gain a detailed understanding of how residents make sense of family members', friends', neighbors', and their own interactions with the police, and how these collectively shape their perceptions (p. 72).

Elijah Anderson's "Code of the Street" (2003) explained what life is like for black youths in the inner-city. He explained that there is a street code that every youth, decent or street, must live by in order to survive the inner-city environment. The code of the street is described by Anderson as "a cultural adaptation to a lack of faith in the police and judicial system" (p. 34). The police are viewed as representation of the dominant white society, and uncaring in the protection of inner-city residents. According to Anderson, the code of the street emerges where the influence of the police ends, and where personal responsibility for one's safety begins. Anderson further explained how some decent youths have to switch from traditional values to the "code" to maneuver through their daily routines. This is called the "social shuffle." Some decent youths may have to dress like street youths (i.e.) Timberland boots, sagging pants, hat turned to the back, swag) in order to appear "tough." They may also have to hide their school books under

their clothing while walking to and from school, so that street youths do not view them as “nerds” or someone conforming to white society. These kids may like school, and do well there, but they cannot appear that way to the street youths. Some youths may also have to carry themselves in a way that may be intimidating to their peers, and other neighborhood residents. This “posturing” is viewed as a defense mechanism. This “social shuffle,” is when youths are forced to switch from their normal way of life (i.e. acting, talking, dressing, going to school, etc.) to that of the street youths.

In regards to youth/police relations, studies have found that African-Americans are less satisfied with conduct displayed by the police in dealing with residents, specifically youth. They reported racial discrimination by white officers during encounters with the police, which also included unnecessary physical force. African-American youths reported being unfairly “targeted” by white officers who patrol their neighborhoods, and “roughed up” during interactions. This complaint was further expressed by some of the youth organizers participating in the dialogues. Many inner-city youths complain that police officers lump them all together. For example, when patrolling crime or drug infested neighborhoods, officers assume that all the male youths living in the neighborhood are part of the crime or drug culture. They do not consider differentiating the “good” youths from the “bad” youths. They judge them on their appearance, and that in effect, causes anger and bitterness (Anderson, 2003). Anderson advised that society needs to identify the decent youths, because grouping all inner-city black youths together can take a psychological toll on those that are not part of the street element (p. 104).

The mistrust of police has gotten so bad in today’s society that it has led to a “no snitching” policy primarily among minority inner-city youths, even though some adults have bought into its slogan. According to Edward Morris (2010), inner-city residents disapprove of snitching, particularly “active snitching” (voluntary offering of information under little or no



duress). He further informed that distrust of the police comes from an individual-level phenomenon based on negative experiences and a criminal lifestyle, to a group-level phenomenon in which anyone's cooperation with police is interpreted as "selling out" or violating solidarity.

The "no snitching" motto has become popular in various communities throughout the country. It discourages revealing information to authorities that could directly lead to a conviction, such as witnesses who are offered reduced sentences in exchange for providing evidence against their criminal associates. The policy has recently developed into a more generalized "street code" which denounces any cooperation with police or other authorities. Those who obey this motto may do so out of fear of retaliation, or a genuine belief that cooperating with police creates more harm than good.

In a conference titled "Race and Criminal Justice" held by the Aspen Institute in 2013, Harvard Professor Charles Ogletree, Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, and San Francisco District Attorney Kamala Harris joined moderator Jeff Brown in a discussion on race and the criminal justice system. During that discussion, DA Harris stated that "distrust of law enforcement is the biggest challenge to both community and law enforcement, and is extremely prevalent in this county." She further stated that it manifests itself in a number of ways that are all harmful to this country, and society as a whole. This distrust has contributed significantly to the "no snitching" phenomenon. DA Harris further commented that "there are reasons the community does not trust law enforcement." She also stressed that it is incumbent that law enforcement, as well as the community positively work on this issue instead of just exist with some mild form of acceptance that there will be this distrust, and somehow we'll get beyond it. She advised that there has to be leadership on both ends that says we have to mend these relationships in the best interest of all. District Attorney Harris further stressed the need for trust of the police by the community,

because in its absence, it can hinder law enforcement from doing their primary jobs of solving crimes, and putting perpetrators in jail.

The mistrust of police by minority members was further evidenced after the shooting death of 18 year old Michael Brown by white police officer, Darren Wilson. The shooting occurred on August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. In the aftermath of the shooting, there have been numerous newspaper articles, and interviews of various criminal justice professionals, including researcher, Ronald Weitzer and Steven Tuch, Sociology professors at George Washington University. Both professors have studied race and policing both nationally and internationally, and have written a number of articles on the subject. According to Weitzler and Tuch, “More African-Americans and Latinos believe police stop them without due cause, use excessive force, and engage in verbal abuse than white Americans. So, they not only tend to see the police as having some racial biases, but also in their day-to-day activities behave in ways that are more obtrusive and maybe unjustified in dealing with citizens.” (p. 436).

According to Associated Press journalist, Jesse Holland “mistrust is fueled by a perception of unchecked police violence through the ages, for example, the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles (1992), the beating death of Arthur McDuffie in Miami (1980), the shooting death of Timothy Thomas in Cincinnati (2001), the chokehold death of Eric Garner (2014) in New York City, the shooting death of Ezell Ford (2014) in South Los Angeles, the shooting death of John Crawford III (August 2014) in Dayton, Ohio, and the shooting death of Jonathan Ferrell (September 2013) in Charlotte, North Carolina. The victims were Black men, and killed by white police officers” (p.2). Police Officer Randall Kerrick was charged with Voluntary Manslaughter in the death of Jonathan Ferrell. A subsequent police investigation found that Officer Kerrick did not have a lawful right to discharge his weapon during the encounter with Ferrell (King&Stapleton, 2013). Holland (2014) noted that Michael Brown’s

death is further evidence of deep divisions between minorities and police that have simmered for years.

In recent years, there has been a litany of police brutality complaints from teens, as well as adults. Cases have surfaced in cities such as Phoenix, New York City, and Philadelphia. In each case, victims report injuries such as neurological damage, broken teeth, and head injuries after being punched or pushed into concrete surfaces by police officers. Fortunately, these complainants lived to tell their side of the story. But, most were charged with crimes such as assault or disorderly conduct after the incident. Many police critics believe this is typical. They claim that police “trump” up charges to deflate blame for their actions, which are believed to be unjustifiable.

There have been many cases regarding police violence against male minority youths. For example, on June 4, 2014, a plainclothes police officer was videotaped punching out a 17 year old black male whom he suspected was smoking a marijuana cigarette as he walked down a street in Brooklyn, New York. The incident was videotaped by another black male teen due to the distrust of police, and the violence committed against the victim. The officer was also black, but does that excuse his actions? There have been many incidents of police violence against black male youths reported across this country that did not result in death. When commenting about the incident, one New York City resident stated, “There is no accountability from police, and no expectation of proportionality from the powers that be, so extreme reactions to jaywalking or not complying to a command are given the cover of legitimacy by elected officials and the criminal justice system.” Many minority citizens, would concur with this assessment, and add thoughts of their own.

During his interview with Associated Press journalist Jesse Holland, Weitzler (2014) described several different forms of police behavior that breeds distrust among black and Latino

males. One of the behaviors named was unwarranted stops of individuals on the street by police. Weitzler further stated that black and Latino males are not only more likely to be stopped by police and subjected to some kind of abuse, but it happens repeatedly. This is not something you see in the white community (p. 1). Another researcher and professor at American University, Cathy Lisa Schneider, commented that “mistrust breeds frustration with police when there is no avenue of redress, and usually an increasing intensity of violence” (p.1). Schneider further commented that “this occurs almost always in cases where the local authorities are impervious to the concerns of people who are vulnerable to police violence, and do not know how to stop it.” Schneider described this as the most potent symbol of racial domination and subjection (p. 3).

Alan Scher Zagier, a journalist for the Associated Press reported on a letter written by United States Attorney General Eric Holder. According to the journalist, Attorney General Holder acknowledged that the bond of trust between law enforcement and the public is “all important” but also “fragile.” This sentiment is echoed in many black communities in this country. According to the article, Attorney General Holder stated that arrest patterns must not lead to disparate treatment under the law, even if such treatment is unintended. He further added that police forces should reflect the diversity of the communities they serve (p. 1).

In 2006, Rod Brunson and Jody Miller conducted a study on gender, race and urban policing in St. Louis Missouri. The researchers’ goal was to examine the perspectives of African-American youths, as well as investigate how gender shapes interactions with the police. During the interviews, young men described being routinely treated as suspects regardless of their involvement in delinquency. They also reported police violence. The young women reported being stopped for curfew violations, but also expressed concerns about police sexual misconduct. The study highlighted the differential harms of urban policing for African-American young men and women. In their report, the researchers concluded that law enforcement strategies in poor

urban communities produce a range of harms to African-American residents. This includes disproportionate experiences with surveillance and stops, disrespectful treatment, excessive force, police deviance, and fewer police protections.

The researchers further concluded that police actions in poor urban communities are different from those in middle and upper-class neighborhoods. Areas characterized by concentrated poverty and minority racial segregation are subject to aggressive policing strategies, including drug and gang suppression efforts, higher levels of police misconduct, and under-responsive policing. Sandra Bass (2001) noted that aggressive policing disproportionately targets African-Americans. Researchers also found that legal cynicism is more prevalent among African-Americans than whites. Distrust of the police is correlated with both concentrated neighborhood disadvantage (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998), and personal experiences with negative and involuntary police contacts (Weitzler and Tuch, 2002). Although juveniles make up a disproportionately large segment of the population subject to police contacts and arrests, most research on race and policing has focused on adults. According to researchers, the few studies to examine adolescents reported they have less favorable attitudes toward the police than adults. Researchers also found that African-American youths experience more police contacts than white youths, and they also have greater distrust of the police than white youths.

During their research, Brunson and Miller (2006) further found that stops and searches, disrespect, and the use of force do not consistently coincide with arrest. But they noted that other research has documented that such actions disproportionately target citizens in poor minority communities. In a study conducted by Weitzer and Tuch (2002), the researchers found that 73 percent of the Black men in their sample reported experiences with racial profiling compared to 38 percent of Black women. Friedman et al (2004) found that 73 percent of young men and 45 percent of young women had been stopped by the police, and that African-American youths were

more likely than other racial groups to report physical abuse during police contacts. A number of researchers concluded that young Black men were found to typify the “symbolic assailant” in the eyes of the police (Brunson and Miller, 2006). And, Hurst et al (2000) reported that urban Black youths are the group for whom involuntary police contacts are most frequent and noticeable.

Many inner city youths describe frequent pedestrian and vehicle stops as the primary policing strategy in their neighborhoods. Some accounts of police harassment by youths describe how the police behave at such stop (Brunson and Miller, 2006). The researchers further found that when discussing the police and young black men, most male youths believe the police besiege their neighborhoods because they suspect that many of the people living there, particularly young Black men, were criminals. They mentioned how hanging out on the street attracts police attention, regardless of whether anyone was involved in crime. Teen Empowerment’s youth organizers verbalized the same feelings during their dialogue sessions. The youths also believed that police sought to limit their use of public space by designating neighborhood locations as crime “hotspots.” For example, when youths are standing in front of a store or on a corner, the police will check everybody, assuming that someone is committing a crime. This is described as the police “rolling up” on you. Sometimes they conduct neighborhood sweeps, and make youths take off their shoes to check for drugs, or pull their pants down. Some youths reported being made to lie on the ground (Brunson and Miller, 2006).

An additional complaint made by Black youths was officers’ refusal to acknowledge their innocence, even when no evidence was found. Instead of an apology, officers usually expressed that youths merely “got lucky this time.” And lastly, youths were critical of officers’ use of antagonistic language, derogatory remarks, and racial epithets. For example, some youths reported being called niggers, punks, sissies, and Black monkey. Some also reported being told that “they don’t wanna be nothing, and ain’t gonna be nothing” (p. 540). Black youths’

complaints about police were not just about routinely being stopped and treated as suspects, but were tied to their sense that officers refused to treat them with dignity and respect (p. 541).

Brunson and Miller (2006) also found through their research that young men were disproportionate recipients of aggressive policing tactics such as stops and searches. They characterized the incidents as harassment because of their intrusive and antagonistic nature.

Young Black male youths were hardened by a presumption of guilt that served as justification for aggressive police behavior.

The young Black men who participated in Brunson and Miller's study expressed frustration with the unilateral suspicion against them. They described encounters where officers routinely used disrespectful language, engaged in physically intrusive actions such as strip searches and cavity probes, and assumed young men merely "got lucky" rather than were innocent when no evidence of criminal wrongdoing was discovered. The participants also described being harassed at all hours, including in the mornings as they walked to school. Proactive policing in urban communities targets activities such as street-level drug dealing and gang participation that disproportionately involve adolescents. Bass (2001) noted that "while this contextualizes police stops, and searches, it is insufficient for explaining why so many young men are treated uniformly as suspects, even when their behavior belies this interpretation" (p.168). Quillian and Pager (2001) reported that it is not simply their status as minority youths living in poor urban communities that exposes them to aggressive policing strategies, but also that they are young African American men. The researchers further explained that the image of young Black men as "symbolic assailants" where they are defined and responded to as criminals, is deeply entrenched in American culture, but is also deeply gendered. These messages are powerfully conveyed in adolescence. In fact, according to Ferguson (2001), research has found

that such responses to African American boys begin in early childhood and has profound consequences.

Brunson and Miller (2006) further reported that youth experiences with police violence is viewed as gendered with males facing more severe violence at the hands of the police. Black male youths were also deeply troubled by the frequency of incidents in their neighborhoods.

In a single study, Rod K. Brunson (2007) researched African-American young men's direct experiences with police harassment and violence, and their impact on the perceptions of police. Brunson interviewed 40 young African-American men for his study. As a result of this study, the researcher found the cumulative impact of racial discrimination accounts for the special way that blacks have of looking at, and evaluating their experiences in public encounters. According to Brunson (p.), descriptions of black citizens' treatment by the police are abundant in some African-American communities.

### *Procedural Justice*

Procedural justice (sometimes referred to as Procedural Fairness) describes the idea that how individuals regard the justice system is tied more to the perceived fairness of the process, and how they were treated, rather than to the perceived fairness of the outcome. Researchers reported that underlying procedural justice is the idea that the criminal justice system must constantly be demonstrating its legitimacy to the public it serves. If the public ceases to view its justice system as legitimate, dire consequences ensue. According to experts on the topic, people are more likely to comply with the law and cooperate with law enforcement efforts when they feel the system and its actors are legitimate. In an article for COPS magazine, researchers Emily Gold and Melissa Bradley (2013) reported finding several dimensions of procedural fairness, which are as follows:

- 1) Voice- described as the perception that your side of the story has been heard.



- 2) Respect- perception that system players treat you with dignity and respect.
- 3) Neutrality- perception that the decision making process is unbiased and trustworthy.
- 4) Understanding- Comprehension of the process and how decisions are made.
- 5) Helpful- perception that system players are interested in your personal situation to the extent that the law allows.

Lyn Hinds (2007) reported the key reason adults support police is because they view them as legitimate. Youths' attitudes toward police legitimacy are linked to police use of procedural justice. Hinds further noted that prior negative contact with police significantly impacts youths' views of legitimacy (p. 195). According to Hinds, "people's earliest attitudes towards the law and legal authorities, including police, are formed in childhood as part of the socialization process. Most children are taught by their parents that police officers are good people, and should be respected. They are taught that police are here to help, and not harm them (p. 196).

There has been a number of studies conducted linking procedural justice to police legitimacy. Researchers found that social identity is an important mechanism linking procedural justice to police legitimacy. When people feel fairly treated, their sense of identification with the group the police represents, seems to be enhanced, strengthening police legitimacy as a result. But, unfair treatment, which indicates to people that they do not belong, may undermine such identification and damage police legitimacy.

Tom Tyler (2003&2006), described procedural justice as an impartial service to the law, fair, respectful, and even-handed wielding of power, as well as the extent to which citizens feel they have some level of control over or input into processes affecting them. Research has linked the experience of procedurally fair treatment at the hands of criminal justice agents, particularly

the police, to positive assessments of their trustworthiness and legitimacy, as well as to enhanced propensities to cooperate with officers and obey the laws they represent (Jackson et al 2012, Murphy et al 2008, Sunshine and Tyler 2003a & 2003b, Tyler 2006a & 2006b). Tom Tyler and Steven Blader (2000) reported that the experience of procedural justice strengthens people's connections to social groups. Tyler, along with Yuen Huo (2002) further noted that when legal authorities use the power vested in them fairly, this strengthens the social bonds between individuals and justice institutions.

### ***Methodology***

The methodology for my evaluation included a pre and post survey for Teen Empowerment's youth organizers and participating police officers. The surveys were completed for the Phase One, and Phase Two dialogue sessions. There were two separate pre and post surveys distributed, one for youths, and one for officers. The youth pre-survey consisted of twenty-eight questions, including two adjective checklists. The youth post-survey consisted of thirty-two questions, including two adjective checklists. The surveys were required, and the results were kept confidential. These rendered eight respondents for the pre-survey, and seven for the post-survey. One youth found other employment after completing the pre-survey. The sample was small with eight respondents. The surveys were designed to measure the respondents' feelings towards the police.

The officers' pre-survey consisted of twenty-nine questions, including two adjective checklists. The officers' post-survey consisted of thirty-two questions, including two adjective checklists. The surveys were required for the project, and the results were kept confidential. The sample was small with five respondents.

The pre-surveys for the youth were completed on September 17, 2013 at the first preparatory session. The post-survey for the youths were completed on October 21, 2013. The

pre-survey for the officers were completed on October 1, 2013, at their preparatory session. The post-survey for the officers were completed on October 17, 2013. The distribution rendered twelve completed, unduplicated surveys appropriate for analysis.

Both the youth and police surveys used an ordinal rating system, of 1 to 5 for the majority of questions. Two types of ordinal responses were used in the survey. The first set of responses started at 5= Strongly Agree, and continued to 4 = Agree, 3= Neutral, 2= Disagree, and 1= Strongly Disagree. The second set started at 5= Always, 4= Most of the Time, 3= Sometimes, 2= Rarely, and 1=Never. The response number was listed with the response name to minimize any confusion by the respondent.

Another part of my research consisted of observing and participating in the youth organizers' preparatory training sessions, by way of engaging in icebreakers called "interactives." Participation in the interactives are required of every youth organizer, facilitator, researcher, and anyone else who observes the sessions.

### ***Session Observations***

The author of this thesis was also the primary Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI) researcher for this project, and observed each session in Phase One and Phase Two of the youth-police dialogue sessions. The researcher attended every youth preparatory session, the police preparatory session, and all four youth-police dialogues to take notes and write separate reports on each session. These consistent, thorough observations were beneficial in that it gave first-hand information regarding what occurs during the sessions. Due to the nature of Teen Empowerment's work being heavily participatory, the researcher was required to be an active participant in every session whenever possible. The researcher only participated in the warm-up question during the actual youth-police dialogue sessions in order to provide more opportunity

for the youth and police to converse. The facilitator explained this to the group at the first dialogue session, and the decision seemed to be accepted by both the youth and officers. The dialogues proceeded with the researcher observing the interactives.

During these sessions, the researcher was able to observe the participants' demeanors, responses (verbal, non-verbal), and interactions with other participants and facilitators. The researcher also had the opportunity to observe how participants responded (negatively or positively) to her presence, and felt she was positively accepted by the participants. The participants seemed to be open and forthcoming about their feelings, so the researcher felt confident her presence was accepted. The researcher felt that the youth in particular trusted her enough to disclose some intimate and personal experiences and issues in her presence. The youth also requested her opinion at times during certain discussions. This made the researcher feel like the youth wanted her included in the discussion. When the researcher was asked to participate in the interactives, the participants were welcoming. While observing the youth, the researcher felt that she had gained a close familiarity with them through involvement in the warm-up questions and participation in the interactives. In addition, she gained a better insight into many of them through the feedback exercise.

The researcher also had the opportunity to participate in the warm-up question and some interactives with the officers. During the preparatory session, the researcher did not engage in all four interactives with the officers. At the end of the session when the officers were giving their verbal rating, one officer stated she wished the researcher had talked a little more during the session.

### ***Focus Groups***

One researcher from the Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI) conducted three focus groups after the dialogue series was completed: one with the youth organizers, one with the police officers, and one with the facilitators. These focus groups provided a platform through which qualitative information could be collected from each group involved in a “confidential” way (i.e. officers could speak to an objective person without youth or Teen Empowerment staff there, youth could speak without the officers or staff there, and facilitators could speak without the participants there (Retrieved from Fetzner Interim Report, 2014).

### ***One-on-One Interviews***

In addition to holding the focus groups, one-on-one interviews were conducted with one youth and one officer who could not attend their respective focus groups. This provided an opportunity to speak with some participants without anyone else there who could potentially influence their responses.

## **Survey Development**

### ***Overview and Methodology***

Prior to the start of each of their respective preparatory sessions, the youth and officers were asked to complete the pre-survey developed by the Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI). After going through the entire dialogue series, a post-survey was also conducted, which had similar questions to the pre-survey to assess changes in attitudes and beliefs. The youth completed their post-survey at one of their debriefing sessions at Teen Empowerment, while the officer post-survey was completed at the beginning of their focus group. (One post-survey was completed via e-mail by the officer who was not able to attend the focus group.)

### ***Survey Design and Goals***

Youth and officers completed slightly different surveys. The language was slightly changed to be relevant to each group, and some questions were asked only of youth or only of officers..

These surveys are included in Appendices A-D. They included three types of questions:

- Ordinal Scale Response to Statements: The surveys mostly consisted of a list of statements, and the youth and police were asked to respond to each statement on an ordinal rating system with five options. Two sets of responses were used:
  - They rated how strongly they agreed with each prompting (5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree).
  - After a question about an event, they chose how frequently that event happened (5 = Always, 4 = Most of the Time, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never).
- Open-Ended Questions: youth and officers were asked several open-ended questions to obtain more qualitative information about how they felt.
- Adjective Checklists: Youth and police were asked to circle words in a pre-defined list which they thought described a given word or phrase. Youth were asked to circle words to describe officers, and officers were asked to circle words to describe youth in Rochester. Then, both were asked to circle words to describe “justice.”

The youth pre-survey consisted of twenty-one statement prompts, two adjective checklists, and five open-ended questions. The officers’ pre-survey consisted of twenty-two statement prompts, two adjective checklists, and five open-ended questions. The youth post-survey consisted of twenty-five statement prompts, two adjective checklists, and five open-ended questions. The officers’ post-survey consisted of twenty-five statement prompts, two adjectives checklists, five open-ended questions, and space for additional comments.

In designing the surveys, the goals were:

- to be able to compare the youth's and officers' responses,
- to compare how their responses varied before and after going through the dialogues,
- to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve the program, and
- to obtain both quantitative (statement prompts) and quantitative (open-ended) data.

To these ends, the surveys were designed so that the officers and youth were asked very similar questions, and both groups responded to the many of the same questions on the post-survey as they did on the pre-survey. There were additional statement prompts on the post-surveys to ask participants to reflect on their experience. The open-ended questions were different on the pre- and post-surveys, as the ones asked on the pre-survey were no longer relevant by the post-survey. For the most part, youth and officers were asked similar open-ended questions in order to compare their responses. Both groups completed the same adjective checklists on the pre-survey and the post-survey.

The aim was to ask questions that would help assess each participant's initial feelings about the state of youth-police relations in Rochester, which served as a baseline to compare the post-survey responses. I theorized shifts in how participants felt about youth-police relations after the dialogues compared to the baseline. Participants were asked about their personal feelings and experiences, as well as how they thought the community or police force felt as a whole about youth-police relations. In theory, this could help to determine if the participants' attitudes shifted relative to their perception of their peers' attitudes.

