

## **COMMUNITY MARTIAL ARTS PROGRAM**

During the course of his career with the Delray Beach Police Department, Sergeant Adam Rosenthal patrolled a rough and somewhat impoverished part of the community as a member of a task force whose focus was street level narcotics, gambling and other associated crimes. As a member of this reactive unit, Sergeant Rosenthal noticed that the interventions that were taking place in the community and the programs that were developed were geared toward those individuals who had already either been through the "system" or were coming dangerously close. Unlike the majority of the individuals that he came in contact with, he would also encounter young people who were good kids, trying to live the right way, but terrified and imprisoned by the bullies and troubled kids running the streets and controlling the neighborhoods. Most times these kids were the victims and targets of the younger criminals preying on the community. Sergeant Rosenthal had the idea to intervene in these kids' lives *before* they took the wrong path and to also provide them with some positive reinforcements and rewards for trying to live right and do right. With an extensive and lengthy background in the martial arts coupled with his broad law enforcement and defensive tactics training, Sergeant Rosenthal knew he had plenty of knowledge, skills and encouragement to share. He believed he was properly equipped to provide these youths with a program that would offer them an interactive, positive and empowering experience in a safe and nurturing environment. In 2003, he formed the Community Martial Arts Program. Armed with a simple flyer, he went to a local housing development where many of these children lived and posted the announcement. In a donated room of this housing development, twenty-five kids, ages five to eighteen, gathered to learn some martial arts; however, this was no ordinary "after school" program where kids would go to hang around with

friends and roll around on some mats. Sergeant Rosenthal had developed a structured and organized program that allowed for the maximum amount of rich development and positive empowerment possible for the children that also had an important element for the youth – it was safe and fun. Requirements were also put into place and the children were expected to meet them to be able to continue to participate and remain in the program. They were to maintain passing grades in school, could not engage in any hostile fighting outside of the program and had to stay out of trouble with the police. Sergeant Rosenthal also had his own requirements for the program. It had to be within walking distance for the children and it had to remain cost free to the participants and their parents. The Delray Beach Police Department has been able to meet these requirements by utilizing available resources in the form of equipment such as padded mats the department has for training and the valuable resource of other officers, who lend their support in a variety of ways.

The first class, comprised of youth ages five to eighteen, quickly outgrew their small, donated room, but Sergeant Rosenthal was able to secure another training room in another local housing development, keeping with his requirement that the program be held within walking distance for the kids. The once a week, two hour class, which was held after school quickly swelled to forty kids and so a second class was instituted. This class was held at the local teen center and was comprised of youths aged thirteen to twenty-one. Again, due to its popularity, a third location at a local church was then formed and was comprised of young people between the ages of eight and sixteen. Each of these classes contained between thirty-five and forty local youths from the community. The Community Martial Arts Program had taken the Delray Beach community by storm. With a destination of “strong bodies, strong minds”, the Delray Beach Police Department led by Sergeant Adam Rosenthal began a journey to strengthen and empower

these once timid and frightened children not only to positively develop and encourage them, but with the hope that these kids would then “pay it forward” and make a positive impact on their own neighborhoods and communities in return.

After the first year of the program had passed, Sergeant Rosenthal felt that the kids were now ready to enter tournaments and competitions, not only to be exposed to a higher level of competitor, but to reinforce the strides these “disadvantaged” children had made by showcasing their talents. They entered local competitions and enlisted the help of other Delray Beach Police officers to transport, referee and show support. The kids did remarkably well against some tough competition; however, the best prize of all was the confidence, strength, both physical and mental, and pride that these children had achieved through the program and tournaments. Because he wanted to continue to provide positive reinforcement for the youth through competition and tournaments, while keeping the expense to a minimum, Sergeant Rosenthal partnered with some local Martial Arts centers and decided to have his program host some competitions right in Delray Beach. Top martial arts performers from all over Palm Beach County were now coming to Delray Beach to compete with members of the Community Martial Arts Program. The tournaments were a great success and they also afforded the city of Delray Beach some additional exposure to different people and organizations. Currently, the Community Martial Arts Program hosts several tournaments each year and has organized and implemented a successful summer camp for the students. Also, each quarter, officers from the Delray Beach Police Department conduct a Gang Prevention seminar for the Martial Arts students so that they are always aware of the potential threats in their neighborhoods and are taught how to be vigilant in remaining steadfast in their efforts to live right. When this type of

education is coupled with the martial arts training that the kids so love and enjoy, it is better absorbed and then more apt to be put into practice by them.

The monetary investment for this program was extremely minimal. Uniforms are provided through the Delray Beach Police Department at an approximate cost of \$15 per child; however, a team member must earn the privilege of wearing this uniform. A program participant must meet the initial requirements of the program in addition to attending at least ten classes per year in order to earn a uniform. After attending thirty classes, the child is then eligible for an upgraded uniform. The privilege of earning and wearing these uniforms instills a sense of pride and accomplishment in the children. There was a one time cost of approximately \$200 for training and safety equipment that was also provided by the police department and the local training spaces and facilities are all donated. The most valuable and effective part of the program is free of charge. It is the commitment, compassion and dedication of Sergeant Adam Rosenthal and the Delray Beach Police Department to these young people trying to live the right way despite the disadvantages and obstacles. These officers come equipped with many diverse talents, techniques and training and all that is needed is their time and willingness to share it with others who put it into action in a positive way.

The success of the program has manifested itself in many outstanding ways. Over 400 neighborhood kids have gone through the program, with many of them now protecting and mentoring those scared and timid kids who were once reminiscent of themselves. Some of the older students have chosen to enter the Martial Arts field as a career and are now passing on their skills and knowledge to others. One young student was awarded a soccer scholarship to a university in Alabama; however, because his family was not financially able to even finance his trip to the school, officers from the Delray Beach Police Department, acting on behalf of the

Community Martial Arts Program, funded his trip so that he could get to the school and have some necessities to sustain him. There have been many instances where either one or both parents of these children have had negative interactions with the police over the years. Many of the fathers at one time fought with the police because of their bad behavior and/or criminal activity; now, the police department is interacting with their children in a positive and empowering way. This program has been able to make an impact on the city through those who will one day possibly be the leaders and business owners in the community – the youth. It has also demonstrated to the children and the community that investing the time, effort, skills and dedication before intervention is needed can pay huge dividends to the kids, their families and the community and is much more cost effective than rehabilitation. The program has also served to teach the young students that crime does not pay and that being diligent in living right and doing right is a better way to live.