

P.A.C.E. Helps Houston's Youth Build Tools for a Better Tomorrow

Where career pathing meets family and community involvement.

Youthful offenders returning to their families and communities in Harris County face multiple challenges, which place them at greater risk for violence, drugs, mental health problems and incarceration. The recidivism rate for youth in Harris County is 30 to 40% greater than other counties in Texas. There are few faith-based, non-residential programs in existence, and even fewer are dedicated to the cause of assisting youthful offenders with their re-entry into their local communities.

P.A.C.E. Youth Programs, Inc., a community-based, 501(c)(3) organization, is a leader in providing wraparound services to Harris County youth offenders. Wraparound encompasses a set of values and principles, as well as a program model of how services should be developed and provided, and a means of accessing a flexible range of services. P.A.C.E. Youth Programs' vision is to impact the lives of adjudicated youth by providing moral, educational and spiritual guidance, through a comprehensive life skills program designed to enhance their potential to be productive citizens.

One of the goals of the P.A.C.E. program is to reduce the disproportionate minority representation of youth referred to the juvenile justice system, by lowering recidivism among those released from Harris County juvenile correctional facilities. Because the majority of these youth need special services and additional resources that

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are, at best, scant, according to the National Association of Child Advocates group, the P.A.C.E. program can provide these youth with one year of aftercare that starts even before they are released from the juvenile justice system.



The Urban League, working with P.A.C.E. and Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, was engaged as a P.A.C.E. training provider with service delivery to program participants at two sites in Southeast and North Houston serving male youth from 10 to 17 years of age. The training provided youthful offenders specific opportunities to focus on developing their own (P)roper self-esteem, (A)cademics, (C)hacrater, and (E)mployment in order to give them vision and goals that go beyond just getting off probation.

Participants were introduced to training by attending an orientation providing a program overview effectively addressing the need for self-assessment and attitudinal changes that focus on appropriate coping skills and choice selection. The orientation also identified societal trends, and discussed Professional Presentation/Image Management, Communications, Life Skills /Social Networking, Business Etiquette, and Vocational and Career Exploration. The training emphasized responsibility and accountability to increase participants' overall marketability through extensive soft-skills reinforcement and community engagement, key to successful outcomes.

As part of their personal growth curriculum, work readiness training in the areas of resume preparation, interviewing skills, presentation/marketing skills and job search techniques were provided. Staff served as an employment referral and mentoring resource, allowing participants to engage in career pathing, family and community involvement.