### *Statement Prompts*

The statement prompts were primarily concerned with measuring self-reported levels of trust, respect, safety (i.e. youth's willingness to approach an officer if in need), and willingness to work to improve relations between youth and police. Many questions intended to measure empathy (such as "I am aware of the challenges faced by youth/police in Rochester."), the strength of stereotypes (i.e. "Most police officers/youth want to help the community."), and the strength of peer group influences on participants (i.e. "If my friend was disrespecting a police officer/youth, I would encourage him or her to act differently.")

Also, four statement prompts assessed how frequently the participants and their peers had positive and negative interactions with youth or officers. These could allow research to see if those who had had direct bad experiences responded any differently from those who had no bad experiences, or those whose peers had bad experiences. This could also help determine what influence social opinions played on their feelings towards youth or officers.

#### *Adjective Checklists*

Likewise, the adjective checklists were used to get a more nuanced view of how youth and police felt about each other, and about justice. Responses to the checklist as a whole can be hard to interpret, such as if a youth circles both "uncaring" and "trustworthy" to describe an officer. They can also provide insight into the complexity of feelings participants have. I hoped to see youth and police circle more words after the dialogues that showed increases in empathy for the other group (i.e. compassionate, vulnerable, stressed, and resilient) and potentially a decrease in "negative" words such as strangers, dangerous, and stupid.

The "justice" adjective checklist aimed to see how youth and police felt about the role of justice in their community and what role, if any, things like forgiveness, accountability, peace, healing and equality had compared to punishment, jail, blame, and arrest. It was theorized that this could also help to see common ground between youth and police conceptions of justice in



theory, as compared to how it is practiced (elicited through the statement prompt responses). The differences that participant groups had in their definitions of justice, could also be seen.

### *Open-Ended Questions*

Finally, the open-ended questions were used to give participants more freedom in their responses. For example, they were asked to define respect, why they wanted to participate, what were the most important and challenging moments in the dialogues, and how they could see the project applying to the larger community. On the pre-surveys, both groups were asked what gave them the strength or ability to share their opinions with the other group and why they were willing to listen to the opinions and feelings of the other group. The goal was to gain insight into their conception of the reconciliation and forgiveness process.

## **Phase One Survey Results**

### *Sample Size*

All of the youth and officers who participated in the dialogues completed both pre- and post-surveys, and all participants completed all questions. The youth participants completing the surveys were selected by a hiring process developed by Teen Empowerment, which consisted of filling out an application then participating in a three-hour session similar to the youth organizer's preparatory session. During the session, each applicant is required to answer a warm-up question and engage in whatever interactive activities (known as interactives) are planned for the evening. The last interactive of the evening is an exercise where the applicants are divided up into groups and given a choice of scenarios they are required to act out. The officer participants were selected primarily on a voluntary basis, but two officers were mandated. The surveys were completed anonymously and responses are reported in aggregate (except open-ended responses) to further preserve confidentiality. The pre-surveys were not matched to the post-surveys, but

the groups were the same (except one youth found other employment after completing the pre-survey and thus did not participate in the youth-police dialogues or in the post-survey). In total, eight respondents were rendered for the youth pre-survey, and seven for the youth post-survey. All five officers took both the officer pre-survey and the officer post-survey. The distribution rendered, therefore, thirteen total pre-surveys and twelve post-surveys that were appropriate for analysis.

The pre-surveys for the youth were completed on September 17, 2013 at one of their preparatory sessions. The pre-surveys for the officers were completed on October 1, 2013 at their preparatory session. The post-surveys for the youth were completed on October 21, 2013 at one of the youth's debriefing sessions with Teen Empowerment. The post-surveys for the officers were completed on October 17, 2013 at their focus group.

These sample sizes are very small, limiting the ability to generalize much from the data. Nonetheless, the results discussed below are promising, and the analytical capabilities will be strengthened after the completion of the second phase of dialogues due to the increase in the number of total participants.

### ***Demographics***

The officer participants consisted of three patrol officers, a Community Police Officer, and one sergeant. There were four male officers and one female. There were eight youth respondents for the pre-survey, with four males and four females. There were seven youth respondents to the post-survey, with four black males and three black females.

### ***Ancillary Benefits***

The analysis for these surveys provided some useful results, and yet completing surveys was found to be useful for other reasons besides evaluation. The surveys allowed the officers the opportunity to express their feelings without fear of repercussions from superiors. The youth,

likewise, were given the opportunity to express their feelings and ideas about youth-police relations confidentially, without fear of retaliation and without peer influence from either youth or officers.

### ***Adjective Checklist Results***

For analysis, I coded whether or not a word was circled as a 1 (yes) or 0 (no) and then calculated the “average” for each word. Then, a significance test was run on the averages on the pre- and post-surveys. For the youth adjective checklist, there were no significant changes in how many youth circled any word. Statisticians consider a difference to be significant only at a 0.050 significance level (less-than-5% chance of being due to random variation), and with our small number of respondents, none of our changes were significant at even a 0.200 significance level. Trends were expected to appear or strengthen once there is more data from more participants after Phase Two of the project.

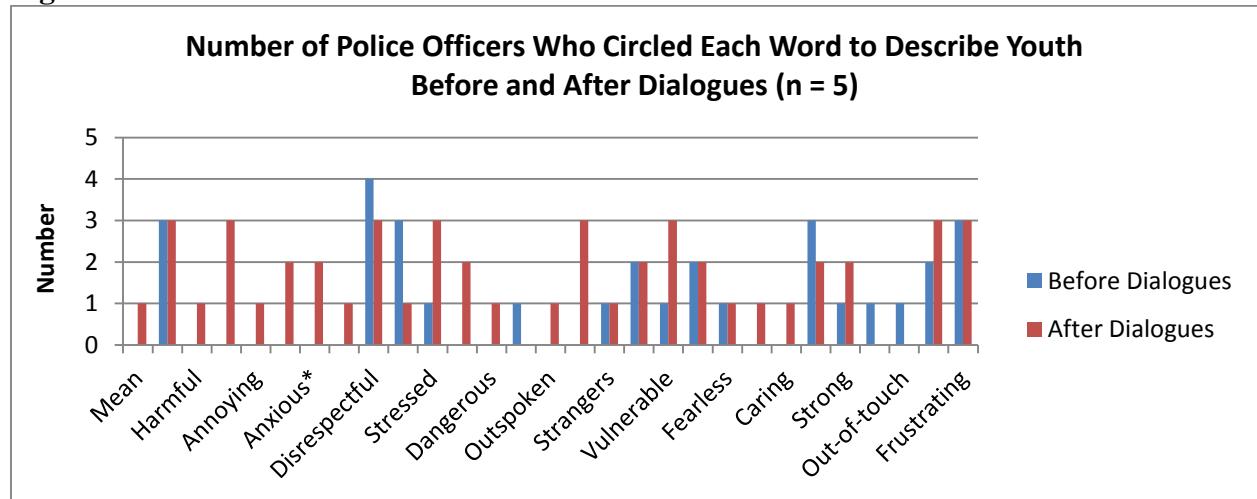
Some interesting results that came out of the youth surveys were the responses to describe officers on the adjective checklists. No youth, neither before nor after the dialogues, circled the following words to describe the police in their community: friendly, dedicated, nice, compassionate, vulnerable, trustworthy, or neighbors. The youth circled more words on the post survey than they did on the pre-survey.

Two youth (30% of the group) circled the words intelligent, helpful, and understanding to describe police officers on the post survey after the dialogues, but none had circled those words on the pre survey before the dialogues. Also, two less youth circled “unfriendly” and “protecting” on the post-survey than they did on the pre-survey.

The officers’ words chosen to describe youth in Rochester were more homogenous than the youth’s and revealed some significant differences between the pre- and post-surveys. In

other words, the officers circled fewer words to describe youth than youth circled to describe officers. The chart below shows the number of police officer participants who circled each word.

**Figure 1**



\* = statistically significant below 0.200 level (less than 20% chance of being due to random variation)

\*\* = statistically significant below 0.100 level (less than 10% chance of being due to random variation)

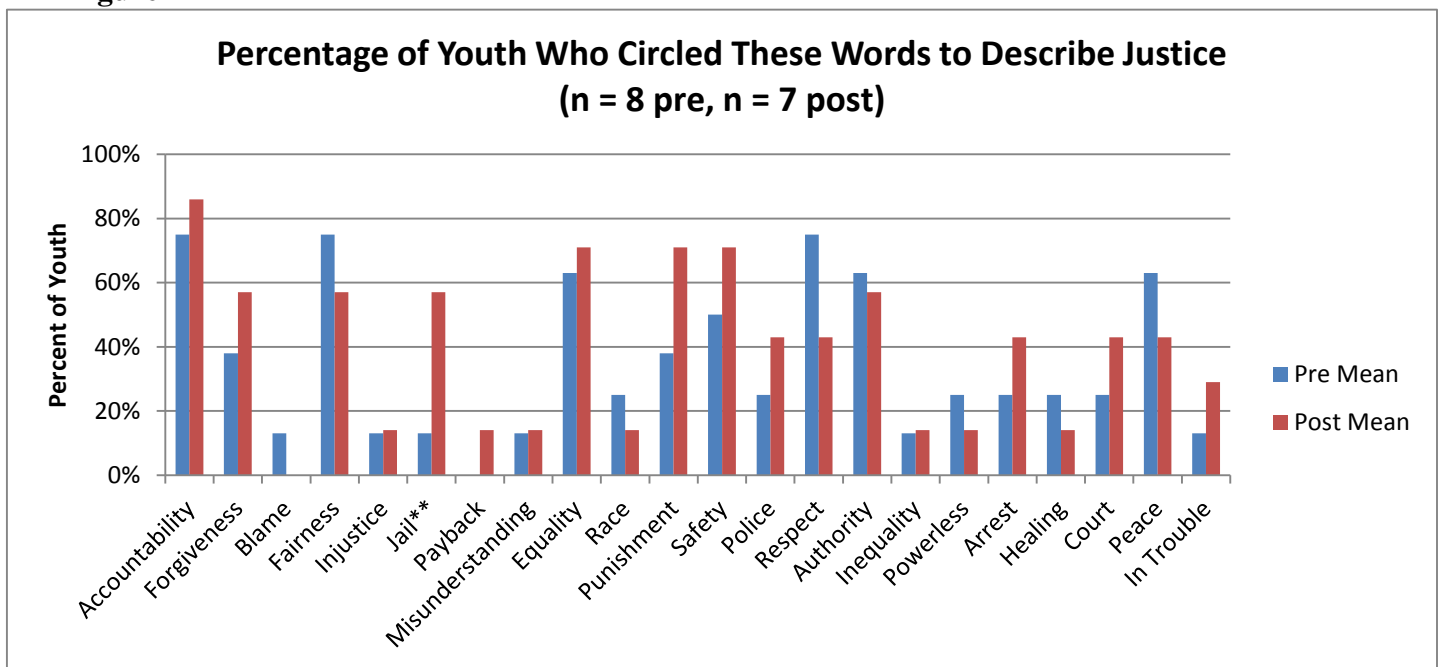
No police officers circled the following words to describe youth, before or after the dialogues: courteous, friendly, respectable, intimidating, cooperative, respectful, weak, engaged, helpful, forgiving, dumb, neighbors, understanding. There was, however, a much greater variety of words circled by the officers after the dialogues than before. This in and of itself may indicate that the officers gained a more nuanced perspective of youth by participating in these dialogues. The most significant changes were that three out of the five officers circled the words “bored” and “scared” to describe youth after participating in the dialogues, while none had circled those words before the dialogues. This change was significant at a 0.100 significance level (so it has a less-than-10% chance of being due to random variation).

Also, at a 0.200 significance level, two out of five officers circled the words grudge, anxious, and intelligent to describe youth after participating in the dialogues, while none had circled those words before. Two additional officers circled “stressed” and “vulnerable” after the dialogues than before and two less circled “uncaring” after the dialogues than before. These changes were not found to be significant at all, but with more participants might emerge as such.

Overall, it seems like officers empathized more with youth after the dialogues, though they still felt that youth were disrespectful, rude, violent, and frustrating, just as they did prior to the dialogues. It seems like they described more of the emotions and predicaments that youth face after the dialogues, rather than simply focusing on youth’s actions with police.

When asked to circle words to describe justice, all words were chosen by at least one youth on either the pre- or post-survey. The chart below shows the percentages of youth who circled each word before and after the dialogues. (Percentages were used because the amount of youth taking the survey before the dialogues was different from the number after the dialogues.)

**Figure 2**



\*\* = statistically significant below 0.100 level (less than 10% chance of being due to random variation)

The most-commonly chosen words were accountability, fairness, equality, respect, authority, punishment, safety, and peace. Four out of seven youths circled the word jail after the dialogues compared to only one youth who circled the word on the pre-survey before the dialogues. This means that 57% of youth circled the word jail to describe justice on the post-survey, while only 13% circled it on the pre-survey. This change in amount of youth who circled “jail” is almost statistically significant (0.100 significance level) despite our small sample size. It is the only change that approaches significance in how the youth described justice.

Some other changes are of interest and could emerge as significant with a larger sample:

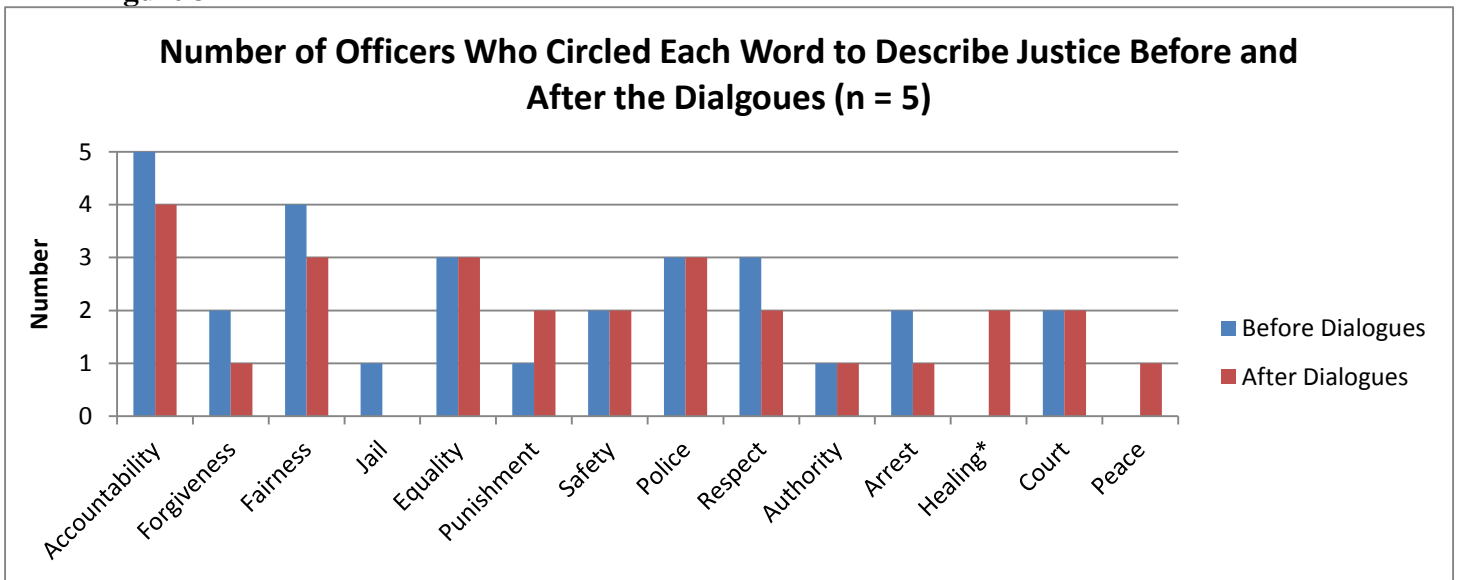
- Before the dialogues, 38% of the youth circled “forgiveness” to describe justice, but after the dialogues, 57% circled this word.
- 38% of the youth circled “punishment” before the dialogues, and 71% circled it after.
- Three-quarters of youth circled “respect” before the dialogues, while less than half circled it afterwards.
- For both “arrest” and “court,” 25% of youth circled these before the dialogues compared to 43% afterwards.
- Finally, 63% of the youth circled “peace” on the pre-survey, while 43% circled it on the post-survey.

These results hint that the youth saw justice in more of a traditional criminal justice lens after the dialogues, but it is possible that the dialogues simply primed them to think about the role of officers in their community, which generally takes the form of punishment, arrest, and court procedures. It is important to note, though, that more youth circled “forgiveness” to describe justice after the dialogues than before.

As for officers, their responses when describing justice were again much more homogenous than the youth's. No police officers circled the following words to describe justice, before nor after the dialogues: blame, injustice, payback, misunderstanding, race, inequality, powerless, or in trouble. Some of these were also the least-commonly-circled words among the youth participants.

The most common words chosen by officers were accountability, fairness, equality, police, and respect. All of these, except "police," were also the most common words circled by the youth. The only change in response among officers that approached statistical significance was that two out of five officers circled the word "healing" to describe justice after the dialogues, while this word was not circled before the dialogues by any officer. There were no other noticeable changes.

**Figure 3**



\* = statistically significant below 0.200 level (less than 20% chance of being due to random variation)

***Statement Prompt Responses***

First, the participant's responses were looked at to see how often their personal interactions with police or youth have been positive or negative, and how often their family/friends/colleagues had positive and negative interactions with police. The youth reported both positive and negative experiences occurring "most of the time" for both them and their family members, possibly indicating that it must depend heavily on the situation. Strangely enough, they reported that both they themselves and their family and friends had more positive *and* more negative experiences with police after the dialogues than before. This is very difficult to interpret, but it is possible that the youth reported less frequent experiences with police overall before the dialogue than after, because going through the dialogues brought these experiences into the forefront of their memory. Thus, they could be expected to report a mix of positive and negative experiences with police after the dialogues.

The officers, in comparison, responded very neutral as to how often their professional interactions or their colleagues' interactions with youth were positive or negative. It depended heavily on the situation they are in. Sometimes they have positive experiences, sometimes negative. Because there are no clear trends in how participants responded to these questions, the information will not be used to try to interpret further results. Perhaps with future data collection, trends will emerge that could divulge more information.

Next, I looked at how participants responded to the other statement prompts. The focus was only on changes in average responses that approached statistical significance. In general, there were some significant changes among officers, but very few significant changes seen among the youth's responses.

### ***Officer Statement Prompt Responses***



As the table on the next page shows, the average responses of the officers shifted in the hypothesized direction for almost all of the statements. Only a few of these were significant, but these results are very promising.

For analysis, the responses were coded according to the 1 through 5 scale that participants used to choose their response. Thus, the higher the mean, the more the participants agreed with the prompting statement. Also, the higher the Standard Deviation (Std. Dev.), the more widely dispersed the group’s answers were. The closer it is to 0, the more they agreed with each other.

The table below shows the means and standard deviations for the pre-survey and the post-survey officer responses as well as the direction of the shift in mean. If there is a plus sign in the direction column, the participants agreed more with the statement on average. If it is negative, the participants agreed less with the statement. Note that the last four questions were only asked on the post-survey and thus cannot be compared to pre-dialogue responses.

The asterisks show the varying significance levels for the differences between the pre- and post-means. Single asterisks (\*) indicate significance at a 0.200 significance level; double asterisks (\*\*) indicate a 0.100 significance level; and triple asterisks (\*\*\*) indicate a 0.050 significance level.

**OFFICERS’ RESPONSES TO STATEMENT PROMPTS**

**1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree**

<b>Prompting Statement</b>	<b>Pre-Mean</b>	<b>Post-Mean</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Pre-Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Post-Std. Deviation</b>
I want to work with Rochester youth to improve youth-police relations.	4.20	4.60	+	0.447	0.548
I want to work with other Officers to improve relations with youth.	4.40	4.60	+	0.548	0.548
I trust youth in Rochester.	2.75	3.00	+	0.500	0.707
In general, Rochester police officers trust youth.	2.20	2.20		0.447	0.447

As a police officer, I try to understand what youth are going through.	3.80	3.80		0.447	0.447
<b>In general, I feel safe and comfortable dealing with youth.*</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>4.00</b>	+	<b>0.548</b>	<b>0</b>
Youth in Rochester respect the police.	2.00	2.20	+	.000	0.447
Youth in Rochester trust the police.	2.00	2.20	+	.000	0.447
I respect youth in Rochester.	3.60	3.60		.894	.894
Police officers respect the youth in Rochester.	2.60	2.80	+	1.140	.837
<b>Relations between youth and police can be improved.**</b>	<b>4.80</b>	<b>4.20</b>	-	<b>.447</b>	<b>0.447</b>
I go out of my way to help youth with their problems, even if it's not technically part of my job.	3.80	3.80		.447	0.447
<b>Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.*</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>4.60</b>	+	<b>.707</b>	<b>.548</b>
Most police officers want to help the community.	4.00	4.40	+	.707	0.548
<b>Youth in Rochester want to make their community better.*</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>3.00</b>	+	<b>.548</b>	<b>.707</b>
<b>When responding to a call or scene, police officers handle the situation to the best of their ability.**</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>2.00</b>	-	<b>.447</b>	<b>1.871</b>
If one of my fellow police officers were disrespecting a youth, I would encourage him/her to act differently.	3.80	4.00	+	.447	0
<b>The way I treat youth influences how my fellow officers treat youth.***</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>4.60</b>	+	<b>.447</b>	<b>.548</b>
I am aware of the challenges faced by youth in Rochester	N/A	4.20		NA	.447
I will try harder to establish better communication between myself and youth.	N/A	4.40		NA	.548
After participating in the youth/police dialogues, I have a better understanding of how youth feel.	N/A	4.60		NA	.548
I will encourage other officers to participate in youth/police dialogues.	N/A	5.00		NA	.000

Analysis:

The strongest increases in agreement were to statements having to do with how police officers handle situations with youth. It seems that the officers learned more than anything else that they can work with youth to make youth-police relations better and that their personal acts as an officer can encourage their fellow officers to treat youth better. The only truly significant change was, indeed, that officers agreed more strongly that the way they treat youth affects how

their fellow officers treat youth. Their agreement levels shifted from somewhere between neutral and agree before the dialogues to firmly between agree and strongly agree afterwards. This is encouraging; it shows that the officers potentially feel more empowered to set an example for other officers in the way that they work with youth.

An interesting and almost-significant shift occurred in response to the statement, “When responding to a call or scene, police officers handle the situation to the best of their ability.” The officers nearly agreed, on average, with this statement before the dialogues, but after the dialogues, they firmly disagreed (on average). The standard deviation also shows that the responses to this question were much more varied after the dialogues than before. This may be worth future exploration. It could indicate that the officers learned from the youth ways in which they could work better in the community. They may have also become more critical – or more openly critical – of common policing practice.

Interestingly, the officers agreed less after the dialogues that relations between youth and police could be improved. Perhaps they sensed the enormity of the problem after going through the dialogues, which the youth and officers discussed in the focus groups. This issue may require more attention in future dialogue sessions to try to leave participants with a stronger sense of hope that their work has impact.

There were somewhat significant shifts in agreement for a few other statements. Officers agreed more that youth in Rochester want to make their community better, that youth and police can work together to help their community, and that the officers felt safe and comfortable dealing with youth. Though only significant at a 0.200 significance level, this shows that officers may have started to see youth as positive forces and indeed partners in their community and that their

sense of respect and trust for youth increased (though responses to direct questions about trusting and respecting youth did not change significantly).

Finally, all of the officers reported a desire to work with youth to improve youth-police relations from the beginning. This is expected, since these officers volunteered for this project. They also agreed that they would work with other officers to improve relations with youth. In fact, on the post-survey, all “strongly agreed” that they would encourage other officers to participate in youth/police dialogues.

For the questions only asked on the post-survey, responses showed that the officers felt more aware of the challenges faced by youth and agreed quite strongly that the dialogues gave them a better understanding of how youth feel. They also agreed that they would work to establish better communication between themselves and youth in their work.

