

2017 CCAP Best Practices for the 21st Century- Partners Award

The Chester County Youth Center (CCYC) proudly nominates Sergeant (Sgt.) Rodger Ollis and State Trooper (Tpr.) Waleska Gonzalez for the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) best practices in Juvenile Detention 21st Century Partners Award. Sgt. Ollis of Coatesville Police and Tpr. Gonzalez from the Embreeville State Police Barracks, provide invaluable educational programming for the youth at our center in Detention and our Shelter programs. Both officers give their time without asking for anything in return. Staff are encouraged by their presence and message. While residents may feel a bit intimidated at first glance, by the close of the program, they continually ask when the “cops” are coming again?

Rodger Ollis is a graduate of West Chester University with bachelor's and master's degrees in criminal justice. He is also a graduate of the Pennsylvania Municipal Police Academy. As a “professional hobby,” Rodger works as an Adjunct Instructor and as a guest lecturer, where he teaches criminal justice curriculum to students. He finds it rewarding and sees it as an opportunity to give quality instruction and perspective to future criminal justice professionals. He believes that in addition to crime fighting, quality policing includes prevention, education, outreach and fostering constructive relationships.

After serving for approximately 12 years as a police officer in other Chester County municipalities, Rodger came to the City of Coatesville Police Department in 2009 as a member of the patrol division. He was asked to build a community policing program with positive impact. Rodger worked to establish constructive relationships between community members, organizations, businesses and the police department. In an effort to resolve complex criminal justice and quality of life issues, Rodger applies criminal justice theory and ‘unconventional’ policing initiatives as part of the City of Coatesville Police Department's strategy.

Waleska Gonzalez was born in Puerto Rico and came to the US at the age of 7. She grew up in Norristown, PA. She grew up seeing her mother get beat by her alcoholic father who eventually left and abandoned them leaving her homeless at the age of 9. Waleska loved school but lacked the attention of her mother and struggled with her father being in and out of her life. Although she loved school, she struggled fitting in and started to make poor decisions. Waleska decided to run away and drop out of school in her 10th grade year and moved to North Philadelphia. She finally decided to get her act together and went to Pittsburg Job Corp where she obtained her GED. Still not feeling like she fit in and still struggling with her father's abandonment, Waleska decided to join the military at the age of 17. When she came back, she worked a fulltime job as a health aid and obtained a Criminal Justice Degree. Waleska managed to do this at the age of 21 when she had her first child.

Waleska then became a dispatcher for the Pennsylvania State Police and later on joined the ranks as a Pennsylvania State Trooper after having her second child at the age of 24. Because of the life she had growing up Waleska now dedicates herself to giving back to her community not just in Chester County but Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties as well. Waleska lives by the quote “It takes a Village” and it shows it with the different youth programs she holds throughout Chester County. Some of those programs are: Lunch Mentoring program, Walking

Girls Toward Success, Hot Seat, and when she isn't in her office planning her next presentation or community event she plays basketball, volleyball or whatever sport is being played at the time at parks, schools and camps with the youth throughout Chester County. Waleska is also the Director of Chester County Camp Cadet and she manages to do all of these things while being a single mom and mentor to her 2 daughters.

Sgt. Ollis contacted Carrie Avery, program coordinator at the Chester County Youth Center, about coming and speaking to the kids on a quarterly basis. He coined the programs name "Sgt. Ollis in the Hot Seat." We now have titled the program "Officer in the Hot Seat" since the addition of Tpr. Gonzalez. Sgt. Ollis sits with the group of detention residents or shelter girls and answers all questions without a script. Often the only time someone interacts with a law enforcement officer is when there is an emergency or a negative set of circumstances. The 'hot seat' program changes the dynamic and makes the discussion about what the participants want to talk about.

While Waleska is also in the "hot seat," her group takes on more of a mentoring role, as she is here once a month. During the mentoring groups Waleska shares her story, experiences, life lessons, and accomplishments in hopes that she can change their lives by showing them that if she made it out so can they. In her talks with the youth at CCYC she dedicates herself to motivate the youth to make better decisions by preaching to them not to let or make their circumstances and environment define who they are. After telling her story she lets the kids ask her questions and is more than willing to have a dialogue with them regarding whatever subject they have a question on.

Roger often says, "They don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." The theme of the "hot seat" sessions is that Education is important, make quality decisions, care about your community and stay safe. Establishing the relationships with the officers is key for when our residents return home. Both officers give out their business cards, ask to meet with them outside the center, encourage letter writing, etc. This unconventional program has done wonders to break down stereotypes and misconceptions about police officers in Chester County. Our youth have a formed relationship and ally in their home community which is the greatest benefit of this program. Sgt. Ollis and Tpr. Gonzalez are two of the most humble individuals you will ever meet and are genuinely here because they care about the future of our youth.

Submitted by Carrie Handy Avery, B.A., M.S.

Chester County Youth Center Program Coordinator

cavery@chesco.org

610-793-5910 ext. 5014

Attachments included: Rodger Ollis résumé, pictures of both officers

“Officer in the Hot Seat” Program
Sgt. Rodger Ollis-Coatesville Police
and State Trooper-Embreeville barracks- Waleska Gonzalez

