**Dallas Fire-Rescue Community Risk Reduction and Youth Empowerment Program**

Problem assessment, the challenge or need that prompted the local government to develop the Program:

The City of Dallas is a modern metropolis in North Texas and serves as both a commercial and cultural hub for the entire region. With a population of over 1.2 M and growing, public safety continues to be a top priority. Within maintaining this priority, the Dallas Fire-Rescue Department (DFRD) faces several challenges. Among these are protecting and serving the public, keeping staff morale up, maintaining safety standards for the Department as well as the larger community, all of this while facing budget cuts year over year. Because of these challenges, the DFRD is continuously developing new policies, procedures and technologies that will only further achieve effective public safety activities. Traditionally, a focus within fire service is to maintain a rapid and effective emergency response capability, however, recent trends have shown the need to move beyond this approach and towards the more comprehensive concept of Community Risk Reduction (CRR). CRR is all associated programs, actions, and services used by a community, which prevent or mitigate the loss of life, property, and resources associated with life safety, fire, and other disasters within a community. Understanding the need to remain on the cutting edge of providing critical public safety activities, the DFRD took a measured approach in implementing their Community Risk Reduction and Youth Empowerment Program. This Program focused on four main goals of overall reduction of risk to the community, proactively providing education about the fire service, creating a diversified, school to fire service pipeline and better recruiting and engaging the next era of their workforce

Program Implementation and Costs

Community engagement goes hand in hand with the CRR model. Because engagement must be a priority for every governmental agency, the DFRD began with a deeper analysis of its fire prevention education. Traditionally, DFRD has been reactive as it relates to providing fire prevention education to elementary aged children.  However, in 2015 the DFRD began a pilot initiative that would involve neighborhood fire stations "adopting" a local elementary school.  The "adoption" process involves a fire station contacting a local school principal to determine specific needs.  This flexibility has proven most effective as some elementary schools wanted assistance with fitness and movement exercises for the students’ while others were seeking mentors or reading tutors.

Community engagement is but one aspect of the overall CRR model and only works with an engaged and motivated workforce. Keeping this and future community needs in mind, the DFRD sought to provide a concrete solution to recruiting the next generation of its workforce. This led to the DFRD entering a partnership with Dallas Independent School District (DISD) and Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) in establishment of a pathway to success initiative called Pathways in Technology Early College High School (PTECH). The PTECH initiative allows the Department to provide expertise in regards to curriculum development and internships that results in participants graduating high school with an Associate Degree tuition free. Additionally, Executive Team members of the Department are attached to DISD middle schools to explore opportunities for mentorship and serve as ambassadors for PTECH. This combined approach is a long-term strategy and will serve as an excellent seed program to ensure that the Department has a pool of viable candidates from the community.

Linked to this, the DFRD also has identified the necessity to have a workforce that also reflects the diversity of its community. Like many Fire Departments across the country, the DFRD saw that there was an underrepresentation of women officers. To address this, the Department instituted Camp L.A.D.D.E.R. (Ladies Achieving Dreams with Dedication Enthusiasm and Respect). L.A.D.D.E.R. is a 1-day/1-night training to focus on leadership, confidence, teamwork and courage for young ladies enrolled in High School (9th-12th grades) in the Dallas Independent School District. Attendees to the Camp are trained on First Aid and CPR certification through the American Red Cross. In addition, they can learn skills associated with fire engine familiarization and USAR (Urban Search and Rescue) strategies such as repelling and aerial climb. The Camp involves current female firefighters speaking with the young ladies about the Department and pathways to success and life skills. Currently, Camp L.A.D.D.E.R. is the only fire service training program in North Texas targeting high school aged, female students. Additionally, of the few programs that exists nationwide, Camp L.A.D.D.E.R. is the only one that provides fire prevention and education, life safety, inspection and investigation training.

Because of all involved partners, to date there has been no realized costs outside of the time of the DFRD and partnering agencies staff.

Tangible results or measurable outcomes of the Program:

Implementation of these initiatives has brought about several tangible results.

As previously mentioned, community engagement and recruitment has been an issue for most Fire Departments across the country. The Adopt-a-School initiative has been a proactive means to enhance efforts to engage the students by establishing a linkage between the neighborhood fire station and the elementary school. Since 2015, more than 100 schools have been officially adopted by the DFRD. During initial piloting phases, the City of Dallas Library System donated books that firefighters could in turn gift to the children, this is anticipated to be a future collaboration in efforts to use these resources to address literacy concerns impacting the Dallas community. Additionally, Camp L.A.D.D.E.R. has maintained a nominal number of participants since its inception also in 2015 (28 in Year 1 and 19 in Year 2). Moreover, the Department was glad to announce one of the volunteers who prior participated in the Camp has successfully applied for a position as Fire Prevention Officer Trainee. A professional career after school program to reach students who do not have an opportunity to attend the annual Camp is currently also underway.

There have also been proven results impacting community satisfaction. 2016 Community Survey results show that the Fire Service has exceeded expectations with an overall 95% satisfaction rating by citizens which also leads to increases to the City’s overall Public Safety index. The Department has also seen an increase in both their applicant pool and percent of recruits graduating from the DFRD academy.

Lessons learned about the planning, implementation and analysis of the Program from my perspective would be as follows:

Conduct a Pilot Program: Likely an observation made from implementing any new program, pilot testing ahead of time helps to gauge readiness of full-scale implementation. An example of this was phasing in schools for the adoption process allowing for best possible decisions to be made on allocation of time and resources.

Identify Program Champions and Key Partnerships: The DFRD early on sought out individuals to serve as ambassadors. This was primarily the case with the Adopt-a-School program in which native born, DISD graduates were targeted. This has also been a significant lesson learned for the L.A.D.D.E.R. Program in seeking to engage more volunteers who would be responsible for a lot of the follow up activities (visiting participating schools to monitor social and educational development post completion of the camp). Also of critical importance are developing key partnerships. Both the Adopt-a-School and L.A.D.D.E.R. Programs would not have excelled without the commitment of partnering agencies such with DISD, DCCCD and the American Red Cross. This ultimately led to raising awareness about these initiatives, building more Program champions and making Program costs essentially nonexistent.

How the Program raises awareness of the contributions of Local Government Managers:

Public Safety predominates any list of priorities for local government managers. Within the spectrum of Fire Services, there may be a general assumption that this means how quickly fires can be put out. However, through implementation of the Community Risk Reduction and Youth Empowerment Program, the DFRD is going beyond the status quo. These initiatives have highlighted the Department’s efforts to tackle issues that are often compounded in larger cities. Through measures to increase literacy rates with Adopt-a-School and career opportunities with PTECH and L.A.D.D.E.R., the Department is aiding the City of Dallas in addressing poverty, joblessness and education. Through these efforts, the Department is highlighting that those responsible for managing local government affairs can and will proactively go beyond their normal scope of duties to connect with and provide for the community in a significantly more impactful way.