***Youth Responses to Statement Prompts***

The table below shows the pre-survey and post-survey levels of agreement youth reported for the statement prompts.

**YOUTH’S RESPONSES TO STATEMENT PROMPTS**

**1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree**

<b>Statement Prompt</b>	<b>Pre-Mean</b>	<b>Post-Mean</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Pre-Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Post-Std. Deviation</b>
I want to work with other youth to improve youth-police relations.	4.00	4.29	+	.926	.756
Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.	4.00	4.43	+	.756	.787
I am excited about working with police officers to improve youth-police relations	3.38	N/A	N/A	1.302	NA
I enjoyed working with police officers to improve youth-police relations.	N/A	4.43	N/A	NA	.787
Most police officers try to understand what youth are going through.	2.25	2.57	+	1.165	1.618
I trust the police.	2.38	2.14	-	1.188	1.069
When they respond to a scene or area, police officers handle the situation well.	2.13	2.00	-	.991	.816
In general, young people trust the police.	1.63	1.29	-	1.061	.488

In general, I feel safe around police officers.	3.13	2.71	-	1.356	1.254
Youth in Rochester respect the police.	1.63	1.29	-	.744	.488
Most police officers want to help the community.	2.38	2.50	+	1.188	.837
Most police officers trust young people.	2.00	1.86	-	1.291	.900
The way I treat police influences how my peers act towards police officers.	2.75	3.00	+	1.389	1.291
I respect the police.	3.13	3.29	+	1.553	.756
If I or someone I knew was in immediate danger of being hurt, I would approach a police officer for help.	3.75	4.14	+	1.165	.690
Police officers respect youth in Rochester.	2.13	1.71	-	.835	.756
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	4.13	4.29	+	.991	.951
If my friend was disrespecting a police officer, I would encourage him or her to act differently.	4.00	4.00		.926	.816
I am aware of the challenges faced by police in Rochester.	N/A	2.71	N/A	N/A	.756
I will try harder to establish better communication between myself and the police.	N/A	4.14	N/A	N/A	.690
After participating in these dialogues, I have a better understanding of how police feel.	N/A	2.71	N/A	N/A	1.380
I will encourage other youth to participate in youth/police dialogues.	N/A	4.00	N/A	N/A	.816

The first important thing to notice is that none of the changes in average response for the youth were statistically significant, even at a 0.200 significance level. Thus, any differences between pre- and post-means below are quite likely to be due to random variation. The youth's responses were also much more widely dispersed than the officers'. For almost all statements, though, the youth agreed more with each other after the dialogues than before. Surveys will need to be completed with more youth participants to start making sense of the effects the dialogues might have on their responses.

Still, the shifts we see are interesting. The youth, like the officers, agreed that they wanted to work on the improving youth-police relations, even agreeing somewhat more strongly after the dialogues than before. They very much agreed that they enjoyed working with the officers in these sessions. The youth were, however, seemingly more pessimistic about the very

role of a police officer. They reported low levels of trust and respect and did not believe that officers handle situations well.

When a question did not ask about trust directly (such as “If I or someone I knew was in immediate danger of being hurt, I would approach a police officer for help”), the youth did seem to agree slightly more after the dialogues than before, which may indicate an increased level of trust that the officer would help. The youth were hopeful (average “agreed”) that relations between youth and police could be improved. They also agreed that they would encourage youth not to disrespect officers, but this was true both before and after the dialogues. They agreed they would work to establish better communication with police themselves and would encourage other youth to participate in the dialogues.

The youth participants disagreed, though, that they understood what police go through or how officers feel so perhaps future dialogue sessions can try to focus on encouraging more expressive stories from the officers. The focus group results discussed later in this report, will shed some light on this issue by the youth.

### ***Comparing Youth and Officers’ Responses to Statement Prompts***

Next, youth and officers were compared on how they responded to similar statement prompts, to get a sense of the commonalities and differences they face during the dialogues. The table on the next page shows data for only the prompting statements that were similar for the youth and officers. The more asterisks, the more statistically significant the difference was between the youth mean and the officer mean for the given statement. Each significance difference is discussed below the table.

### **Comparing Pre-Means for Youth and Officers and Post-Means for Youth and Officers**

\* = 0.050 significance level

\*\* = 0.010 significance level

Prompting Statement	Youth Pre-Dialogue Mean	Officer Pre-Dialogue Mean	Youth Post-Dialogue Mean	Officer Post-Dialogue Mean
<b>Youth:</b> I want to work with other youth to improve youth-police relations. <b>Officers:</b> I want to work with youth to improve youth-police relations.	4.00	4.20	4.29	4.60
Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.	4.00	4.00	4.43	4.60
<b>Youth:</b> I trust the police. <b>Officers:</b> I trust youth in Rochester.	2.38	2.75	2.14	3.00
When they respond to a scene, call, or area, police officers handle the situation well.	2.13**	3.80**	2.00	2.00
<b>Youth:</b> Young people trust the police. <b>Officers:</b> In general, Rochester police officers trust youth.	1.63	2.20	1.29**	2.20**
<b>Youth:</b> In general, I feel safe around police officers. <b>Officers:</b> In general, I feel safe and comfortable dealing with youth.	3.13	3.60	2.71*	4.00*
Youth in Rochester respect the police.	1.63	2.00	1.29**	2.20**
Most officers want to help the community.	2.38**	4.00**	2.50**	4.40**
<b>Youth:</b> Most police officers trust young people. <b>Officers:</b> In general, Rochester police officers trust youth.	2.00	2.20	1.86	2.20
<b>Youth:</b> The way I treat police influences how my peers act towards police officers. <b>Officers:</b> The way I treat youth influences how my fellow officers treat youth.	2.75	3.80	3.00*	4.60*
<b>Youth:</b> I respect the police. <b>Officers:</b> I respect youth in Rochester.	3.13	3.60	3.29	3.60
Police Officers respect the youth in Rochester.	2.13	2.60	1.71*	2.80*
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	4.13	4.80	4.29	4.20
<b>Youth:</b> If my friend was disrespecting a police officer, I would encourage him or her to act differently. <b>Officers:</b> If one of my fellow officers were disrespecting a youth, I would encourage him or her to act differently.	4.00	3.80	4.00	4.00

Prompting Statement	Youth Pre-Dialogue Mean	Officer Pre-Dialogue Mean	Youth Post-Dialogue Mean	Officer Post-Dialogue Mean
<b>Youth:</b> I am aware of the challenges faced by officers in Rochester. <b>Officers:</b> I am aware of the challenges faced by youth in Rochester.	N/A	N/A	2.71**	4.20**
I will try harder to establish better communication between myself and youth/officers.	N/A	N/A	4.14	4.40
After participating in the youth-police dialogues, I have a better understanding of how youth/officers feel.	N/A	N/A	2.71*	4.60*
I will encourage other youth/officers to participate in the youth-police dialogues.	N/A	N/A	4.00*	5.00*

*Results:*

Before the dialogues, officers felt that officers as a whole handle responding to calls significantly better than youth thought they did. After the dialogues, this difference disappeared, and both groups thought that officers did not handle their calls well.

The youth felt that young people trust police much less than officers felt most officers trust youth. This was seen both before and after the dialogues, though the difference was stronger after the dialogues.

Both before and after the dialogues, the youth felt less safe around officers than the officers did around youth. This difference was stronger after the dialogues, with officers agreeing more that they felt safe with youth and youth reporting feeling less safe around officers.

Both before and after the dialogues, the officers felt significantly more strongly than youth did that most police officers wanted to help the community. Both groups agreed more after the dialogues that the way they treat the other group influenced how their peers would treat the other group. However, the officers agreed significantly more strongly with this statement after



the dialogues than the youth did, while there was no significant difference between the youth's and officers' responses prior to the dialogues.

The youth felt less respected by most police officers after the dialogues, while the officers agreed more that most police respect youth. Thus, the difference in how much they felt police as a whole respected youth were significantly different after the dialogues but not before.

The last four questions were only asked on the post-survey, taken after the dialogues. The officers felt significantly more strongly that they were aware of the youth's issues than the youth felt they were aware of the officers' issues. Similarly, the officers agreed more strongly that they understood how youth felt than the youth agreed they understood how officers felt. Finally, the officers reported being significantly more willing to encourage their peers to participate in these dialogues than the youth did, though both agreed they would encourage peers to participate.

Despite these differences, there are some commonalities between the groups that are worth noting. Both groups wanted to work to improve youth-police relations, and both felt that youth and police could work together to help their community. Yet interestingly, there were statistically equivalent levels of distrust between the youth and police. (i.e. the youth reported distrusting the police just as much as the police reported distrusting the youth). Likewise, both groups were neutral about respecting the other group as a whole when overtly asked, both before and after the dialogues. They both, however, agreed that youth-police relations could be improved, and they both agreed to work harder to establish better communication between the groups.

### ***Trust and Respect***

Many of my questions focused on the ideas of trust and respect among police and youth. When looking at whether or not the participating officers personally trusted youth, the reported

level of trust increased from the pre- to the post-survey. When asked whether police officers in general trust youth, the response did not change from pre- to post-survey. Thus, this shows that while participating officers' attitudes towards youth had shifted as a result of these dialogues, they did not feel that the attitudes of their fellow non-participant officers changed at all.

### Open-Ended Questions

The open-ended questions asked on the pre-surveys were different from those asked on the post-surveys. Whenever it made sense, youth and police were asked the same questions.

#### Pre-Survey Question: Defining Respect

When analyzing responses to the open-ended questions, it was found that both the police officers and youth had similar responses to describe the word respect. For example, the majority of participants in both groups answered that respect is treating someone the way you would like to be treated. One youth and one officer felt that respect is earned, not just given. An officer wrote that, "Respect varies, depending on age/gender, but always with kindness and dignity."

#### Pre-Survey Question: Why Participants Wanted to Participate

When asked why they wanted to participate in the program, both officers and youth shared a desire to get to know each other and to work together to improve the community. Some officers wanted to "dispel myths" and teach the youth why officers do what they do, and one youth mentioned specifically being interested in learning about officers' actions. The youth wanted to teach the officers about themselves and why they feel the way they do about police, and the police independently reported being interested in learning this as well. They all wanted to improve communication and the working relationship between the youth and police, citing the dialogues as an opportunity to communicate in ways that are not normally available. One youth specifically said that they want to "have a different perspective of police."

### Pre-Survey Question: Willingness to Share

When asked why they were willing or able to share their own opinions and feelings in this process, both groups expressed a desire to improve or change youth-police relations and to understand each other. Many participants, whether youth or officers, simply stated that their experiences and their awareness of the tension between youth and police made them willing and able to participate. Some of the youth recognized that they were willing to participate because they “don’t get along well with police” and wanted to see that change. They stressed the importance of all participants being open-minded and honest if any progress was to be made.

Several expressed a righteous or moral stance, saying they were able to participate by “being bold, and standing up for what’s right” (a youth). In contrast, another youth said they were willing to participate because it was “my job.” The officers often expressed duty, stating that, “Police play [an] important role in shaping the relationship of police/youth. I feel it is important to improve it.” Another said, “I believe it will help youth understand that all police are not just a badge.”

### Why Participants Were Willing to Listen

When asked why they are willing to listen to the opinions of police officers, the youth had varying responses. Most said they wanted a better relationship with officers or thought they could learn from the officers and in turn help others work with officers better. Some youth said that they were not willing to listen to the officers, while others said they were willing to listen simply “because it matters in my eye.”

When asked why they were willing to listen to the opinions and feelings of youth, the officer respondents expressed wanting to achieve better understanding and to have a better relationship with youth, in addition to increasing youth cooperation with police. They felt that

they could learn from the youth and could in turn do their jobs better. One put it quite well: “If you can’t understand where others are coming from, you can’t help them.”

On the post-survey, only the youth were asked this question again. When asked why they had been willing to listen to officers’ opinions in the dialogues, three youth cited a desire to get a better understanding of the police or for the officers to understand the youth better. One youth wanted to give the officers a chance to speak their minds, just like the youth want to do; they emphasized that it is only fair for them to get a chance to argue their side as well. Another youth commented, “[Because] we all are similar in one way or another. Our feelings about officers can be changed [because] of the conversations, interactions, dialogues. Relationships are built, respect is gained, and solutions/problems in your life or community can be decreased.” Another youth was willing to listen, “To get them to see how I work, and what I do around the community, and let it be known to improve.” It seems that the youth had a lot more to say in response to this question after the dialogues than before.

#### Prior Youth-Police Activities

When asked to describe prior participation in youth-police activities, five out of the eight youth informed of prior participation in some type of youth-police activity, while the other three reported no prior participation. Two had participated in Teen Empowerment’s Youth-Police Dialogues in prior years, and another one had been involved in Teen Empowerment’s youth-police symposium.

Four out of the five officers had done some type of activities with youth before. They included: scuba-demonstration events, Police Activity League events, speaking at city schools, mentoring or coaching students, criminal justice camp, and police explorers. Overall, it seems like the officers had primarily participated in activities with younger youth or with youth who

were interested in criminal justice as a career. Those who had been involved with coaching or mentoring students did not specify how old those students were.

#### Post-Survey Question: Most Important Result

When asked on the post-survey about the most important thing the participants got out of participating in the dialogues, the youth replied that they have a better understanding of police, they had a chance to voice their opinions, and they realize that police are human just like them. In other words, they saw a different side of the police. One was simply glad to see “that we met with police and got along with them with no problems.” One youth stated that the most important thing was that “there is a possibility and an opportunity that we as a community can improve in police relationships.” Finally, one wrote, “The most important thing I got out of the police dialogue was that police are always under peer pressure, and that they have somewhat hard lives, like us youth do. And, they respect us more than we thought police did.”

The police officers felt the most important thing was that it gave them the opportunity to learn from youth and have a better understanding of youth. They were able to understand better what they go through and “why youth see police the way they do.” Another officer felt it was most useful to learn how much the youth wanted “officers to be more understanding and explanative with them.”

#### Post-Survey Question: Challenges

When asked what was difficult or challenging about the dialogues and how they could be improved, two youth responded that there was nothing difficult. Another commented that their dislike for officers made it difficult to fully participate. One youth suggested having more events with both youth and officers such as neighborhood block parties.

The officers responded to this question with suggestions to stay on topic and allocate more time for certain discussions. The need for more time was important to the officers, and one youth mentioned it specifically as well. In addition, one officer commented on the need to stay on task, as well as questioning the effect the dialogues could have on youth and officers outside of the group. The same officer suggested having longer sessions with more straightforward questions rather than multiple questions for each task. The officers further suggested possibly walking in the neighborhood with the youth organizers, so that their efforts to heal relations could be seen by other youth, “which would hopefully help transfer the effects of their improved relationship to youth and police outside the group.” They acknowledged, though, that this might put the youth in difficult situations with their peers. Finally, one officer expressed frustration and powerlessness in their ability to help the youth: “It's difficult to hear how some of them have had it and/or have it, and it's challenging because most of it is not something I CAN DIRECTLY IMPACT.”

#### Post-Survey Question: What They Learned

When asked to describe something new youth learned from the officers, two youth learned that officers have some of the same struggles and issues as they do. Two youth acknowledged that officers have policies and rules to follow and face getting in trouble too. They learned how police get their calls and information and how that makes their job difficult. Another youth acknowledged that not every officer is “out to get you, and that some do care about the community and loves to be involved with programs like Teen Empowerment to... get opinions from youth like us.” Another youth was happy to hear about the officers’ volunteer work and that the officers listened to what the youth had to say about their community.

The officers reported learning that the youth really care about improving youth-police relations, their personal situations, and their community. One described this well: “Prior to the

project, I have only come across mostly youth that convey an attitude that they do not care about life, and do not care about the community. It was nice to meet with youth that I could tell cared about their lives, and cared about the community they live in. I also learned a lot about the frustrations they have faced as they grew up and that they face on a day to day basis.” Another officer acknowledged that, “There are a lot of good kids in the community who get swept up in the negative behaviors of a few.” Another officer commented that, “These kids are articulate, smart, and have to deal with lots of shit to just get through the day.”

#### Officer Post-Survey: Expanding the Project in Law Enforcement

When the officers were asked if they thought the project could have a broader impact on law enforcement agencies, one officer responded, “Yes, it needs to be done on a bigger scale to reach out to more officers/youth. Maybe create a volunteer based program in juvenile facilities where a focus group can be drawn from.” Another officer wrote, “Yes, I think officers should be required to meet with the community, including youth, on a more regular basis, possibly setting up a few hours a week for officers to respond to community events, in addition to rotating officers, youth, and other community members to improve relations. I wish more youth had a similar attitude that the youth involved in this project had.” One officer stated, “The more people on each side get involved, the bigger the impact. That said, both sides have to really want it.” Another acknowledged that more knowledge and understanding will be gained with more dialogues, which will lead to greater compassion. Some suggested making the groups bigger and then following-up after the project ends. Another officer believed that more police departments besides the City of Rochester should be involved with these groups, since many city kids are moving or traveling into suburbs, and cops there “don’t have a clue” what they go through.

#### Additional Comments

When asked for additional comments, one officer stated, “Overall it was helpful in understanding some of youth’s issues and letting them see us as people, not cops.” Another officer commented, “As we work with teens, we should also work with younger groups to have an impact before prejudices and bad feelings develop.” Another officer further commented, “I enjoyed this, and wish to do more of it.”

## **Phase Two Survey Results**

### Youth Survey Results

#### Youth Sample Size

The pre-surveys for the youth were completed on December 12, 2013 at the beginning of their second orientation session. All of the 11 original youth organizers completed a pre-survey and completed all questions. Because only seven youth organizers participated in the dialogues in March 2014, there were only seven post-survey responses. Unfortunately, due to the anonymity of the surveys, the researchers could not discard the responses on the pre-surveys for the youth who did not participate in the dialogues.

#### Youth Demographics

The eleven original youth participants consisted of six females and five males. One youth was Hispanic, while the rest were African-American. By the time the dialogues began, the Hispanic youth left the program, leaving seven African-Americans. Four female youths and three male youths participated in the dialogues.

#### Youth Responses to Statement Prompts

The table below shows the levels of agreement youth reported for each statement prompt. There were a few statistically significant changes from the pre-survey to the post-survey. Youth agreed more after the dialogues that officers try to understand what youth are going through.



They agreed more after the dialogues that young people in Rochester trust and respect the police. However, they were less inclined after the dialogues to want to work with other youth to improve youth-police relations or to believe that youth and police could work together to effectively help the community.

It seems as though the youth responded more positively to less direct questions, say, about how they think other youth feel, than they did to questions directly asking how they would act or think. This may be because they felt disconnected and standoffish with the officers in the dialogues (see the focus group section later in this report), but they still learned quite a bit about how officers go about their jobs. This may have changed some of their views in subtle ways.

Overall, the responses from youth were largely neutral to negative on the statement prompts. However, they agreed that they would encourage other youth to participate in these dialogue sessions. The youth seemed to be willing to encourage their peers to respect officers – a feeling which grew somewhat stronger on the post-survey. The youth also acknowledged that the way they treat the police in the presence of their friends could influence how their friends treat police.

***Phase Two Youth Responses to Statement Prompts (n=6)***

(A mean of 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

<b>Statement Prompt</b>	<b>Pre-Mean</b>	<b>Post-Mean</b>	<b>Direction of Change</b>
<b>I want to work with other youth to improve youth-police relations. *</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>Agreed less</b>
<b>Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community. *</b>	<b>4.18</b>	<b>3.57</b>	<b>Agreed less</b>
I am excited about working with police officers to improve youth-police relations	3.64	N/A	N/A
I enjoyed working with police officers to improve youth-police relations.	N/A	3.29	N/A
<b>Most police officers try to understand what youth are going through. **</b>	<b>2.27</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>Agreed more</b>
I trust the police.	2.45	2.14	None

When they respond to a scene or area, police officers handle the situation well.	2.64	2.86	None
<b>In general, young people trust the police. *</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>1.86</b>	<b>Agreed more</b>
In general, I feel safe around police officers.	3.00	3.00	None
<b>Youth in Rochester respect the police. *</b>	<b>1.55</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>Agreed more</b>
Most police officers want to help the community.	2.91	2.86	None
Most police officers trust young people.	1.64	1.86	None
The way I treat police influences how my peers act towards police officers.	3.36	3.86	None
I respect the police.	3.27	3.43	None
If I or someone I knew was in immediate danger of being hurt, I would approach a police officer for help.	4.09	3.86	None
Police officers respect youth in Rochester.	2.18	2.00	None
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	3.91	4.00	None
If my friend was disrespecting a police officer, I would encourage him or her to act differently.	3.91	4.00	None
I am aware of the challenges faced by police in Rochester.	N/A	2.86	N/A
I will try harder to establish better communication between myself and the police.	N/A	2.71	N/A
After participating in these dialogues, I have a better understanding of how police feel.	N/A	2.43	N/A
I will encourage other youth to participate in youth/police dialogues.	N/A	4.00	N/A

\* = statistically significant below 0.200 level (less than 20% chance of being due to random variation)

\*\* = statistically significant below 0.100 level (less than 10% chance of being due to random variation)

### Youth Adjective Checklist Responses

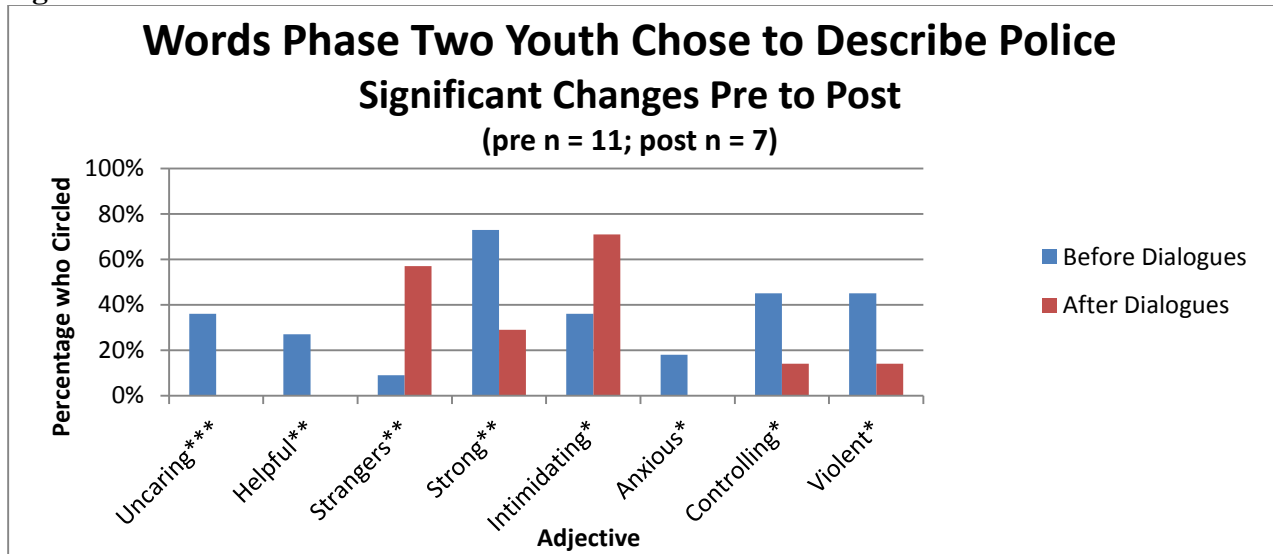
On both surveys, Phase Two youth were asked to circle words to describe the police. No youth felt that police were respectable, compassionate, vulnerable, resilient, or understanding, neither before nor after the dialogues.

Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of youth who circled each word to describe officers before and after the Phase Two dialogue series. Figure 1 shows the words that yielded significant changes from the pre- to post-survey. Significantly more youth thought that police were strangers and intimidating after the dialogues and less felt they were helpful. In contrast,

significantly *less* youth felt police were uncaring, strong, anxious, controlling, and violent after going through the dialogues.

Figure 2 displays the words for which the percentage did not differ significantly before and after the dialogues. These words are displayed in order of the most commonly-chosen words on the pre-survey. While not statistically significant, more youth after the dialogues felt officers were out-of-touch, and more realized officers are stressed. The most common words chosen by Phase Two youth to describe police included disrespectful, rude, mean, strong, and intimidating.

**Figure 1**

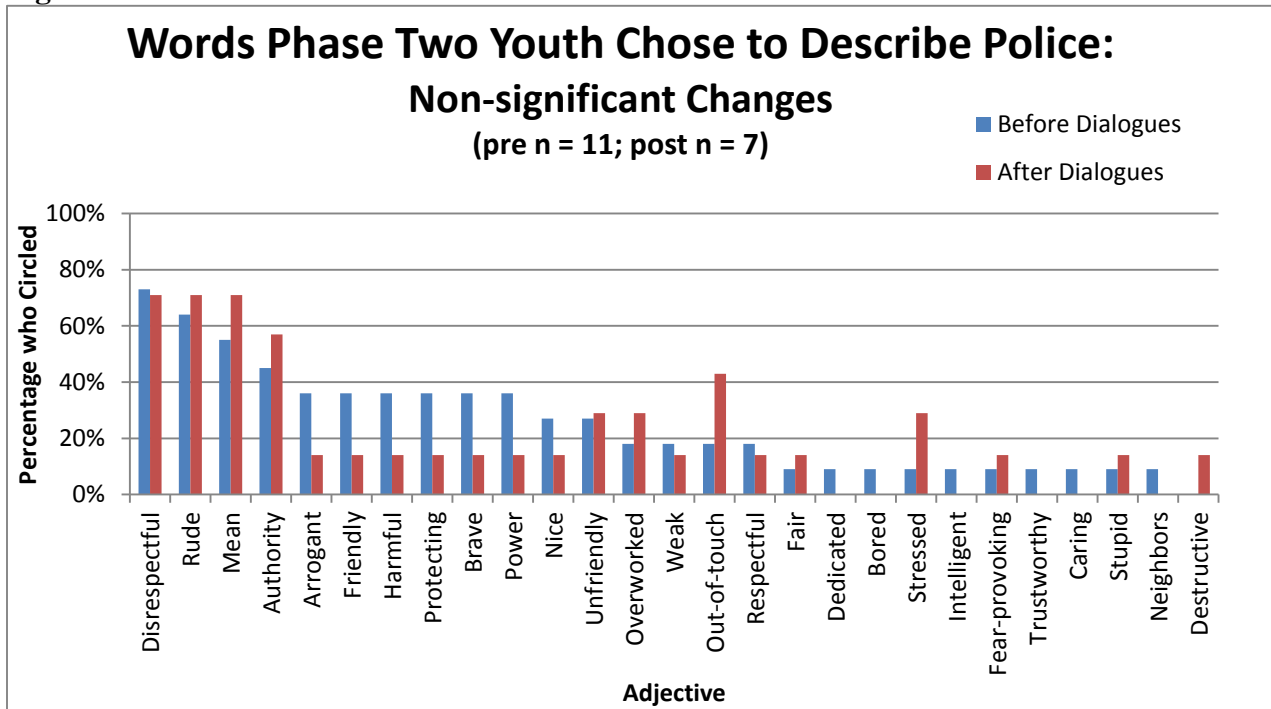


\* = statistically significant below 0.200 level (less than 20% chance of being due to random variation)

\*\* = statistically significant below 0.100 level (less than 10% chance of being due to random variation)

\*\*\* = statistically significant below 0.050 level (less than 5% chance of being due to random variation)

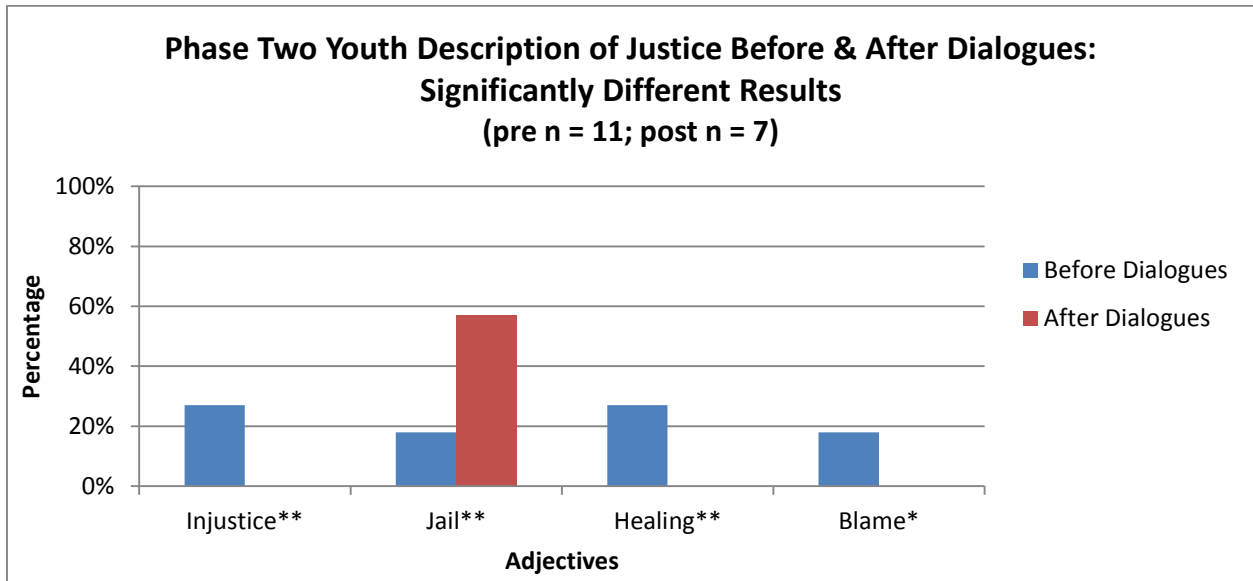
Figure 2



On the pre-survey, five words were not circled by any youth to describe police, but on the post survey, the number increased to 14 words. Thus, the youth chose a much smaller set of words to describe police after the dialogues, but this could be because four less youth took the post-survey than the pre-survey. Overall, the responses after the dialogues expressed a slightly more negative view of the police than the responses before the dialogues. It is not wise to attribute this to the dialogues themselves, though, because of the large change in the composition of the youth sample.

In regards to the word justice, all of the words were circled by at least one person on the pre- or post-survey. Figure 3 shows the words that resulted in statistically significant changes. While more youth circled “jail” to describe justice on the post-survey than on the pre-survey and less youth circled “healing,” less youth also chose injustice and blame. Therefore, results are mixed.

**Figure 3**

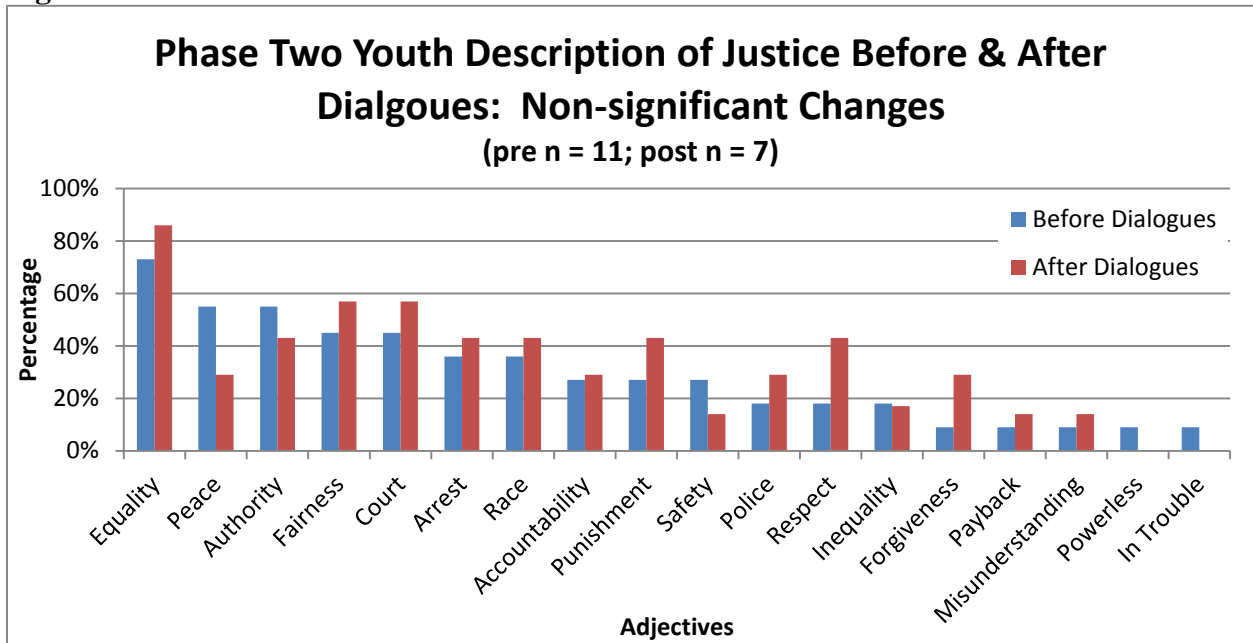


\* = statistically significant below 0.200 level (less than 20% chance of being due to random variation)

\*\* = statistically significant below 0.100 level (less than 10% chance of being due to random variation)

Figure 4 shows the other words circled by youth to describe justice, but the changes from pre- to post-survey were not statistically significant. They are listed in order of the most-circled words on the pre-survey. Equality was by far the most common word chosen by Phase Two youth to describe justice.

**Figure 4**



Officer Sample Size

All seven Phase Two officer participants completed the pre-survey at their orientation session (whether at the scheduled orientation session or the one right before the first dialogue). Six of the officers completed the post-survey at the officers’ focus group, but one did not attend. That officer also did not complete the post-survey through e-mail upon request. Thus, there are only six of the seven post-surveys available for analysis.

Officer Demographics

The officer participants consisted of six males and one female. One male and the one female officer were African-American, while the rest were Caucasian. It is important to note, since being from Rochester seemed important to the youth, in addition to race, that the two African-American officers in the group were not originally from the Rochester area.

### Officers' Responses to Statement Prompts

In terms of how they responded to the statement prompts, Phase Two officers were generally more positive than the youth. The table on the next page shows the average responses from the officers from before and after the dialogues. The only somewhat significant change in response from the pre-survey to the post-survey was that officers felt less inclined to want to work with other officers to improve relations with youth after going through the dialogues.

While the officers did not feel like youth trusted them or that officers *trusted* youth, they felt that police officers do at least somewhat *respect* youth. The officers definitively felt like they personally respected youth. They expressed continued desire to work with youth to improve relations, but they were not very inclined to encourage other officers to participate in the dialogues. They were neutral as to whether the dialogues helped them better understand how youth feel. Nonetheless, they were hopeful that they would continue to act in their jobs in respectful ways towards youth and that there was hope in improving youth-police relations.

*Phase Two Officer Responses to Statement Prompts*

**1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Pre-Mean</b>	<b>Post-Mean</b>	<b>Direction of Change</b>
I want to work with Rochester youth to improve youth-police relations.	4.71	4.50	None
<b>I want to work with other Officers to improve relations with youth.*</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>4.33</b>	<b>Agreed less</b>
I trust youth in Rochester.	2.71	2.83	None
In general, Rochester police officers trust youth.	2.43	2.50	None
As a police officer, I try to understand what youth are going through.	4.57	4.17	None
In general, I feel safe and comfortable dealing with youth.	3.57	3.83	None
Youth in Rochester respect the police.	1.83	2.33	None
Youth in Rochester trust the police.	2.00	2.50	None
I respect youth in Rochester.	4.00	4.00	None
Police officers respect the youth in Rochester.	3.29	3.33	None
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	4.14	4.33	None
I go out of my way to help youth with their problems, even if it's not technically part of my job.	4.14	3.83	None
Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.	4.43	4.67	None
Most police officers want to help the community.	4.43	4.33	None
Youth in Rochester want to make their community better.	2.71	3.00	None
When responding to a call or scene, police officers handle the situation to the best of their ability.	4.43	4.00	None
If one of my fellow police officers were disrespecting a youth, I would encourage him/her to act differently.	4.14	4.33	None
The way I treat youth influences how my fellow officers treat youth.	4.00	4.00	None
I am aware of the challenges faced by youth in Rochester	N/A	3.33	N/A
I will try harder to establish better communication between myself and youth.	N/A	4.40	N/A
After participating in the youth/police dialogues, I have a better understanding of how youth feel.	N/A	3.00	N/A
I will encourage other officers to participate in youth/police dialogues.	N/A	2.83	N/A

\* = statistically significant below 0.200 level (less than 20% chance of being due to random variation)

Statistically significant changes occurred as to how often officers had positive and negative interactions with youth. Apparently, officers had significantly more positive interactions with youth by the end of the dialogues, but also significantly more negative interactions. Interestingly, they reported that all other officers also had more positive and more negative experiences with youth.



This could show that officers realized what constitutes a good and bad interaction and realized they had more of each, or that by going through these dialogues, they have now had more of all types of interactions with youth.

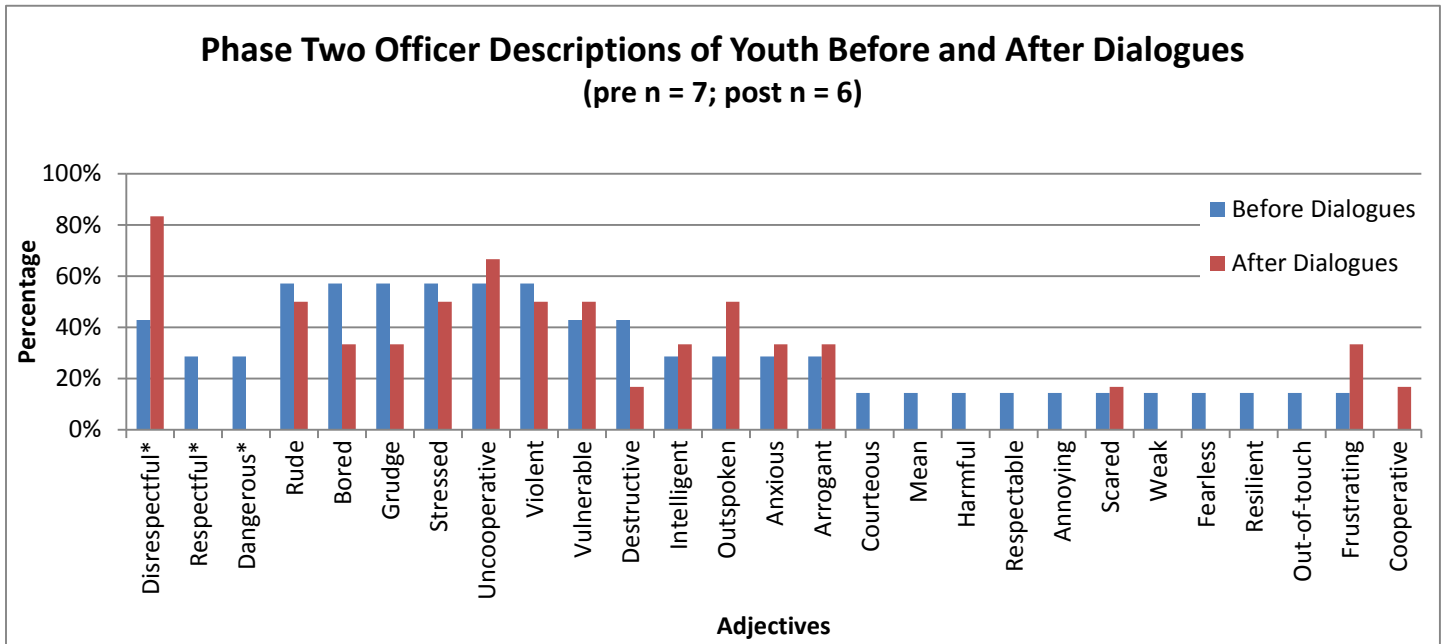
#### Officer Adjective Checklist Responses

On the surveys, the officers were asked to circle words to describe the youth in Rochester. There were many words that officers did not circle on either survey. No officers felt that youth were friendly, brave, engaged, helpful, compassionate, caring, forgiving, strong, neighbors, or understanding. On a more positive note, no officers felt youth were intimidating, uncaring, unfriendly, strangers, or dumb.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of officers who circled each other word before and after the dialogues. Significantly more of the officers felt that youth were disrespectful after the dialogues, while significantly less felt they were dangerous. Also, after the dialogues, slightly more officers found the youth to be uncooperative and outspoken. Fewer officers felt youth were bored, held grudges, or were destructive after they went through the dialogues, though these differences were not statistically significant and could be due to any other factor. It is important to note that both youths and officers think that the other lacks understanding.

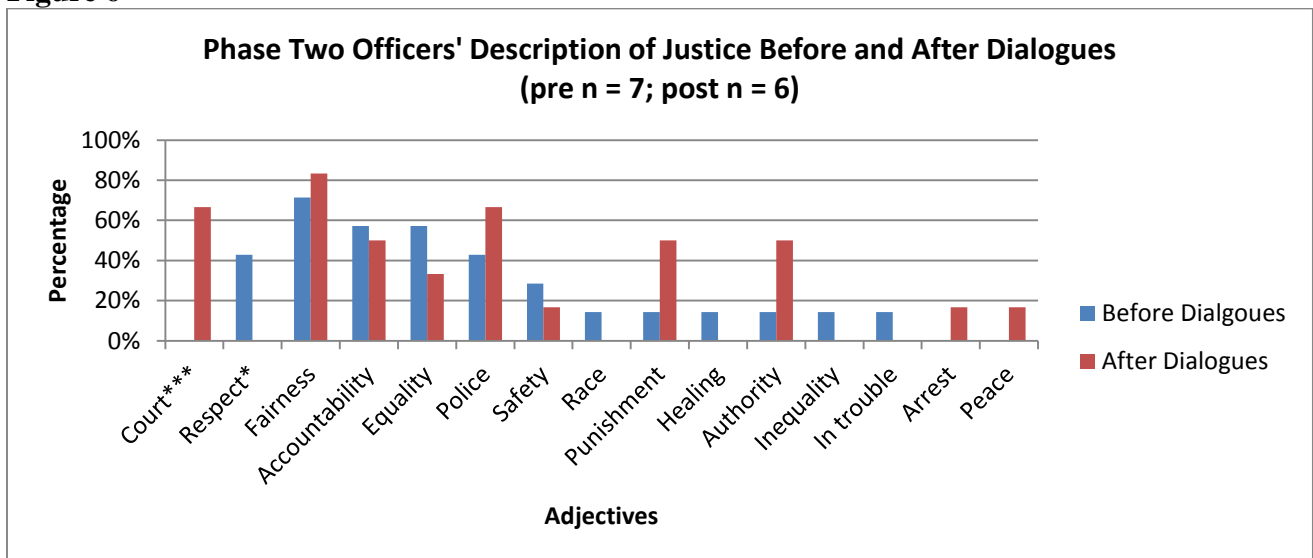
A much larger variety of words were circled by officers before the Phase Two dialogues than after, just like with the youth, but the composition of the officer group did not change from pre- to post-survey. Therefore, I conjectured that the officers gained a broader picture of youth than they had prior to participating in the dialogues.

Figure 5



In describing justice (Figure 6), no officers chose forgiveness, blame, injustice, jail, payback, misunderstanding, or powerless. Over half of officers described justice using the words fairness, accountability, and equality. The only statistically significant changes between the pre- and the post-survey were that no officers used the word “court” to describe justice before the dialogues, while two thirds of them chose it after the dialogues ( $p < 0.05$ ). Also, less of the officers chose the word respect to describe justice after the dialogues. Though not statistically significant, more officers described justice using the words authority and punishment after the dialogues.

**Figure 6**



\* = statistically significant below 0.200 level (less than 20% chance of being due to random variation)

\*\*\* = statistically significant below 0.050 level (less than 5% chance of being due to random variation)

### Comparing Phase Two Youth and Officers

When comparing Phase Two youths and officers, it was discovered that officers circled far fewer words to describe youth on the pre-survey than youth circled to describe officers. On the pre-survey, no youth or officer circled the word compassionate to describe each other. Five

out of 11 youths (46%) circled the word violent to describe officers. Four out of seven officers (57%) circled the word violent to describe youths. According to this, more officers consider youth violent than youth consider police violent. In addition, the most common words circled by both groups on the pre-survey were violent, bored, disrespectful, anxious, mean, strong, harmful, weak, stressed, anxious, and arrogant. On the post-survey, both groups commonly thought the other group was disrespectful and rude. Far fewer youth felt officers were violent, but the officers continued to describe youth as violent.

As in Phase One, the youth in Phase Two expressed a much more negative outlook in general than the officers did on the statement prompts. Much else remained the same as Phase One in terms of how differently the youth and police responded.

## **Open-Ended Questions**

The open-ended questions asked on the pre-surveys were different from those asked on the post-surveys. Whenever it made sense, youth and police were asked the same questions.

### ***Prior Youth-Police Activities***

When asked to describe prior participation in youth-police activities, five out of the eight youth in Phase One had prior participation in some type of youth-police activity, while the other three reported no prior participation. Two had participated in Teen Empowerment's Youth-Police Dialogues in prior years, and another youth had been involved in Teen Empowerment's youth-police symposium.

In Phase Two, three of the seven officers had never participated in any activities with youth in their job as officers. One had gone to an event at the Rochester School for the Deaf.

Two had done Police Activities League (PAL) events, and one participated in Phase One of the Teen Empowerment Youth-Police Dialogues. For the most part, these officers had little personal contact with teenagers outside of their patrol.

Similarly, eight out of the eleven original youth in Phase Two had never participated in youth-police activities. Two youth participated in a Police/Youth Summit a few years ago, which was the culmination of another series of dialogues that Teen Empowerment held. Another youth participated in a Peace March, and one participated in a focus group that talked about violence.

Overall, the officer participants had very little prior contact with youth in general or teenagers in particular outside their regular jobs. Most of the youth in Phase One had already participated in youth-police dialogues, while very few of the youth in Phase Two had done such an activity. This may help explain why there were more significant changes among Phase Two youth in our survey results than there were for Phase One youth: Phase One youth perhaps had already learned many of the lessons, affecting their pre-survey responses.

### ***Why participate?***

In Phase Two, one officer wanted to participate “so I can connect with youth in my area, and thus I would become better at my job.” Another officer responded, “I want to show some of Rochester’s youth that not all police officers fit the stereotype they are often labeled as.” One more officer stated, “My interactions with youth mainly consist of domestic issues. I hope to speak with youth about other issues they have with police, and how our relationship can be improved.”

A youth in Phase Two wanted to participate because, “I feel as if youth and police have a negative relationship, and that neither youth respect police and visa-versa. I would like to see that changed.” Another youth responded, “Because I had a bad altercation with a police officer before, and I think a lot of the police out there don’t respect youth.” Another youth stated, “I want the police to do their jobs, and teens to stop acting up.”

### ***Defining Respect***

It was found that both the police officers and youth had similar responses when asked to define the word respect on their pre-surveys. For example, the majority of respondents for both groups in both phases said that respect is treating someone the way you would like to be treated. A youth in Phase One felt that respect is earned rather than simply given. An officer in Phase One wrote that, “Respect varies, depending on age/gender, but always with kindness and dignity.” Similarly, one youth in Phase Two defined respect as “a mutual feeling shown between people who may not share the same views, but agree to disagree.”

### ***Willingness to Share***

When asked about their willingness to share their experiences with the other group, both groups in Phase One expressed a desire to improve or change youth-police relations and to understand each other. Many participants, whether youth or officers, simply stated that their experiences and their awareness of the tension between youth and police made them willing and able to participate. Some of the youth recognized that they were willing to participate because they “don’t get along well with police” and wanted to see that change. They stressed the importance of all participants being open-minded and honest if any progress was to be made. Several Phase One participants expressed a righteous or moral stance, saying they were able to participate by “being bold, and standing up for what’s right” (a youth). In contrast, another

youth said they were willing to participate because it was “my job.” The officers often expressed duty, stating that, “Police play [an] important role in shaping the relationship of police/youth. I feel it is important to improve it.” Another said, “I believe it will help youth understand that all police are not just a badge.”

In Phase Two, one officer responded, “If my experience in any area is able to help anyone, or I can learn from others, I am open to it.” Another officer felt “this would give me the ability to be open with the kids, and them with me.” A youth participant in Phase Two felt that “everyone needs to know about how youth feel about police.” Another youth was “tired of them same outcome when I don’t speak.” Another expressed a desire to change the community in which he or she lived as to “how we approach the police.” One youth was willing to share his or her thoughts “because I had bad and good experiences with police. I know there are some police officers that are nice out there.”

### ***Why Participants Were Willing to Listen***

When asked why they are willing to listen to the opinions of police officers, the Phase One youth had varying responses. Most said they wanted a better relationship with officers or thought they could learn from the officers and in turn help others work with officers better. Some youth said that they were not willing to listen to the officers, while others said they were willing to listen simply “because it matters.” Similarly, youth in Phase Two were willing to listen to police to gain a better understanding of police. One youth stated that “maybe other people’s opinions are also valuable” and that “if more people talk, more people listen.” One youth wanted to see if the officers would tell the truth about how they feel about youth. Insightfully, another youth was willing to listen “because we are all people, and there are always three sides to a story: mine, the police, and the truth.”

When asked why they were willing to listen to the opinions and feelings of youth, the Phase One officers expressed wanting to achieve better understanding and better relationships with youth, in addition to increasing youth cooperation with police. They felt that they could learn from the youth and could in turn do their jobs better. One put it well: “If you can’t understand where others are coming from, you can’t help them.” Five of the seven Phase Two officers also reported a desire for understanding youth better.

On the post-survey, only the youth were asked this question again. When asked why they had been willing to listen to officers’ opinions in the dialogues, three Phase One youth cited a desire to get a better mutual understanding, as indicated before. One youth wanted to give the officers a chance to speak their minds. Another youth commented, “[Because] we all are similar in one way or another. Our feelings about officers can be changed [because] of the conversations, interactions, dialogues. Relationships are built, respect is gained, and solutions/problems in your life or community can be decreased.” Another youth was willing to listen, “To get them to see how I work, and what I do around the community, and let it be known to improve.” One youth in Phase Two found he or she was willing to listen “to compare who has a harder walk through life.” Another wanted to know what motivated the officers. It seems that the youth had a lot more to say in response to this question after the dialogues than before.

### ***Most Important Lesson from These Dialogues***

On the post survey, respondents were asked what the most important aspect of these dialogues had been for them. The Phase Two youth gained insight into how police think about youth and broke down some stereotypes. One youth learned “how some of the police were kind and respectful, and how they were cool and friendly at times.” Another learned from the officers “how they felt youth treated them.”



Phase Two officers learned powerful lessons, such as realizing that the “majority of youth actually care about their community” and that many “youth worry about similar issues that I worry about.” One connected a lot of what they learned to the powerful preconceived notions created by the media. An officer learned that police are “fighting an uphill battle” in working to change perceptions.

### ***Challenges***

When asked on the post survey about challenges they faced participating in the dialogues, two youth in Phase One responded that there was nothing difficult. Another commented that their dislike for officers made it difficult to fully participate. One youth suggested having more events with both youth and officers such as neighborhood block parties. In Phase Two, challenges the youth faced included not feeling like “the whole truth was being told.” Others were challenged by “the officers’ reaction to certain questions and attitude” and “knowing that they didn’t care about us, and how we feel” because “they were too laid back.” Finally, one youth found it difficult to connect with the police.

The Phase One officers responded to this question with suggestions to stay on topic and allocate more time for certain discussions. In addition, one officer questioned the effect the dialogues could have on youth and officers outside of the group. The same officer suggested having longer sessions with more straightforward questions rather than multiple questions for each task. The officers further suggested possibly walking in the neighborhood with the youth organizers, so that their efforts to heal relations could be seen by other youth, “which would hopefully help transfer the effects of their improved relationship to youth and police outside the group.” They acknowledged, though, that this might put the youth in difficult situations with their peers. Finally, one officer expressed frustration and powerlessness in their ability to help

the youth: “It's difficult to hear how some of them have had it and/or have it, and it's challenging because most of it is not something I can directly impact.” Some officers agreed with this sentiment in Phase Two. Another Phase Two officer responded that “getting youth/officers to open up and be honest was difficult.”

### ***What Participants Learned***

The surveys asked participants what they had learned from going through the dialogues. In the Phase One group, two youth learned that officers have some of the same struggles and issues as they do. Two youth acknowledged that officers have policies and rules to follow and face getting in trouble too. They learned how police get their calls and information. Another youth acknowledged that not every officer is “out to get you, and that some do care about the community and love to be involved with programs like Teen Empowerment to... get opinions from youth like us.” Another youth was happy to hear about the officers’ volunteer work and that the officers listened to what the youth had to say about their community. The youth in Phase Two reported learning that police officers are stressed, and that both youth and police can be victims. Youth learned why officers react the ways they do.

Officers in both phases reported learning that the youth really care about improving youth-police relations, their personal situations, and their community. One officer acknowledged that, “There are a lot of good kids in the community who get swept up in the negative behaviors of a few.” Another officer commented that, “These kids are articulate, smart, and have to deal with lots of shit to just get through the day.” Another learned that “most of the youth... do not want any interaction [with police] whatsoever.” He understood but felt that “the barrier to effective communication needs to be broken.” Another officer learned that “race plays a larger role in police/youth relationships than I thought.” More critically, one officer learned that “the

youth are struggling to define themselves and their futures. The youth are misinformed.” Another stated, “That deep down, they are afraid, and looking for guidance.”

### ***Expanding the Project within Law Enforcement***

Officers were asked how they saw this project expanding with the police department. One suggested billboards and advertising. Another thought it should be held “in a larger setting” and “include more students to get more points of view.” One officer wrote, “I think officers should be required to meet with the community, including youth, on a more regular basis, possibly setting up a few hours a week for officers to respond to community events, in addition to rotating officers, youth, and other community members to improve relations. I wish more youth had a similar attitude that the youth involved in this project had.” One officer stated, “The more people on each side get involved, the bigger the impact. That said, both sides have to really want it.” Another acknowledged that more knowledge and understanding will be gained with more dialogues, which will lead to greater compassion. Some suggested making the groups bigger and then following-up after the project ends. Another officer believed that more police departments besides the City of Rochester should be involved with these groups, since many city kids are moving or traveling into suburbs, and cops there “don’t have a clue” what they go through.

### ***Contrasting the Dialogue Phases***

There were some important differences between Phase One and Phase Two of this Youth-Police Dialogue program.

First, youth were recruited to participate in different ways and for different purposes. Phase One youth were brought in specifically for the youth-police dialogues. Many of them had participated in dialogue activities before, and many of them also had prior negative experiences

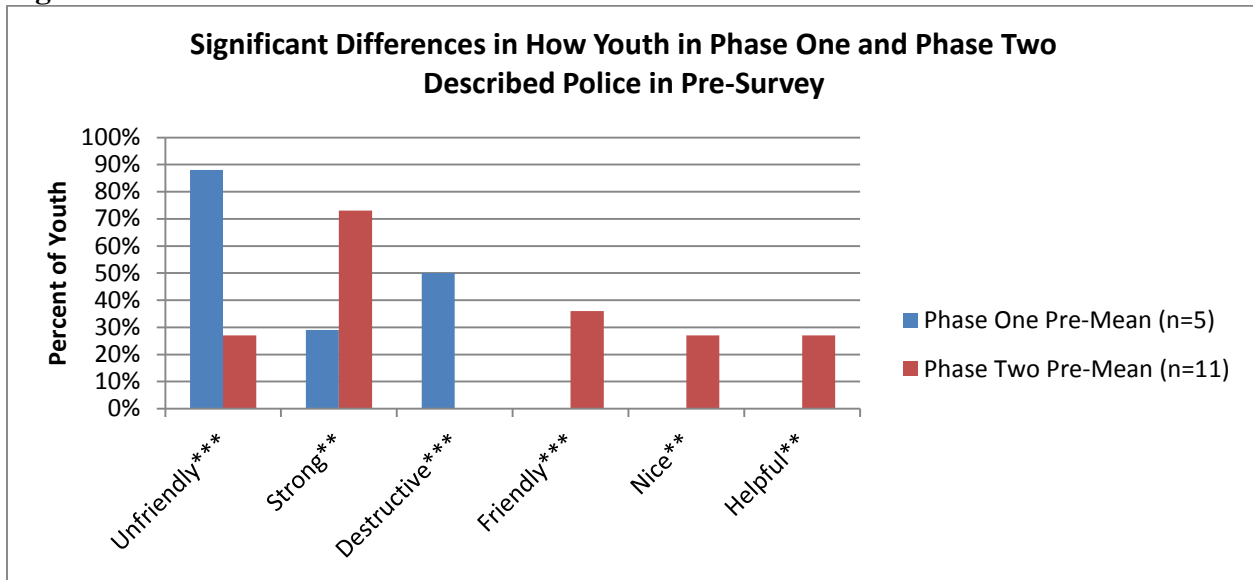
with police. Phase Two youth, on the other hand, were hired by Teen Empowerment to organize around a range of issues affecting youth, with the youth-police dialogues being just a part of their work. They did not have as many strong feelings about police as the Phase One youth did, and they were also juggling many other responsibilities with Teen Empowerment at the time that they were participating in the dialogues.

Also, facilitators felt it was detrimental to the second phase of dialogues for two of the officers to have missed the preparation sessions. They felt this created some tension and defensiveness, even though they tried to address it. There were more attendance issues in general among the officers in the second phase, which seemed to affect the group dynamics heavily. It is likely that these factors added to some of the other issues that were relevant as discussed above, only exacerbating the poor “vibe” of the second phase.

The survey results revealed that both the youth and officers in Phase Two started out with more positive outlook on one another than did the participants in Phase One. This, for the youth, was only evident in how they responded to the adjective checklists. We conducted significance tests to compare pre-survey average responses between Phase One and Phase Two respondents.

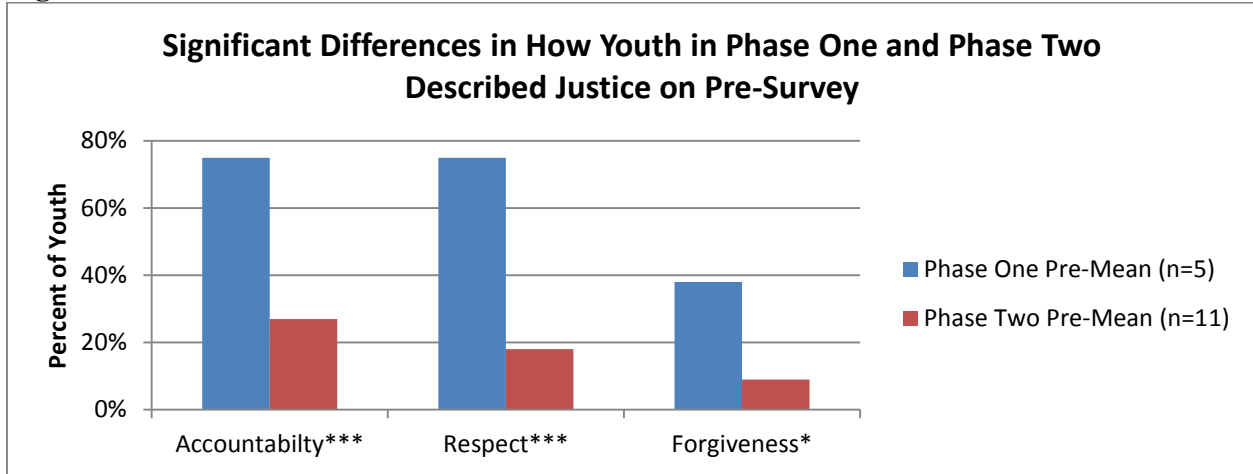
Figure 7 shows the significant differences in how youth in each phase described officers. Phase Two youth were significantly more likely to describe police in positive terms, such as strong, friendly, nice, and helpful. They were less likely to choose negative words compared to Phase One youth, such as unfriendly and destructive

**Figure 7**



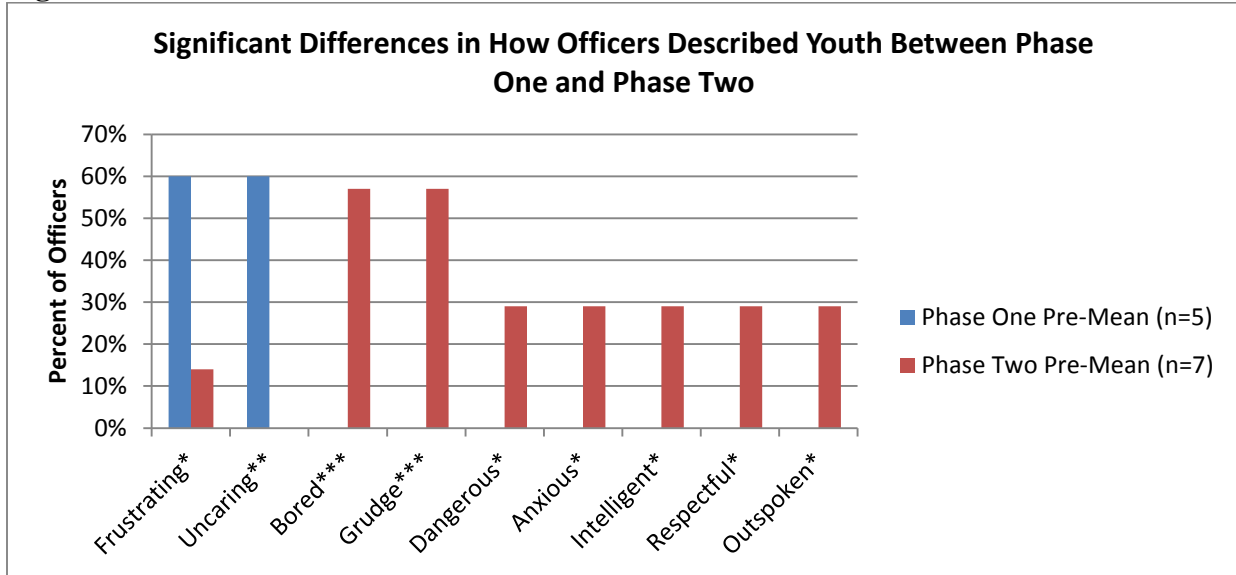
Then, Figure 8 displays the differences in how the two groups of youth described justice. Phase Two youth were significantly less likely than Phase One youth to describe justice in terms of accountability, respect, and forgiveness. In a way, this makes Phase Two youth seem more pessimistic about justice than Phase One youth. However, perhaps this indicates that Phase One youth feel more strongly that justice should be held to ideals that it does not currently meet, while Phase Two youth may have a more “realistic” notion of what justice currently means in our society. Phase Two youth may also agree more with the role that police currently play in our society as a result.

**Figure 8**



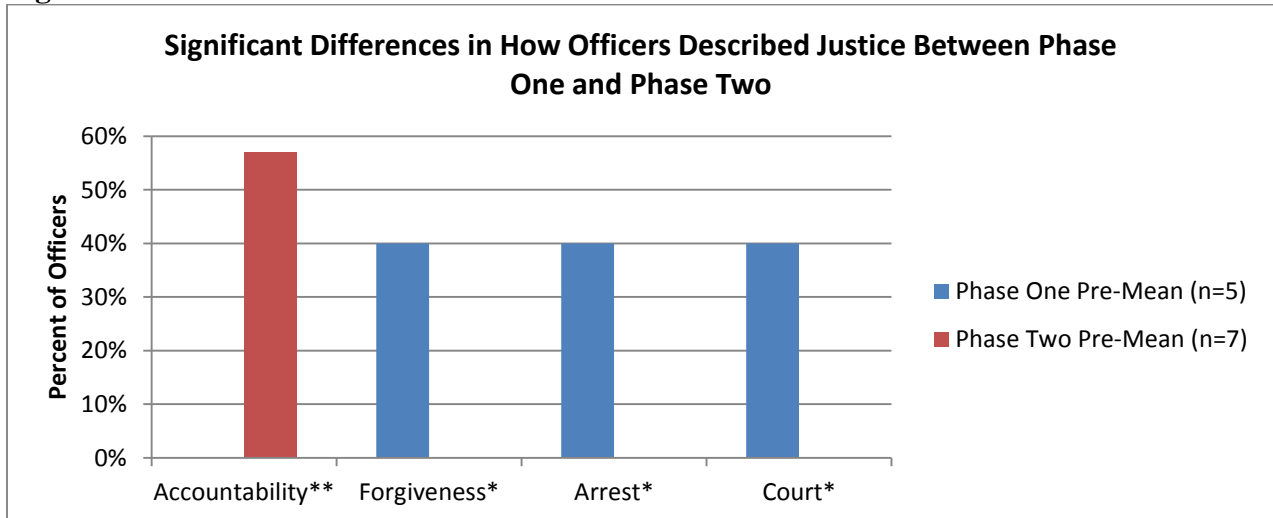
Similarly, there are a few reasons to believe from the pre-survey results that the officers in Phase Two were also more positive in outlook than their colleagues in Phase One. As can be seen below, Phase Two officers were significantly more likely to describe youth on the pre-survey using empathic or positive words such as bored, anxious, intelligent, respectful, and outspoken. They were significantly less likely to describe youth as frustrating or uncaring. However, the Phase Two officers were also more likely to choose two negative words (grudge and dangerous) to describe youth. Overall, though, their sentiment towards youth seems to have started out more positive than their colleagues in Phase One.

**Figure 9**



The Phase Two officers were significantly more likely to describe justice in terms of accountability and less likely to choose the words “arrest” and “court” to describe justice. In contrast to this relatively positive outlook, they were less likely than Phase One officers to describe justice as similar to forgiveness.

**Figure 10**



Finally, the table below shows how the officers in Phase One and Phase Two differed from one another in how they responded to the statement prompts. (There were no significant differences in how youth in Phase One and Phase Two responded to their statement prompts.)

Again, this gives an indication that Phase Two officers had a more positive outlook to begin with than Phase One officers. The average scores shaded in gray indicate the phase group that had the more positive outlook. For three out of the four prompts for which there were significant differences between the phases, Phase Two responses were more positive.

***Officer Pre-Survey Statement Prompt Significant Differences between Phase One & Phase Two***

<b>Statement Prompt</b>	<b>Phase One Pre-Mean (n=5)</b>	<b>Phase Two Pre-Mean (n=7)</b>	<b>Significance</b>
I want to work with Rochester youth to improve youth-police relations.	4.2	4.71	0.092
As a police officer, I try to understand what youth are going through.	3.8	4.57	0.025
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	4.8	4.14	0.093
When responding to a call or scene, police officers handle the situation to the best of their ability.	3.8	4.43	0.058

**Qualitative Differences between Phase One and Phase Two**

In contrast to the survey results, the Teen Empowerment facilitators found it much more difficult to work with the Phase Two participants. All participants (facilitators, youth, and police) felt the “vibe” was off in the second phase, which precluded the development of strong relationships and open conversation. While facilitators worked hard to address this, it remained an issue in the dialogue sessions. Evaluators also found that the Phase Two officers in the focus group were a bit more negative in outlook than their Phase One counterparts; they expressed some expectations that the dialogues would be more confrontational than they were (perhaps



even wishing they were so). Youth in their focus group also mentioned some moments in which some officers in Phase Two showed they strongly subscribed to stereotypes about inner-city teenagers. Facilitators found it difficult to get the Phase Two participants to open up, and some officers participants seemed somewhat less invested in the process than their Phase One colleagues (evidenced by showing up late or missing sessions).

There are several potential ways to view this apparent discrepancy between survey findings and qualitative findings. As the survey was developed by the CPSI team and was not in any way validated, it may not be a reliable measure of how respondents really feel. Researchers attempted to ask a variety of questions (some more overt and others more subtle) to not rely on any one response, but nonetheless, it is possible that respondents' indicated responses were different from their subconscious feelings. It is common for people to respond to questions in a way that they think they "should" reply to be socially acceptable, and this may have been true here. Alternatively, Phase One officers may have been more aware of the issue of youth-police relations than Phase Two officers, and therefore they might have been more cognizant of their feelings about youth. If officers had not spent a lot of time thinking about these issues, they would be expected to assume everything was more positive about youth-police relations than is actually true. This could be what happened in Phase Two, though much more research would have to show if this is true.

Finally, there is a degree of selection bias that probably influenced these results. Officers in both phases were recruited in the same way – with a department-wide e-mail soliciting interest in the program. Since Phase One officers were the first group responding to this solicitation, we can infer that they were more eager and excited to participate and learn from the youth. Therefore, they would have been more engaged in the dialogue sessions, which is what facilitators observed.

## **Implications**

These differences in the Phase One and Phase Two youth may have had important implications for the dialogues and evaluation results. While there were no significant changes as to how youth in Phase One responded to survey statement prompts, most of their attitudes and beliefs shifted in the positive, more empathic ways were envisioned. From talking with the youth, it seemed, in a way, that Phase One youth had more initial resentment towards police than youth in Phase Two did. However, some Phase One youth had also already experienced youth-police dialogues before, perhaps explaining why their attitudes did not change very much. Nonetheless, they had more to “forgive” and learn, it seems, than youth in Phase Two. They seemed to have a more positive experience overall than youth in Phase Two did, largely due to the better “vibe” of the group and perhaps because they were solely focusing on youth-police relations.

These differences between phase groups are important to consider in facilitating these dialogues. Facilitators worked hard to accommodate the different personality and interest levels as well as circumstantial factors of participants in both phases, and this undoubtedly contributed to the overall program’s success. One should not assume that a single dialogue curriculum would be appropriate for any group of participants.

### ***Combining Survey Results across Dialogue Phases***

*When the surveys were first constructed, it was known the sample size of youth and officers would be small. I hoped to combine the survey results from the first and second phases to strengthen some of my conclusions. However, as discussed above, the groups of youth and officers seemed different from their peers across the phases, with Phase Two being more positive*

*in outlook than Phase One participants. As a result, when the survey results were combined across the phases, very few significant changes are revealed.*

### ***Youth Combined Survey Results***

When combining all youth surveys, there were no significant changes in how youth participants responded to the statement prompts. On the adjective checklists, the only significant change was that youth were more likely to describe police as strangers ( $p < .05$ ) after the dialogues. The youth, combined, were also more likely to describe justice in terms of jail ( $p < .05$ ). In contrast, they were less likely to describe justice in terms of blame ( $p < .10$ ).

### ***Officer Combined Survey Results***

When combining the officers' surveys across Phase One and Phase Two, the only statement prompt to which they responded significantly differently after the dialogues was that they agreed significantly less that officers handle calls well ( $p < 0.07$ ). They, on average, went from agreeing with this statement to fully, on average, disagreeing with it. They seemed to learn from the youth what handling a call really means, and how often police do not actually interact well with the community.

As for the adjective checklists, officers were significantly more likely to use the word "court" to describe justice after the dialogues ( $p < .07$ ). There were no significant changes in how they described youth when combined across both phases, despite there being quite a few significant changes when the phases' surveys are taken alone.

### **Survey Results Discussion**

After analyzing results from the surveys, valuable information was obtained through the surveys when I examined responses to individual prompts and questions, even though most or all of the significant results were lost when I combined the survey results across the phases. It was found that youth and officers share a mutual distrust and disrespect of one another, but, for the

most part, this decreased slightly after they went through the dialogues. They gained an understanding of youth-police relations and how they all serve as role models for their peers. They expressed hope that youth-police relations really could improve. They also learned to see each other in more empathic and understanding ways. The results were consistently stronger for police officer participants. This may be because the youth come into the dialogues with much more negative perceptions and long histories of negative experiences, and it takes them more time, effort, and experience to learn to trust the officers. In open-ended questions, participants listed many lessons they learned that were very powerful, largely centered around gaining mutual understanding, learning how they affect one another, and acknowledging that they can work together to help the community.

### **Focus Group Results**

After each phase of the dialogues, focus groups and/or interviews were held with all participants with only their peers: officers alone, youth alone, and facilitators alone. This allowed participants to share their thoughts about the program with evaluators in a different way than we may have obtained if the facilitators had conducted a reflection session. If participants could not attend the focus group, individual interviews were scheduled to get their input. Results of the focus groups are summarized below by theme. The focus groups were facilitated by an Associate Researcher in the Center for Public Safety Initiatives. The author of this thesis observed the focus group in Phase II.

### ***Overview***

Across both phases, the consensus was that the officers were very pleased with the dialogues. They offered some suggestions and were confident that these dialogues could help heal youth-police relations if expanded to include more youth and police over time. As indicated by the survey results, the Phase Two officers were slightly less satisfied with the process,

attributing much of that to the energy or “vibe” being “off” in the group sessions. Nonetheless, all participants were glad to have participated.

The youth felt the dialogues were, overall, a positive experience. However, there was a noticeable difference between the youth and the officers. The youth seemed much more hopeless about the dialogues being beneficial for themselves and for their community. This was particularly true among Phase One youth. A few of them strongly questioned whether the officers were sincere, open, and honest. The youth seemed to see the goal of the dialogues as an unachievable ideal, since they would go back to their everyday lives and still face the same issues with other police officers. Phase II youths were less overtly hopeless but in some ways just disinterested. Much of this, again, seemed to be attributed to the “vibe” being off in the second phase. Nonetheless, both youth and officers seemed to learn a great deal from each other and were able to apply some lessons to their lives.

Finally, focus groups were held with the Teen Empowerment facilitators. They were able to provide us insight into some of the finer workings and historical aspects of the youth-police dialogues, as well as a larger perspective on how the program fit into the community and how it was organized across both phases. They also had unique insight into the participants, having worked with them over time.

### ***Getting Involved***

The officers were first asked how they became involved, and what they expected. All officers responded volunteering via e-mail. One officer was interested because he wanted to be more involved in the community; he was new to working in the area and to working days, so he encounters youth much more and wants to work to improve things. The officers were surprised to learn that many of their fellow officers had participated in prior youth-police dialogues with Teen Empowerment, but they had never heard them mention it. Some officers in Phase Two had

heard from the Phase One officers that it was a good experience, because it gave them time to talk with youth without being in a crisis situation. The officers felt the dialogues would help them sharpen their skills for talking with youth.

### ***Factors that Enabled or Encouraged Participation***

Because Teen Empowerment has been facilitating and coordinating youth-police dialogues for several years now, we asked what their sense was as to why youth and police are willing to reach out to each other and participate in these sessions. They initially said, “Because things are so bad” between youth and police, people feel compelled to do something about it. They felt that from the youth’s perspective, there is always a bit of curiosity because they do not know any police officers personally and probably have never talked to one in a neutral setting. They may be curious because it is “out of the norm.”

Also, the facilitators recognized the importance of monetarily compensating the participants. They felt that if this was taken out of the equation, they would not have been able to get the kind of youth in the room as they did (i.e. youth that have had police contacts). For officers, being compensated and supported by the department led to increased commitment and honesty.

The facilitators thought the opportunity to log community service hours might encourage some officers to participate because it might help them for promotion. Also, the officers were glad to participate because talking at the Gandhi Institute was much safer and less stressful than being on the street. It also gave them time to reflect and work in a different way from normal.

Once the dialogues start, the facilitators notice a sense of caring develops among the individuals in the room. They develop human connections, evidenced most acutely by how much the officers wanted to keep in touch with the youth after the dialogues were over.

### ***Officers' Expectations***

The officers were not surprised by the conversations or what they learned from the youth, as they were already aware of youths' issues and concerns. One officer expected a little more interaction. Several officers "expected different kids – kids who hate the police. I thought there were going to be yelling matches." The Phase One officers somewhat expected to be working with younger "youth," rather than "teenagers."

### ***Comfort and Safety***

All participants, including those who were interviewed one-on-one, stated they felt comfortable speaking their mind in the group and felt that others did as well. Youth and facilitators were concerned because one of the officers was a sergeant, but the officers expressed no hesitation about fully and honestly participating. Some youth, as discussed below, occasionally felt guarded, but for the most part still spoke their minds.

### ***Ratings of the Dialogue Series***

The focus groups were asked to rate the dialogue series as a whole. All officers gave it at least a seven out of ten. They seemed to learn much from the dialogues and were very glad to have participated.

The youth, on the other hand, gave more neutral ratings. The youth were satisfied with the dialogues themselves and thought they were essential in order for officers who do not live in the city to understand youth and improve relationships, but they felt pessimistic about the possibility of any true change in the community. One youth felt that no matter how good the dialogues were, "crime rates are still going to go up and police brutality is still going to exist."

The one youth who gave the highest rating – a seven – said "it was cool" but expressed a concern regarding how honest conversation could be among the officers if their sergeant is also

in the room. Another youth expressed concern that the officers who were present were not the ones they see on the streets. Some youth felt that if they needed to get out of a situation, the officers probably would not or could not do anything for them. For those reasons, the one who gave it the lowest rating in Phase One felt it was a waste of time, though hoped it was not.

The overarching theme expressed by the youth in Phase Two was that the dialogues lacked energy and were somewhat awkward. They said the “vibe” was not great. They felt that the conversations lacked depth. One youth said, “To me, it was just a meeting with police. It wasn’t what it was meant for. It didn’t get to the truth.” The youth described this as a lack of enthusiasm or motivation on the part of the officers that resulted in a lack of enthusiasm for the youth as well. Another said there was a “big separation between the teens and officers.” They barely greeted each other, and she “got the sense they didn’t like us.” They felt that the officers did little mingling with the youth, though some youth acknowledged that they did little mingling among the officers too.

The youth felt that the first two sessions were easier and better because the topics were not as deep. However, during the third and fourth sessions, a youth reported that the officers seemed uncomfortable and took offense to some topics such as racism. They found it difficult to engage in more personal or deep conversation.

The Phase Two officers agreed that the energy was not great, but they agreed that some powerful moments were created in small group discussions that allowed more time for each person to speak. One officer gave a lower rating because they felt the youth should have been the ones “who constantly have guns” or those creating problems in the community.



### ***Memorable Experiences***

The participants and facilitators were all asked what their most powerful or memorable experience was from these dialogues. The youth in Phase One agreed that it was powerful to see everyone be honest and share their feelings. Several youth thought it was powerful just to have civil conversations with police and to see “how things were on the other side of the fence.”

One youth, who had participated in the dialogues last year, thought the most powerful moment was when one of the officers from last year’s group came back to visit during one of the sessions. The youth was glad to “see a change in him.” She said that moment “makes you think that maybe the dialogue between police and youth can change things.” The facilitators acknowledged this as a particularly powerful moment as well and confirmed that it was not planned in any way.

One youth’s most powerful experience was watching officers come out of their shells. She felt at some point they stopped justifying and defending themselves in the dialogues and were more themselves, recognizing and acknowledging some of the wrong that had been done by other officers to the youth in the past.

Some of the officers in Phase One felt that the most valuable thing was to just hang out with the youth and have everyone treat each other as humans. A discussion about role models “hit home” for another officer. He was pained to hear that the youth have very few or no role models.

Despite the poor energy levels reportedly in Phase Two, all of the Phase Two participants identified memorable learning experiences in the dialogues. The youth felt that their most memorable moments from the dialogues occurred when they got to speak in smaller groups with the officers. One youth remembered discussing what the officers were like as teenagers and realizing that their lives had actually been similar. Another youth was surprised by how

defensive the officers got when speaking about problems youth have with police. One youth was struck by the officers “showing they had feelings.” In contrast, two youth were struck by how “robotic” the officers were in responding to questions.

The officers in Phase Two were most struck by particular comments from the youth. One remembered a youth saying that a goal he or she had in the next two years was to stay alive. It hurt the officer to hear this, expressing that, “Kids that age shouldn’t worry about things like that.” Another officer remembered a youth’s story about having a bullet go right over her head one night while she was sleeping and just missed her. The surprising part about this for the officer was that it did not seem to bother the youth, “almost like this was expected.” Clearly, the officers learned deeply about the struggles the youth face every day.

The officers also learned how much work needs to be done to improve perceptions around violence. They referenced a youth’s comment that it is “not a big deal for a black person to shoot another black person, but if a black person shoots a white person, it is a big deal.” To the officers, it should always be “a big deal” if someone gets shot. The officers felt there is little police can do to address violence if this is how the community feels towards intra-racial violence. They acknowledged that the officers can try to reach out, but they are facing generations of learned experiences. Facilitators, however, recognized more accurately what the youth meant, having had this discussion with youth before. To them, the youth was expressing that it seems like society devalues black people’s lives in favor of the lives of white people; facilitators understood that the youth did not mean that youth devalue black people’s lives. This is just one example of how it can be difficult for program participants to accurately articulate the complexity of their opinions.

For the facilitators observing this process as a whole, they were pleased to see that in their own time, “everyone found their place” in the dialogues and were able to open up and participate fully. They also sensed reaching a “middle point” in the dialogues where they realized that everyone was on board and excited about the sessions. The facilitators also enjoyed witnessing the first dialogue sessions in each phase because there was, as always, a lot of tension in the room, and they got to watch it slowly break down.

### ***Changing Contexts***

The officers felt a major benefit to participating in the dialogues was to let the youth see them differently from normal, since the nature of the officers’ job is to run into people only when they are in bad situations. They felt this was very important for the youth and officers to find common ground and develop relationships outside the context of a conflict. This gave them a true chance to see the youths’ perspectives and listen to their issues without chaos or danger.

The youth also benefited from the change in context by being able to truly express themselves to officers, with whom they normally must be on the defensive.

### ***Benefits to Officers***

The facilitators recognized that most officers know things are bad, but it was important for them to really see the impact and recognize that they are part of the impact – in either good or bad ways depending on their choices. They felt that for deep change to occur, we need to reach a tipping point where most officers and youth recognize that they can choose to make things better.

The officers felt it helped them learn how youth think and what they struggle with. They benefitted by learning to relate to youth, as the “issues they have are the same as [or similar to] the issues we had in high school.” The officers felt having “prolonged exposure” to a small group of youth was beneficial, as, on the job, they usually encounter youth in large groups.

Nonetheless, the youth perceived very little benefit to the officers. The youth felt that the officers “weren’t really putting effort into changing or understanding.” Another youth remembered an officer saying that cops still have to do their job. The youth felt this meant that nothing is going to change. One youth did acknowledge that the dialogues improved relationships with some officers, but they were not “that kind of officer” that needed to change.

The youth felt that those who shared personal perspectives, showing motivation and honesty, made the youth feel comfortable. The youth were truly not sure if the officers had learned anything from the youth, even though the officers all identified many lessons they learned. This speaks to the hopelessness and distrust that many of the youth carry.

### ***Benefits to Youth***

The youth largely denied benefitting from the dialogues, but upon closer questioning revealed some benefits. One stated, “Sometimes I just didn’t look at police like they were human” but changed their mind when the officers opened up about their personal lives. Several youth felt just knowing a few officers personally was a benefit. Several youth felt it was beneficial to learn what an officer’s job is really like and what precautions they have to take to do their job safely. They benefited from just feeling comfortable talking with police. Some felt that these insights could help them get out of bad situations with police because they know how to talk to them better now that they understand what they are thinking. They also felt they “got more clarity” on why police interact with youth the way they do on the street. They realized that officers are often frustrated and empathized with this feeling.

Another youth felt the dialogues taught her how to de-escalate situations. It taught her patience to listen to the officers when it was their turn to speak and helped to clarify differences in how police and youth saw certain issues. Some youth thought these dialogues could help

officers see ways to truly help the community, fix the root causes of issues, and give people the opportunity to contribute positively to their communities.

Some Phase Two youth already had few interactions with police, so they felt there was not much to learn or change. They already treated them with respect and tried to get out of the situation as quickly as possible when they are confronted by police.

The officers seemed disappointed in the degree of attitude shift among the youth. They felt most youth left with the same attitude they had when they started. For some youth, “no matter what we said, it would never change how they felt about us.” This assessment is somewhat supported by the youth’s responses, as the youth were quick to interpret officers’ words and actions in line with their preconceptions. For youth that did make small progress, the officers acknowledged that “it’s just going to take one bad interaction [with police] for all that to be reversed.”

Having worked with many of the youth for a long time, the facilitators felt that, for some of the youth, the simple fact that they successfully participated in the dialogues benefitted them. Some were very resistant to even being in the same room as police officers at the beginning. They got to see a different perspective and challenge themselves.

### ***Worlds Apart***

The youth clearly felt disconnected from the officers based on residency and race. The youth further pointed out that the officers grew up with father figures and possibilities for jobs, while the youth have to sell drugs to pay for food and never had anyone tell them to do the right thing.

The youth felt a large benefit to the officers was just hearing about youth's lives, lifestyles, and situations, though they felt the officers could never truly understand unless they lived in the city and had the same skin color. They hoped that hearing it would at least make them better officers.

The youth also expressed frustration because there are different rules on the streets than there are in the dialogues. "If you try to get your point across [on the street], you just got yourself a charge – disorderly conduct."

Some youth recognized that the officers deal with many issues, such as the potential for being injured or killed, but the youth felt the officers can never relate to the youth because they can go home and get away from it, while the youth cannot. In their focus group, the officers expressed empathy for the youth and acknowledged how important it is for officers to be able to go home at the end of their work shifts. They recognized that the youth did not have this option and saw how much that must affect the youth. This seemed to help them better understand the youth and their pessimism about the dialogues and community change.

The facilitators recognized how hard it is for the youth when the inevitable reality of youth-police relations in Rochester comes back. If they had a great interaction at the session and then were mistreated by another officer, it rekindles the hopeless feelings about the reality of their relationship. In a neutral place like at Teen Empowerment, they can have commonality with officers, but back in the normal community setting, they each still have their jobs and roles.

### ***Healing Relationships and Trying to Relate***

The officers in the first phase discussed how in the first session or two, they felt guarded, fully aware of the negativity with which police are received in the community. One officer said, "As much as they're guarded from us, we're guarded from them," referencing that police have to look out for their safety when in the community. They felt they should, at first, wear their uniforms and maintain distance and caution in the conversations. The officers said that by the

second or third session, this dividing line was gone. It was quickly obvious that group members were there to come to an understanding with one another. They felt comfortable coming to the sessions without their uniforms, and all members of the group were greeting each other upon arrival. By the last session, officers were giving out business cards and asking how they could follow up with the youth to know how they were doing. One youth described Teen Empowerment as a “comfortable place – don’t have to watch your back, just come here and relax.” This shows that youth and officers felt similarly about the atmosphere of the dialogue being conducive to building relationships.

The facilitators felt that asking one particular discussion really helped the youth and participants relate to one another. They were asked to share an issue that they were currently dealing with. Participants really spoke about their personal lives, allowing for feelings of relatedness. They felt this somewhat indirect but personal question worked far better than very direct, topic-focused questions, such as “How do youth and police treat each other in Rochester?” for developing relatedness.

### ***Youth Learning About Officers’ Experiences***

The youth in Phase One admitted they had not before considered what kind of issues the officers went through; they knew their job was stressful, but never thought about how it affected them. Officers often work nights, lose sleep, have kids and bills to worry about, and struggle with alcoholism, high rates of divorce, and proneness to suicide. The youth identified several things they learned about officers’ jobs. One acknowledged the amount of trauma that officers face. One learned about officers’ frustration with “ignorant civilians.” For example, showing up to the same house over and over again yet the people calling do not take other initiatives to solve their problems. Another youth realized how frustrating it is for police to face people who “are

just born to not like the police,” even if they have never had a bad interaction. The youth felt that most officers are here to help and acknowledged there are always two sides of the stories about bad police experiences.

In the end, though, the youth felt that none of these were excuses for mistreating people. When they deal with police, the youth are expected to “check our attitude,” be polite and calm to avoid going to jail; they wondered why officers are not expected to do the same thing.

Similarly, the youth were displeased to hear officers “make excuses for the things they do.” The youth felt that officers were somewhat disconnected from the reality of their jobs. An officer allegedly said that counseling and social work is not a part of their jobs, but to the youth, this is a very important part of their job.

### ***Officers Learning About What Youth Struggle With***

The officers were able to develop relationships with the youth by learning about issues they did not know were so critical in youth’s lives. Some were shocked to hear that some of the youth’s biggest frustrations are not having enough food, how frustrated they are with their poor educational options if they go to school, and how difficult it is for them to find a job. The officers were able to empathize and were glad to see the youth cared about their own futures and about their community, just as the officers do.

### ***Ability to Generalize Outside the Group***

Officers felt the youth participating in this group were the “exception” and not like the majority of youth they deal with every day. Youth also felt like the officers were the exception among officers. Both groups felt the “norm” of each group would not participate in a dialogue session like this. As such, many of the youth were concerned that the cops who were in the room were not the ones that needed to be in the room; these were the cops who volunteered and who



“don’t do wrong.” They felt that, “There’s nothing really to accomplish here” except making them aware of what is going on when encountering police. Officers agreed that police with more punitive policing styles would probably benefit more from these dialogues.

### ***Changes in Behavior***

When asked how the dialogues benefitted them or their work, the officers discussed small changes they have made in how they approach their jobs. They emphasized that there is little room for substantial changes in their work, as they have protocol and must handle situations with safety as the priority. They all agreed that they have always approached people first with respect and courtesy. Their behavior after that depends on the circumstances and on the actions of the individuals involved. They also acknowledged that they get a large number of calls, such that officers do not have much time to really talk with the people they encounter.

That said, the dialogues have helped them to approach situations “with a bit more understanding.” The officers felt that they now give the people they encounter more benefit of the doubt and react less quickly. Even if the results were the same, one officer learned that the youth really just wanted the officers to listen and try to understand the situation more fully. The dialogues strengthened their understanding that the individuals they approach are not at their best and that disrespectful actions can sometimes at least explained by the circumstances.

Also, some officers identified specific changes in behavior or mentality that they think are the result of these dialogues and what they learned from the youth. One stated that his way of working with youth has shifted so much that his partner asked him, “What’s with you?” and he replied, “Teen Empowerment.” Another officer said that he has seen some of the youth outside of the dialogues, and they have waved to each other.

The officers also learned from the youth how important it is for them as officers to seize opportunities to make bad situations better for the people involved. One officer revealed a powerful story. The officer had stopped a car and had to arrest both the driver and passenger because they had active warrants. They were the mother and father of three children sitting in the back of the car. He remembered the youth in the dialogues saying how they had childhood memories of police taking their parents away. He stated that once the parents were secured, he made a particular effort to go back to the car and talk with the kids to try to make the situation a little better for them. He reflected that officers “wear two hats,” one that is primarily concerned with safety and securing a situation, and the other which deals compassionately with people.

The officers realized that they should be more aware of the potential traumatic effects of their actions on everyone witnessing them. They mentioned that if they come to a house where there are children and they have to deal with the adults, they can ask the children to go in a different room so they do not see or hear what goes on.

Some of the youth also felt limited in how much they could change their behaviors towards police. They felt that police have a position of authority and use it to treat them unequally, so they must deal with police as if the police are lying. They felt that even if you give a police officer respect, you do not receive it back. Nonetheless, one youth felt he would give an officer respect because it would help get out of the situation or be treated less harshly. One youth described a situation where he used what he learned from the officers. He was approached by police on two separate occasions. Rather than getting defensive, he just walked away calmly and spoke nicely to them, de-escalating the situation.

One officer realized a new tool for working with youth. He or she noticed that the youth in this group acted differently from how they act on the street. They felt that when youth are in big groups, they are often trying to impress their friends, and they tend to be rude and

disrespectful. In this group, though, they “come as individuals.” The officer felt it was good to remember this on the job. Even if youth are being disrespectful, they “are not really like this” on their own. They found they could work better with youth if they were separated from the group.

### ***Making More Effective Officers***

The youth felt that, in theory, going through similar dialogue sessions could help make officers more effective by teaching communication skills and by helping them “loosen up.” The youth felt that officers should get trained in situations like these with youth.

When asked what makes an effective officer, the officers spoke much about respect, caring, and communication. The officers felt they were most effective when they could make personal connections with youth. They felt that doing just a little bit more in their job, like getting out of the car just to walk the streets and talk to people, made them more aware of their community and in turn made them safer and more effective. Another officer felt efficacy came from starting all encounters with respect and then “letting them dictate how it goes.” He felt these dialogues helped “humanize everything” and understand better where people are coming from. Another felt that communication was crucial to being an effective officer, and these dialogues were a clear way to learn to communicate better with youth.

### ***Peer and Other Social Pressure***

The facilitators had insights into how much peer pressure affects both groups. It is not simply a teenage phenomenon; it is entrenched in other systems, like police departments, as well.

Facilitators tried to discuss this topic with the group, but it “seemed to get to a stalemate.” Both groups did learn that their loyalty to their respective group means a lot, which often supersedes a lot of rational thinking. The facilitators felt this might even be stronger among

officers than it is among the youth. As an officer, if you're considered a "rat," you have to wonder whether your fellow officers will come quite as quickly to save you. Thus, many accept the status quo. This is very in-tune with the paramilitary-like training officers receive, as opposed to communicative and community-based training they may need. Facilitators and researchers learned that officers deal with this by trying to find people within their ranks who are like-minded to work with.

The facilitators remarked how much this sounds like what youth do, especially because it is quite literally about surviving. They found it difficult to see where change can occur when going up against these kinds of odds, with their very safety occasionally at risk. There are codes of conduct within both social groups that are very entrenched in their identities. The youth were also surprised to find how strong an influence peer pressure is for officers and could relate on those terms.

The facilitators felt that there needs to be a paradigm shift in the social mentality of both groups and within the community for change to really take place. Among officers, there is a sense that they are overwhelmed with the group protection mentality, which prevents them from calling each other out for wrongdoing, even if that means occasionally compromising on ideals. The same is true among youth, and this thwarts much of the beginnings of true change. The officers noted that participating in these dialogues can often been seen by other officers as "weak" or "uncool." One officer expressed that the dialogues would help him speak more freely with other officers about having a community-oriented policing style. He felt he could speak from his experience at the dialogues to reinforce that it is not acceptable to treat people with disrespect. He hoped to speak up more against police wrongdoing.

## *Challenges Faced*

The officers did not find it difficult to discuss youth-police relations with youth. They did, however, find some of the interactives challenging because they had to let their guards down and be out of their element. They were impressed that the youth could interpolate metaphors from the interactives. They described feeling uncomfortable in some of the “corny” or “silly” interactives, but they felt their honest participation was important and so pushed themselves to set the tone for the group. They thought the youth could see them as more than just a uniform if they were willing to have fun with them. Other officers only mentioned struggling to fit the dialogues into their schedules.

Also, in Phase Two, officers mentioned struggling with the “low energy” in the room. The youth overwhelmingly agreed that the most difficult thing to deal with in the second phase was “the vibe” and trying to get the officers to open up. One youth said it was difficult for her to try to understand how the officers because they were so quiet.

One youth found it challenging to get the group dynamics to work if participants were late or did not show up, attributing this to some of the days that were more “off.” No Phase Two participants stated they felt challenged by the conversations or interactives, despite the alleged lack of discussion.

One youth in Phase One felt the hardest part was explaining himself and opening up to strangers. The biggest challenge for the youth in general seemed to be the enormity of the youth-police relationship issue. They acknowledged that everyone in the group was trying to benefit their community, but they ultimately felt that in order to really accomplish anything, they had to

heal generations of racism “dating back to slavery and up to modern police brutality.” It would take time and a lot of work. The officers recognized this challenge as well.

Though this was not stated by participants, the way the youth interpreted the officers’ words and actions seemed to pose a strong challenge to success of the dialogues as a whole. The youth were very quick to interpret the officers’ actions and words in line with their preconceived notions. For instance, if officers agreed with one another or gave short answers, the youth interpreted this as them trying to hide something from the youth and being dishonest.

From the researcher’s perspective, this was probably because the officers were a much more homogenous group and actually just agreed with each other more than the youth did. The officers also acknowledged that they are often more matter-of-fact than the youth. Another youth felt the hardest part was believing what the officers said. The youth were often convinced that the officers had “played” them and “spoon-fed” them lies. One youth in the first phase said that he or she had “really believed everything [the officers] were saying,” until the other youth revealed that it was all, supposedly, a lie. “Knowing that I really got played [was the hardest part].”

That said, some youth did think the officers were genuine, citing their attendance, punctuality, and interest in the youth’s futures as evidence that they were truly dedicated to working towards change, listening to the community, and improving youth-police relations. Perhaps when preparing officers for these sessions, it is important to inform them how important their actions, depth of responses, and uniqueness of responses are in helping the youth to trust them.

### ***Topics that Needed More Discussion***

The police officers in Phase Two wished they could have spent more time challenging “the history of perceptions” about police and helping the youth think critically about how those perceptions developed.

As for the youth, racism was the major topic they felt was neglected. According to them, when it was brought up, there was “awkwardness in the room.” They felt that “the whole vibe in the room changed.” In contrast, the officers were pleased that the tension and anger were not so high as to prevent useful conversation around these issues. Overall, though, the officers said racial issues were brought up less than they had expected. They felt the youth “see blue more than they see black or white,” and felt the feelings of disrespect came more from the officers’ uniforms and position of authority than from perceived or real racism. They felt that racial tensions were discussed and therefore diminished after the first or second session. The youth, though, basically said they stopped trying to talk about it because the officers were so resistant.

Youth in Phase One also felt that they needed to discuss with the officers how youth feel in situations with authority – specifically, how they feel they do not have the right to say anything and how officers abuse their badge. The youth did not seem nearly as satisfied with the topics of race, discrimination, profiling, and authority as the officers thought they were. Perhaps the youth did not think it was worth their energy to challenge the officers’ thoughts on these issues due to time constraints and the enormity of the history and emotions involved.

### ***Larger Community Effects***

The consensus among all participants was that if anything was going to change, the program needed to expand to more youth and more officers. In order to work with the larger community, the officers suggested working with slightly younger youth so that they have these

discussions “before a mindset has been created.” The officers felt it would be much harder to do these dialogues with adults, as adults’ mentalities towards police are much more entrenched. They felt any adults involved would have to have the same mentality and openness to participate as the youth did. They felt kids should have more positive exposures to police by seeing them at school and activities. They also thought that more had to be done about the perceptions of police in the community.

The youth said that they could only do so much to reach out to their peers; in the end, individual youth are going to feel differently based on their experiences. The youth hoped that things would change as a result of the dialogues but did not expect it to. All participants and facilitators felt that more organizations besides Teen Empowerment need to work on these issues in order for change to really happen. They were all confident that if the program could be expanded, it would have an effect on the larger community; they were just wary to think it could be expanded.

### ***Improving the “Vibe”***

To the Phase Two participants, we asked specifically how they thought the “vibe” could be improved. The youth clarified that the “vibe” was inferred when the officers did not have much to say and because they did not reveal much about their personal lives or “go deep” into issues. This made the youth standoffish with the officers; they were in turn uncomfortable sharing themselves.

One youth felt having a bigger group would make it more likely to have at least one person in the group with a lot of energy who can get the rest of the group to open up. “You need someone there to give that spark.” Having a bigger group could also make for more discussion, as more people offer their opinions. Along those lines, another youth suggested having “more of



a variety of people,” including a variety of youth from other programs. Many of these suggestions were made by officers as well.

### ***Forgiveness and Reconciliation***

The researchers and Teen Empowerment staff conjectured that these dialogues would serve, for some participants, as a forgiveness or reconciliation process. The researchers found it problematic to ask directly about these themes, so we tried to interpret participants’ responses to other questions through this lens.

The participants did not explicitly experience any particular feelings of reconciliation, as they had not had any negative experiences with any of the other participants in the dialogues. Also, the officers expressed that it is senseless for them to hold grudges, as the nature of their jobs is for people to lie to them, be mad at them, and essentially “play their role in the game.” They respected the youth who took responsibility for their actions. They speculated that maybe the youth had a desire to forgive the police more than the officers had a need to forgive the youth. The officers guessed that most of the participants in the group had already dealt with their pasts and so forgiveness was not the priority; it was more about discussing things and trying to move on from them. Essentially, officers feel little need to reconcile, as they expect to have conflicts with people every day and do not take it personally.

Some youth might have found reconciliation in knowing why officers had stopped or “targeted” them in the past or otherwise behaved as they do, though they did not frame this as reconciliation. They only stated that they found it to be useful knowledge, but we can conjecture that it helped them heal some past wounds.

The consensus among facilitators was that in order to achieve any sense of long-term reconciliation or forgiveness among youth and police, participants need to see actual change in

their everyday lives. They said that it would help to do more dialogues, but it is not within Teen Empowerment's organizational mission or capacity to focus all of their energy on this one issue. That is precisely why they are hoping to "institutionalize" the process by getting youth-oriented training into the police department. The facilitators felt that with a limited number of sessions and time, it was difficult for individuals to bring up particular histories from which they needed to heal. There are select moments when people have better feelings about youth-police relations, but the sum over time often leaves a lot of hurt remaining.

### ***Respect and Trust***

The officers felt it was part of their job to treat everyone they encountered with respect. They definitely respected the youth in the room more after the dialogues than before, but they did not necessarily generalize this feeling to the community as a whole.

The youth, as discussed above, had mixed feelings about whether or not they trusted the officers. They seemed to respect them, recognizing that these particular officers were good people who wanted to help the community. As discussed above, they did not entirely believe what they said, though, probably due to long histories of distrusting police.

### ***When is Best for Officers to Participate?***

The officers believed that trainings such as this should occur in the police academy because it would set the tone for new officers to approach youth and the community in respectful, attentive ways. However, they acknowledged that such training should continue throughout officers' careers. An officer suggested that the youth-police dialogues get integrated into the end of each officer's probation term, such that they complete an in-service at 18 or 24 months into their career. This in-service would take the form of 4-8 dialogues led by Teen Empowerment. They suggested that it be part of the plan from the beginning when officers sign

up for service so people expect it as normal. This seems like a good compromise between teaching officers early and letting them gain experience first.

### ***Most Important Lessons to Convey to Others***

The focus group concluded after participants were asked about the most important lesson from these dialogues that they would convey to other youth and officers. Immediately, one officer stated that officers needed to learn to “shut up and listen. Everyone wants to be heard. Be quiet and listen to someone else.” Other officers felt their colleagues needed to “keep an open mind about your interactions with youth.” Another wanted to convey “how much negative interaction impacts the kids. It takes so many more positive interactions to get someone back once have a negative interaction.”

Other officers felt young officers would benefit from hearing what youth experience. They also felt that some of the interactives used could be helpful in breaking down tensions between the two groups. One officer wanted the youth to explain how much they just wanted to be heard by officers and just to know that they are listened to.

The youth felt that police need to learn that not all youth are bad. “Some youth have the right state of mind and are doing what they’re supposed to be doing.” Simply having youth be open about their activities and goals would convey this. The youth also felt officers need to know about the problems youth face every day, particularly about school, stress, and poverty. The youth only interact with officers when things are bad, and, combined with their stress levels, this creates tension right from the start.

The youth hoped that other youth would learn that officers have emotions too. Youth need to know that officers are doing their job. Perhaps youth would not take officers’ behaviors

so personally if they understood this and police protocol better. One youth felt that kids need to know that not all officers are the same. Finally, another youth felt that both police and youth need to learn to give respect to get it. The officers felt the most important lessons for youth to learn were why officers do what they do and that not all officers are the same.

### ***Facilitation***

The youth and the officers all felt comfortable with how the groups were facilitated and that things were kept moving. The youth and facilitators specifically felt the consistency of the sessions (i.e. having dialogues twice per week for two weeks) helped to build relationships and foster better dialogue. The facilitators noted that having frequent sessions helped participants remember what was discussed and get to the point quicker at each session. Facilitators also found it helpful to have all four dialogue sessions fully planned out as a cohesive unit prior to beginning any of them.

Some of the youth facilitated parts of the dialogues, and they thought they did quite well (as did the officers). The officers were pleasantly surprised that the youth facilitated some sessions and applauded both the youth and Teen Empowerment for having the youth practice speaking in public. The youth who facilitated suggested that if you are going to facilitate, you need to know how each interactive is going to ultimately help relations between youth and police. They felt that facilitators need to have an open mind to anyone's point of view and to also have their own thoughts well organized.

### ***Recruiting More Officers***

The officers strongly felt it was imperative to let officers volunteer to sign up for future dialogues. "Cops are stubborn people to begin with," they said, and if you let people volunteer, they will be more invested and more interested. The officers recommended using a department-

wide e-mail again to recruit new Officers. In addition, they recommended that Teen Empowerment also come in to roll calls to explain the program because many officers do not read their e-mails. They said that they would all be willing to encourage their colleagues to volunteer their time.

### ***Expanding the Program in Size and Context***

Officers and youth both expressed an interest in participating in more dialogue sessions with different participants. They felt this would allow them to personally get to know more of the officers and/or youth in their community.

One officer felt it would definitely be helpful to do such dialogues with adults, possibly holding events or forums at community agencies so that people could come and just talk with police and get to know them. He suggested that maybe the patrol officers could be required to go to a certain number of events in a given time frame.

One youth thought that if someone had a bad experience with an officer, they could really benefit from going through a dialogue like this to heal the wounds. The parties involved could discuss what went wrong, what could have gone differently, and how to handle future situations better. She felt it was more about being heard – for both the youth and the officer – than it was about seeking any type of penalty or revenge.

The facilitators strongly felt that a lot more youth-police initiatives need to occur, especially with teenagers, beyond what Teen Empowerment has tried to do. They felt that youth-police activities are usually run from a police perspective and that more needs to occur from the youth's perspective. There needs to be more activities that get officers to think critically, challenge their conceptions, and get out of their comfort zones (by having the young people lead the groups, for instance). Many of the programs in which youth interact with police

are also for youth who are considering being a police officer; they are not looking to change how police act in the community as much as they want to do what police already do.

### *Suggestions for Improvement*

One overarching suggestion from Phase One youth and officers was that the questions be a bit more focused and that participants be given more time for everyone to fully speak their minds and explore a topic. They reported that the participants certainly were not lacking words and that conversation flowed freely, so allowing time to fully dive into an issue should take priority. In particular, they felt that brainstorming interactives and multi-part small-group questions often ended somewhat unsatisfactorily. Sometimes a person would not get a chance to speak, or they just would not touch on certain parts of the question at all. The youth also want to have more discussions around race, profiling, and authority. Participants felt they simply needed more time overall to develop stronger relationships.

A few officers suggested doing other activities with the youth, such as a sport, to “take a break from the issues and just have fun.” They felt this could improve relationships before discussing serious issues, helping participants feel comfortable opening up to one another.

The officers liked the room in which the sessions were held but found it got loud when everyone was talking in small groups. They felt the small groups worked best when they went into separate rooms in the building because they could hear better and had less distraction.

Also, many of the officers were very interested in following up with the youth in a few months. They suggested having a check-in, pizza party, or some event so everyone could see what was new in each other’s lives. The officers discussed a desire to greet and acknowledge youth when they see them on the street, but they recognized the need to use caution when doing so to avoid causing problems for youth from others in the neighborhood.

Some youth suggested posing deeper questions that really got into their personal lives or more controversial questions such as, “How do you feel about African-Americans?” They felt this would foster better connections between youth and police by forcing them to share deep emotions and strong opinions. The youth felt these issues could not be solved without asking these tough questions.

Facilitators felt that they needed to strike a better balance between breaking into small groups and having people do multiple activities around the room. They thought that they might need more facilitation and guidance for the small groups so that people do not get off-track or stuck with nothing to say. They felt varying the activities (small vs. large group) and organizing them better would help.

One thing the facilitators thought they should try to prevent in the future was having a sergeant in the group. It could limit some of the officers from speaking their minds. The facilitators recognized how important it was to help participants learn how to use the skills and insights they gained in the dialogues in their everyday lives. In the last couple of sessions, they had some discussions as to how to implement what they learned. Facilitators felt that both officers and youth need to have constant training, reminders, or practice because we all forget things so easily and are so heavily influenced by other circumstances. The youth and police go back to places after the dialogues where people are not communicating and working out issues in civil ways, so they do not get to constantly practice that mentality. Teen Empowerment hoped to work with future participants more on everyday applications of their discussions.

### ***Organizational Achievements and Things to Keep Doing***

The facilitators felt that programmatically, having the preparation sessions with the officers was a very good idea. They also felt the youth preparation sessions got very strong and

were useful. These helped participants know what to expect before engaging in full dialogue. In fact, facilitators attributed some of the tension in Phase Two to allowing officers to participate who had not gone through the preparation session.

The facilitators also noted the importance of the police department administration giving officers the time to participate in these dialogues. They felt it made the officers more committed. They also feel that support for the program is growing within the police department, so they should have an easier time recruiting new officers in the future.

The facilitators strongly felt that having the researcher present at every session was beneficial to the organizational structure. The researcher was able to witness what usually goes on “behind the scenes” at Teen Empowerment. She was also able to watch people’s perspectives change. Finally, she was able to remind the facilitators and coordinators of the program about the evaluative aspects of the program to improve follow-through with data collection. It provided the researchers thorough insight into the dialogues and the process as a whole, which will, in the future, greatly assist in any potential replications of the program.

Facilitators felt it was a major benefit for them to have the four dialogue sessions fully planned out before any of the sessions happened. Also, the high frequency and shorter duration of the dialogues helped participants to remember what had been discussed at prior sessions and build off each one.

The facilitators were asked what was different about the Phase One group that made the dialogue process work better than in years past. For one, the youth were older. Almost all of them had been locked up at some point in their lives, and all had issues with police. This gave them plenty to talk about. For the officers, they were more consistent and reliable than prior groups. They were more responsive to scheduling demands and changes.



### ***Special Considerations When Working On Such Tense Conflicts***

The facilitators felt that it was important for both parties to be truly willing to participate. They have to have buy-in, investment, and compensation for participants. They felt having all the preparation sessions with youth really helped because the discussions there translated exactly into how the sessions went with officers and gave them time to process it all. Also, youth need to see consistency and action from officers, often more so than officers need to see that from youth.

### ***What Sustains You to Keep Doing This Work?***

The Teen Empowerment staff said that, in a way, the fact that youth-police relations are so poor is what keeps them committed to this work. They feel they need to do something and that something is bound to happen as a result, even if it is slow or small changes. If they could help conditions exist such that less damage occurs, they can also meanwhile make more systemic and substantial changes over time.

Witnessing the moments in the dialogues when they knew that people were focused, sharing, and stepping up made the facilitators realize it was all worth it. They felt they helped to provide one of the only places where youth can have an honest conversation with officers about what has happened to them, and this was a valuable experience to keep alive.

### ***Police Academy Training Center***

On February 11, 2014, Teen Empowerment visited Rochester's Public Safety Training Facility. The purpose was to introduce the youth to the new class of police recruits for agencies across the county, who were in their second day of training. Ten current youth organizers, a former youth organizer, two staff members, one youth advocate, and the Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI) researcher spent approximately two hours engaging in interactives and speaking with the prospective officers while enjoying pizza provided by Teen Empowerment.

This was the first time Teen Empowerment had been to the training center. It was one of the major steps in institutionalization of Teen Empowerment trainings for Rochester Police Officers. The youth were excited and nervous because they did not know what to expect.

When the group arrived at the training center, they were led to a classroom and welcomed by 25 recruits, who ranged in age from 20 to 34 years old. Thirteen of the twenty five recruits were Caucasian males (52%), and six (24%) were African-American males. This class is the most racially diverse police academy class in Rochester's history, with 40% minority recruits. Prior to 2012, minority representation had been well below 25%.

Indeed, when the youth organizers – who were all African-American or Hispanic – walked into the room, they were glad to see that many recruits were of racial minority groups. During their time at the Training Center, the youth organizers, former youth organizer, facilitators, and youth advocate engaged in two interactives with the police recruits. The CPSI researcher participated in one interactive and then observed participants in the other.

During the “**stand and move**” interactive, participants were expected to respond to questions by either standing and completing a motion or staying seated. For example, the former youth organizer who was leading the interactive asked everyone who ever had problems with the police to stand up. Almost half of the participants stood up. It was surprising to the youth that some of the white recruits stood up. The youth leading the group also asked everyone who had brushed their teeth that morning to stand up and make a motion like they were brushing their teeth. Everyone stood up for that question. The youth organizer explained that this was to show all the participants that youth and police do some of the same things and have some of the same experiences. He asked the recruits to remember this when interacting with any person, especially youth. The former youth organizer recalled participating in Phase One's youth-police dialogues, in which he had the opportunity to listen to some of the issues the officers faced. He learned that

youth and officers share some of the same issues. He asked the recruits to recognize that all human beings go through similar problems.

As the youth was addressing the recruits, the researcher observed some of them nodding their heads in agreement. As this youth talked, he had the recruits' full attention. He spoke intelligently and eloquently. It was evident that the recruits could relate to what he was saying. He was telling future officers how he and other youth feel when they are mistreated and disrespected by the police. He stated, "All we want is to be treated with respect, whether we're right or wrong." It was a proud moment for this young man. He was chosen to speak to the recruits because of his passion for change in his community, his past negative experiences with police, and the life changes he has made as a result of his involvement with Teen Empowerment.

The second interactive the group engaged in at the police training center was "**concentric conversations**." Each youth was paired with two recruits. They discussed where they grew up, the most influential person in their lives, and where they attended school. This helped everyone to get to know each other. The researcher noted that each participant listened attentively to the person that was speaking. It seemed as though everyone was interested in what others had to say.

Finally, participants shared a pizza lunch. Some of the youth mingled with the recruits. It was refreshing to see youth and police recruits engaging in casual, cordial conversation, and the youth reported really enjoying some of their conversations.

### ***Training Center Participant Evaluations***

At the end of the training session, the youth and recruits were asked to complete an evaluation developed by Teen Empowerment. The consensus of the recruit evaluations was that they enjoyed the one-on-one talks with the youth but felt more time was needed. Some recruits acknowledged that youth and police have things in common and admitted that youth-police

relationships need improvement. The consensus of the youth evaluations was that they enjoyed the one-on-one talks with the recruits, and one youth remarked, “Not all police are bad.”

Both groups gave high ratings. More specifically, one recruit liked the organization of the session. Another liked “finding common ground between youth and police.” Another recruit liked that “we talked about real issues,” and, similarly, another liked “the intelligence and stories of the youth.” One recruit liked “hearing the opinions of the youth, and what they want to see from the police.” Another recruit felt it was a “good learning/eye opening experience.” For the most part, all the recruits responded positively about the training session. They enjoyed talking and interacting with the youth.

### *Next Steps and Program Changes*

Teen Empowerment’s next steps and program changes include staff members continuously pursuing institutionalization of the dialogues so they are a more regular occurrence within the police department. The organization is applying for some funds through the Rochester Police Department in order to support the continued dialogue and officer training work.

Teen Empowerment also plans to continue conducting youth-police dialogue series for at least another year. They are hoping to hold another set of dialogues in early 2015 with the new group of youth organizers hired for the 2014-2015 school year. They plan to modify the structure so that there are two dialogue sessions between the youth and police. This structure will allow for the most important work of the dialogues to occur quickly, allow more officers to participate, and put less pressure on the RPD and on individual officers to find time and resources to commit to the project.

For youth and officers who have been through the dialogues and want to continue working more deeply on youth-police issues, Teen Empowerment plans to offer to facilitate and

form a core group of participants to meet on a regular basis to continue and expand this work. They plan to offer participation in this group to the officers who have been through the dialogues discussed in this report. That group can then work together to develop action steps on addressing issues related to youth-police relations.

Facilitators plan to integrate other lessons from this Youth-Police Dialogue Program into future dialogue sessions. For example, they plan to recruit officers by sending a department-wide e-mail, and then they will follow this up with a brief presentation at the RPD's roll call in order to tell officers about the program in person. They will focus the sessions on building relationships through deep, personal conversation, as this seemed to make the most progress among participants.

Also, Teen Empowerment will continue to conduct trainings on youth and community issues at the Rochester Police Academy, as well as remaining open to other potential training opportunities for RPD officers.

Finally, Teen Empowerment staff will offer their expertise on youth and community issues and on youth-police relations in particular to assist the RPD in designing the youth-focused officer position in each quadrant. This is a productive way for Teen Empowerment to assist the RPD in institutionalizing its commitment to improving youth-police relations.

## **Findings**

The environment in the Southwest quadrant contains a number of vacant, and abandoned buildings, litter filled lots, littered sidewalks, and a large number of graffiti covered buildings. According to information included in the Southwest Block Group Data, the number of abandoned structures observed in 2012 were 125, and 96 in 2013. The number of vacant lots in 2012 were 353, and 398 in 2013. The data included 11 Block Groups. In addition, there were

1,369 residential buildings and 825 commercial buildings in 2013. Sampson et al (1999) described public signs of disorder as vacant buildings, burned-out buildings, vandalism, and litter. This can describe the environment that many youths who reside in the Southwest quadrant are exposed to on a daily basis. A number of Teen Empowerment's youth organizers have described their neighborhoods the same way.

In a study on Gender, Race, and Urban Society, Rod Brunson and Jody Miller (2006), along with other researchers interviewed young Black male and female participants in St. Louis, Missouri who described their neighborhoods the same way. Neighborhoods that are physically run down, and saturated with gangs, drug dealing, and violence tend to be ecologically clustered and lacking the institutional resources necessary to insulate them from crime. These neighborhoods are typically associated with aggressive policing, police deviance, and under policing. Many police strategies in poor neighborhoods include proactive encounters to address problems such as drugs and gangs. These strategies involve frequent pedestrian and vehicle stops by patrol officers, detectives, and members of specialized units. A number of researchers reported those actions negatively impact the youth-police relationship.

Sampson and Wilson (2003) explained that "youths feel like they are cut off from the kind of daily routines that kids in more affluent areas witness, take for granted, and learn from." Teen empowerment youth organizers have expressed these very same feelings. They feel separated, or alienated from the youths who live in the suburbs. To some inner-city youths, it is like an "us" and "them" situation.

The majority of Teen Empowerment's youth organizers in both phases, felt like they had to act a certain way with the police in order to prevent from being harmed. Many also voiced feeling unsafe around police officers. The youths participating in Teen Empowerment's Youth-Police Dialogues, formed their opinions of law enforcement from personal experiences with

police, patterns of events they are exposed to in their communities, and knowledge imparted by members of their racial group. This is evidenced in some of their responses on the surveys.

According to researchers, the few studies to examine adolescents reported they have less favorable attitudes toward the police than adults. This fact is evidenced in the survey responses from Teen Empowerment's youth organizers. Researchers also found that African-American youths experience more police contacts than white youths, and they also have greater distrust of the police than white youths. This fact was voiced by the Teen Empowerment youth organizers on several occasions during their training and dialogues with police officers. A number of Teen Empowerment's youth organizers expressed their belief that the police are here to help them. Nearly all of the youth organizers admitted believing that when they were younger, but changed their opinion of the police when they became older, and had negative experiences with them. Some of the youths did not believe that police cared about them, wanted to help them, and that they disrespected them. Some youth organizers reported not liking the police, and "never will."

One youth interviewed by researchers described police as "mean and disrespectful." These adjectives were selected by a number of Teen Empowerment youth organizers on the survey they completed in Phase I and Phase II of the youth/police dialogues. A second youth commented that "police treat people like they are nothing, and especially Black people." And, another youth responded "they act like Black people are worthless." Many youths in the study believed that severe police behaviors were typically reserved for young men.

In regards to procedural justice and youths, specifically black male youths, Joanna Lee, and others (2011), concluded that many African American youth, particularly low-income urban residents associate being black with police contact in the form of neighborhood surveillance, racial profiling, harassment, and arrest processing. The researchers further noted there is little understanding about how these experiences are related to youth development. The researchers

also noted that biased police behavior also has been cited as a factor that plays a role in disproportionate minority contact with the justice system (p. 23). Lee and other researchers found evidence that suggests black youth experience the criminal stigma associated with their group, and also have come to expect negative behavior from law enforcement during interactions. This fact was also expressed by Teen Empowerment's youth organizers during Phase I and Phase II training, and dialogues. Youth organizers expressed being viewed as criminals by police officers due to their clothing, who they associated with, or where they hung out. For example, some youths stated that if they were standing on a street corner with some friends, the police would assume they were participating in, or planning some type of criminal activity, so they (police) would hassle them unnecessarily. They voiced the opinion that if the group standing on the corner had been white, they would not have been hassled at all.

Some youth organizers believe that if the police did not hassle them so much, the situation would be much better between them. They stated that sometimes they respond negatively to the police out of anger and frustration, as a result of mistreatment and disrespect. The youth commented that officers should have better communication skills, which will help them when interacting with youth. They also felt that officers should allow them to explain themselves, instead of judging them. They feel like during an encounter with police, they seldom get an opportunity to tell their side of the story before a decision is made on how to handle the situation, and most of the time, they get "locked up."

### ***Recommendations and Policy Implications***

During the interviews and focus groups, youth and officer participants made suggestions that could improve future dialogue sessions. In addition to the suggestions, there were recommendations from the researcher as well. First, as a point of research and organization, it



would have been helpful to have the pre- and post-surveys assigned to participants via an identification number. More accurate statistical testing could be done, and participants that took the pre-survey but not the post-survey could have been excluded from analysis.

All participants in both Phase One and Phase Two felt that more sessions were needed. In addition, several participants felt that non-dialogue activities could have helped the group bond. Thus, it is recommended that integrating or at least offering some group activities such as sports or community volunteering to youth and officer dialogue participants. This can be less of a commitment than participation in the core group but still serve as a way to maintain or develop bonds between officers and youth.

Finally, an important observation found that some participants seemed to have certain expectations about the program which were not satisfactorily met. For example, youth and officers both expected the “bad guys” from the other group to be participating. When they realized that the officers and youth were not the ones creating the most problems in the community, both groups were dismayed.

The youth also seemed to expect the dialogues to achieve much more transformation and deeper healing than may be feasible in a few sessions with volunteer officers. The youth were somewhat disappointed in the progress made. It is recommended that these expectations be addressed during the preparation sessions with both youth and officers. It seems that with a small number of dialogues, the primary outcome is that the youth and officers get to know one another as individual human beings, learn to empathize with each other, and learn about their day-to-day lives and the institutional structures that affect them all. These are all powerful lessons, but the youth were disappointed that the officers (and the youth) did not have extremely transformative experiences. I recommend framing the dialogue series as a chance to learn from

one another as the first step in larger community change work, rather than framing the dialogues as a way to deeply confront youth-police issues and change one another's opinions.

Similarly, participants seemed to be most deeply moved when people in the group shared personal stories. It seemed particularly necessary for the youth to hear the officers open up on personal matters in order to trust the officers and find them genuine. It was also important, as evidenced in Phase Two, for the officers to attend all the sessions in order to maintain the youths' trust. This should perhaps be discussed with officers during their recruitment and preparatory session, encouraging them to fully share themselves with the youth.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that communication between police and youths can bridge the gap, and heal wounds created by both groups. The survey results, focus group outcomes, and interview outcomes all point to positive results from the Youth-Police Dialogues. There were evident shifts in some measures on the surveys showing that participants gained empathy, understanding, and respect. Focus groups revealed some tangible changes in behavior among both officers and youth that show they gained new perspectives as well as new skills for how to work together effectively. Participants seemed to learn much from each other. The officers benefited from hearing about youth's challenges, and youth benefited by learning about what police really do and think. All participants were able to see more clearly the complexity of youth-police relations, including the systemic issues and structures that affect them.

Compared to the Phase One's dialogues, the Phase Two dialogues suffered from low energy in the group, and the youth and police officers did not form as close relationships as they had expected. The youth expected the officers to open up more about their personal lives and to give deeper responses, and the officers wanted to have more time with the youth. Nonetheless,

valuable lessons were learned by youth as to how police work in the community and that police have real-life issues too, which helped “humanize” the police to the youth. The officers learned from youth about the issues they deal with and the depth of the conflict in youth-police relations. The participants were somewhat pessimistic, just like Phase One’s participants, about truly changing youth-police relations across the community. However, all expressed a desire to continue working on the issue.

Experiencing such different dialogue groups taught the Teen Empowerment facilitators several lessons about how to structure the program to best fit the group dynamics and how to better recruit participants most likely to benefit from the program.

Further, the introduction session and training session held at the police academy were very successful. Surveys indicated significant changes in how participants viewed one another after going through the training, and recruits were poised to begin their careers as officers with a unique outlook on youth and community issues.

While reported levels of trust and respect did not change much for any participants except for police academy training participants, there is evidence of healing in other ways among all participants. Participants certainly came to respect the other participants more, though they found it difficult to generalize those feelings to youth or officers as a whole. They also empathized more with each other, and this empathic feeling was more easily extended to non-participant youth and officers than respect was. Participants seemed to be encouraged by a true desire to improve the state of youth-police relations in Rochester, as it would make their lives, jobs, and community healthier and happier.

Reconciliation between youth and police will take time and energy from everyone in the community. As evidenced by this thesis, youth-police dialogues can be a powerful factor in healing the broken relationship between these two groups. The dialogues seem to be beneficial to

all participants in building communication in a constructive and collaborative manner, even between groups who experience much tension between them.

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## ***Appendix A: Youth Pre-Survey***

### **Script to Use When Handing Out Youth Pre-Survey**

Part of us doing the Youth-Police Unity Project involves research questions that can help us see what participants learned and if the project was successful overall. Throughout your participation in this project, we will ask that you complete surveys to help with this goal. The surveys are voluntary, and you can choose to skip questions if you wish. However we strongly encourage you to complete the survey fully and thoughtfully. This will help us show our community how you feel, what you've learned, and how to do projects like this in other communities. The results of the survey will also be fed back to us so that we can make improvements based on your thoughts and suggestions.

We're giving you some time now to answer this first survey. The surveys are anonymous, so please never write your name on the surveys. Your name or identity will never be attached to your answers. Please complete both sides of this page, and return it to me.

**Teen Empowerment/RPD Youth-Police Dialogues  
YOUTH Pre-Survey**

**RATE HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS (CIRCLE A NUMBER)**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
I want to work with other youth to improve youth-police relations.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
I am excited about working with police officers to improve youth-police relations.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers try to understand what youth are going through.	5	4	3	2	1
I trust the police.	5	4	3	2	1
When they respond to a scene or area, police officers handle the situation well.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, young people trust the police.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, I feel safe around police officers.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth in Rochester respect the police.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers want to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers trust young people.	5	4	3	2	1
The way I treat police officers influences how my peers act towards police officers.	5	4	3	2	1
I respect the police.	5	4	3	2	1
If I or someone I knew was in immediate danger of being hurt, I would approach a police officer for help if I saw one in the area.	5	4	3	2	1
Police officers respect the youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	5	4	3	2	1
If my friend was disrespecting a police officer, I would encourage him or her to act differently.	5	4	3	2	1

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

**1. Describe “respect” and what it means to you.**

**2. Why do you want to participate in the TE’s Youth-Police Dialogues? This could be what you want to share, learn, or accomplish, what you find interesting about it, etc.**

**Teen Empowerment/RPD Youth-Police Dialogues  
YOUTH Pre-Survey**

**CIRCLE A NUMBER TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
How often have your personal interactions with police officers been positive?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your personal interactions with police officers been negative?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your friends or family members had positive interactions with police?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your friends or family members had negative interactions with police?	5	4	3	2	1

**Circle the words that you think describe police officers in your community.**

Fair    Authority    Mean    Friendly    Dedicated    Harmful    Protecting    Respectable    Nice  
 Intimidating    Anxious    Bored    Brave    Disrespectful    Uncaring    Stressed    Intelligent  
 Respectful    Fear-provoking    Unfriendly    Rude    Compassionate    Controlling    Arrogant  
 Helpful    Vulnerable    Destructive    Overworked    Trustworthy    Power    Strangers    Caring  
 Weak    Strong    Resilient    Stupid    Neighbors    Out-of-touch    Violent    Understanding

**Circle the words below that you think describe “justice.”**

Accountability    Forgiveness    Blame    Fairness    Injustice    Jail    Payback    Misunderstanding  
 Equality    Race    Punishment    Safety    Police    Respect    Authority    Inequality  
 Powerless    Arrest    Healing    Court    Peace    In trouble

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

1. What makes you willing or able to share your opinions and feelings in this process?
2. Why are you willing to listen to the opinions and feelings of police officers?
3. Please describe any youth-police activity you have participated in before (including if you’ve participated in TE’s youth-police dialogues before):

## ***Appendix B: Officer Pre-Survey***

### **Script to Use When Handing Out Officer Pre-Survey**

Part of us doing the Youth-Police Unity Project involves research questions that can help us see what participants learned and if the project was successful overall. Throughout your participation in this project, we will ask that you complete surveys to help with this goal. The surveys are voluntary, and you can choose to skip questions if you wish. However we strongly encourage you to complete the survey fully and thoughtfully. This will help us make this program better, show, what you've learned, and how to do projects like this in other communities.

We're giving you some time now to answer this first survey. The surveys are anonymous, so please never write your name on the surveys. Your name or identity will never be attached to your answers. Please complete both sides of this page, and return it to me.

**Teen Empowerment Youth-Police Dialogues  
OFFICER Pre-Survey**

**RATE HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS (CIRCLE A NUMBER)**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I want to work with Rochester youth to improve youth-police relations.	5	4	3	2	1
I want to work with other Officers to improve relations with youth.	5	4	3	2	1
I trust youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, Rochester police officers trust youth.	5	4	3	2	1
As a police officer, I try to understand what youth are going through.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, I feel safe and comfortable dealing with youth.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth in Rochester respect the police.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth in Rochester trust the police.	5	4	3	2	1
I respect youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
Police officers respect the youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	5	4	3	2	1
I go out of my way to help youth with their problems, even if it's not technically part of my job.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers want to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth in Rochester want to make their community better.	5	4	3	2	1
When responding to a call or scene, police officers handle the situation to the best of their ability.	5	4	3	2	1
If one of my fellow officers were disrespecting a youth, I would encourage him/her to act differently.	5	4	3	2	1
The way I treat youth influences how my fellow officers treat youth.	5	4	3	2	1

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

**1. Describe “respect” and what it means to you.**

**2. Why do you want to participate in the TE’s Youth-Police Dialogues? This could be what you want to share, learn, or accomplish, what you find interesting about it, etc.**

**Teen Empowerment Youth-Police Dialogues  
OFFICER Pre-Survey**

**CIRCLE A NUMBER TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
How often have your own professional interactions with youth in Rochester been positive?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your own professional interactions with youth in Rochester been negative?	5	4	3	2	1
To your knowledge, how often have your fellow officers had positive interactions with youth in Rochester?	5	4	3	2	1
To your knowledge, how often have your fellow officers had negative interactions with youth in Rochester?	5	4	3	2	1

**Circle the words that you think describe youth in Rochester.**

Courteous    Mean    Friendly    Rude    Harmful    Bored    Respectable    Annoying    Grudge  
 Intimidating    Anxious    Cooperative    Brave    Disrespectful    Uncaring    Stressed    Intelligent  
 Respectful    Dangerous    Unfriendly    Outspoken    Scared    Strangers    Arrogant    Weak    Engaged  
 Helpful    Vulnerable    Destructive    Fearless    Compassionate    Caring    Uncooperative    Forgiving  
 Strong    Resilient    Dumb    Neighbors    Out-of-touch    Violent    Understanding    Frustrating

**Circle the words below that you think describe “justice.”**

Accountability    Forgiveness    Blame    Fairness    Injustice    Jail    Payback    Misunderstanding  
 Equality    Race    Punishment    Safety    Police    Respect    Authority    Inequality  
 Powerless    Arrest    Healing    Court    Peace    In trouble

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

1. What makes you willing or able to share your opinions and feelings in this process?
2. Why are you willing to listen to the opinions and feelings of youth and other police officers about youth-police relations?
3. Please describe any youth-police activity you have participated in before (including if you’ve participated in TE’s youth-police dialogues before):

## Appendix C: Youth Post-Survey

### Teen Empowerment/RPD Youth-Police Dialogues

#### YOUTH Post-Survey

**RATE HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS (CIRCLE A NUMBER)**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I want to work with other youth to improve youth-police relations.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
I enjoyed working with police officers to improve youth-police relations.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers try to understand what youth are going through.	5	4	3	2	1
I trust the police.	5	4	3	2	1
When they respond to a scene or area, police officers handle the situation well.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, young people trust the police.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, I feel safe around police officers.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth in Rochester respect the police.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers want to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers trust young people.	5	4	3	2	1
The way I treat police officers influences how my peers act towards police officers.	5	4	3	2	1
I respect the police.	5	4	3	2	1
If I or someone I knew was in immediate danger of being hurt, I would approach a police officer for help, if I saw one in the area.	5	4	3	2	1
Police officers respect the youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
Relations between youth and police can be improved.	5	4	3	2	1
If my friend was disrespecting a police officer, I would encourage him or her to act differently.	5	4	3	2	1
I am aware of the challenges faced by police in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
I will try harder to establish better communication between myself and the police.	5	4	3	2	1
After participating in the youth/police dialogues, I have a better understanding of how police feel.	5	4	3	2	1
I will encourage other youth to participate in youth/police dialogues.	5	4	3	2	1

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:**

1. What was the most important thing that you got out of your participation in youth/police dialogues?

**Teen Empowerment/RPD Youth-Police Dialogues  
YOUTH Post-Survey**

**CIRCLE A NUMBER TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
How often have your personal interactions with police officers been positive?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your personal interactions with police officers been negative?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your friends or family members had positive interactions with police?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your friends or family members had negative interactions with police?	5	4	3	2	1

**Circle the words that you think describe police officers in your community.**

- Fair    Authority    Mean    Friendly    Dedicated    Harmful    Protecting    Respectable  
Nice
- Intimidating    Anxious    Bored    Brave    Disrespectful    Uncaring    Stressed    Intelligent
- Respectful    Fear-provoking    Unfriendly    Rude    Compassionate    Controlling    Arrogant
- Helpful    Vulnerable    Destructive    Overworked    Trustworthy    Power    Strangers    Caring
- Weak    Strong    Resilient    Stupid    Neighbors    Out-of-touch    Violent    Understanding

**Circle the words below that you think describe “justice.”**

- Accountability    Forgiveness    Blame    Fairness    Injustice    Jail    Payback  
Misunderstanding
- Equality    Race    Punishment    Safety    Police    Respect    Authority    Inequality
- Powerless    Arrest    Healing    Court    Peace    In trouble

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:**

1. Describe something new you learned from the police officers participating in the project:



2. Why were you willing to listen to the opinions and feelings of police officers?
  
3. What was difficult or challenging about the project, and how do you think it can be improved?
  
4. Please describe any youth-police activity you have participated in before (*including if you've ever participated in TE's youth-police dialogues*).

## Appendix D: Officer Post-Survey

### Teen Empowerment Youth-Police Dialogues OFFICER Post-Survey

RATE HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS (CIRCLE A NUMBER)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I want to work with youth to improve youth-police relations.	5	4	3	2	1
I want to work with other officers to improve relations with youth.	5	4	3	2	1
I trust youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, Rochester police officers trust youth.	5	4	3	2	1
As a police officer, I try to understand what youth are going through.	5	4	3	2	1
In general, I feel safe and comfortable dealing with youth.	5	4	3	2	1
I believe youth in Rochester respect the police.	5	4	3	2	1
I believe youth in Rochester trust the police.	5	4	3	2	1
I respect youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
Police officers respect the youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
I believe relations between youth and police can be improved.	5	4	3	2	1
I go out of my way to help youth with their problems, even if it's not technically part of my job.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth and police can work together effectively to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
Most police officers want to help the community.	5	4	3	2	1
Youth in Rochester want to make their community better.	5	4	3	2	1
If one of my fellow officers were disrespecting a youth, I would encourage him/her to act differently.	5	4	3	2	1
The way I treat youth influences how my fellow officers treat youth	5	4	3	2	1
I am aware of the challenges faced by youth in Rochester.	5	4	3	2	1
I will try harder to establish better communication between myself and youth.	5	4	3	2	1
After participating in the youth/police dialogues, I have a better understanding of how youth feel.	5	4	3	2	1
I will encourage other officers to participate in youth/police dialogues.	5	4	3	2	1

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

1. What was the most important thing that you got out of your participation in the dialogues?

2. What was difficult or challenging about the dialogues, and how do you think it can be improved?

**Teen Empowerment Youth-Police Dialogues  
OFFICER Post-Survey**

**CIRCLE A NUMBER TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
How often have your own professional interactions with youth in Rochester been positive?	5	4	3	2	1
How often have your own professional interactions with youth in Rochester been negative?	5	4	3	2	1
To your knowledge, how often have your fellow officers had positive interactions with youth in Rochester?	5	4	3	2	1
To your knowledge, how often have your fellow officers had negative interactions with youth in Rochester?	5	4	3	2	1

**Circle the words that you think describe youth in Rochester.**

Courteous    Mean    Friendly    Rude    Harmful    Bored    Respectable    Annoying    Grudge  
 Intimidating    Anxious    Cooperative    Brave    Disrespectful    Uncaring    Stressed    Intelligent  
 Respectful    Dangerous    Unfriendly    Outspoken    Scared    Strangers    Arrogant    Weak    Engaged  
 Helpful    Vulnerable    Destructive    Fearless    Compassionate    Caring    Uncooperative    Forgiving  
 Strong    Resilient    Dumb    Neighbors    Out-of-touch    Violent    Understanding    Frustrating

**Circle the words below that you think describe “justice.”**

Accountability    Forgiveness    Blame    Fairness    Injustice    Jail    Payback    Misunderstanding  
 Equality    Race    Punishment    Safety    Police    Respect    Authority    Inequality  
 Powerless    Arrest    Healing    Court    Peace    In trouble

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:**

- Describe something new you learned from the youth participating in the project:
  
- Do you think this project could have a broader impact on law enforcement agencies? If so, how?  
*(Please include any specific ideas you have for how this project can be expanded)*
  
- Please describe any youth-police activity you have participated in before (including if you’ve participated in TE’s youth-police dialogues before):
  
- Additional Comments:

## **Appendix E: Youth-Police Dialogue Sessions Evaluation**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Something that worked well:

Something that did not work so well:

Something the facilitator(s) did well:

Something the facilitator(s) could have done better:

Something else I think would have made the session better is:

A challenging part of today's session for me was:

Something that I learned or that surprised me was:

A question or concern I am left with is:

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this session? (*Circle a number*)

10    9    8    7    6    5    4    3    2    1  
Great                      Good                      Fair                      Poor

*Thank you!!*

## **Appendix F: TE YP Dialogues Facilitators Session Evaluation**

Date of session: \_\_\_\_\_

Something that worked well and/or the facilitator(s) did well at today's session:

Something that did not work so well and what could have made it better:

Did anything occur in today's session that reminded you of why you do this work?

What was difficult about today's session for you (including any internal obstacles you faced)

Where did you think you were successful in your facilitation of today's session? How do you think you could improve your facilitation of today's session?

If you could change one thing about your facilitation of today's session, what would it be?

Something that I learned or that surprised me was:

A question or concern I am left with is:

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this session? (*Circle a number*)

10    9    8    7    6    5    4    3    2    1  
Great                      Good                      Fair                      Poor

## **Appendix G: Youth Focus Group Questions**

Questions for youth, 4/11/14 at 4pm, Teen Empowerment:

- 1. Let's go around the group and say how long have you been involved in TE, and your most powerful experience from these dialogue sessions (good or bad)?**
- 2. On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate the dialogues series, with 1 being the worst and 10 being the best?**
  - a. Can anyone describe why you chose the number you did?**
- 3. Did going through these dialogues benefit you or your work with TE? How? Skills?**
4. Do you think these dialogues benefitted the officers? Why or why not?
5. *Do you think participating in this process can help officers be more effective?*
  - a. Possibly trust, communication, relationships with youth, etc.*
6. *Did your attitude toward police changed as a result of these sessions? How?*
- 7. Has or will your behavior toward officers change as a result of being in these sessions? If they did, do you have any examples?**
8. *Did you learn anything new about the issues that officers face? That youth face?*
- 9. What was the most challenging part of participating in these dialogues for you?**
- 10. How do you think these dialogues could be improved?**
11. How well do you think these dialogues were organized and facilitated? Any suggestions?
12. Were there any topics that you felt needed to be discussed more?
13. Did you feel safe to share your thoughts in these dialogues? What helped you feel safe, or what could have helped you share more?
14. *Do you believe this process can help improve youth-police relations in Rochester, if more youth and officers participate over time? If yes, how? If no, what could?*
15. *Do you feel like you would use what you learned to challenge stereotypes among your peers or family about police? Why? How?*
- 16. What youth-related topics do you think are most important to train new RPD officers on?**
- 17. What do you think is the most important thing that other youth need to hear that you learned from these dialogues?**

## **Appendix H: Officer Focus Group Questions**

Questions for police, 4/15/14 at 4pm, Gandhi Institute:

1. Can you say your rank or job role? And what made you want to participate?
  - a. Are there any other factors that encouraged you or factored into your decision to participate? We'd like to hear them all so we can best recruit other officers.
2. What did you expect this project to be like before participating?
3. On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate the dialogue series?
  - a. Can anyone describe why you chose the number you did?
4. Describe the most powerful or memorable experience you had in these dialogues.
5. Did going through these dialogues benefit you or your work? If so, in what ways?
6. When you think about what makes you effective as an officer, did this process help you be more effective in the role you play in the community? How?
  - a. Possibly trust, communication, relationships with youth, etc.
7. Do you think these dialogues benefitted the youth? Why or why not?
8. What was the most challenging part of participating in these dialogues for you?
9. Did your behavior (actions) toward youths (or the community) change as a result of being in these sessions? Why or why not? Do you have any examples?
10. Did you learn anything new about the issues that youth face? That officers face?
11. How do you think these dialogues could be improved?
  - a. (if conversation lags, ask if there were logistical issues, emotional barriers, etc.)
12. Were there any topics that you felt needed to be discussed more?
13. Do you believe this process can help improve youth-police relations in Rochester, if more youth and officers participate over time?
14. Would you encourage other officers to participate? Why or why not?
15. How should TE recruit officers? What type of officers should be recruited, or when in their career? (young, old, patrol, SRO, etc.)
16. How could this be expanded within the RPD? Should it be?
17. What do you think is the most important thing officers need to know that you learned in this process?
18. Have you done other youth engagement activities? What were they like, and how did they compare?