

***Talking with Police:
Bringing Law Enforcement and the Community Together
Vista Adult School***

Depending upon their culture, adults from around the world have had a variety of experiences with police, from torture, to tyranny, to unfair treatment — thus, talking with police evokes an array of emotions. Vista Adult School met this issue head on with a “Talking with Police” program, modeled after the community-based English Language and Civics Workbook project produced by the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library LAMP (Literacy for All of Monterey Park) project. Vista Adult developed the yearlong program, with supporting curriculum, designed around their EL Civics/ESL student needs assessment, incorporating suggestions from the Vista Weed and Seed Program and the Vista Crime Prevention Commission. It was particularly timely after three officer-involved fatalities occurred in Vista in August 2005. The first phase of the program consisted of presentations to EL Civics/ESL students at several Vista Adult School campuses by a San Diego Sheriff’s Department lieutenant and a community service officer, as well as a City of Vista code enforcement officer. Information and dialogue involved more than five hundred adult second-language learners.



Topics covered in the presentations and in the curriculum:



- Meeting and greeting police officers
- Handling traffic stops
- Calling 911
- Reporting accidents and crimes
- Crime awareness and prevention
- Issues related to domestic violence
- What to do if accused of a crime
- How to file a complaint if treated unfairly

The presentations and the discussions that followed were very valuable. The officers were open and honest and encouraged questions leading to a great deal of interaction, all very important considering the tense relationship between Vista citizens and their police force. Students left the presentations with a better understanding of law enforcement in their community and were much more comfortable in approaching a deputy, reporting crimes, and understanding code regulations. They also had a clearer understanding of their rights and responsibilities as residents of their county. Students surveyed after the



presentations requested more information on gang awareness and domestic violence, and so, to complete the curriculum, a San Diego Sheriff's Office crime prevention specialist gave follow-up presentations at four Vista Adult School campuses that focused on those two issues.



As a result of the police presentations, one student submitted an application to become a volunteer translator for the San Diego Sheriff's Department Vista Division. Several students approached the San Diego Sheriff's Office lieutenant with individual

questions, and two students scheduled appointments with the community service officer to report crimes in their apartment complexes. As a result of the classroom activities, four students contacted agencies to request assistance with legal matters and several students referred family members to these agencies. After the domestic violence presentations, one woman asked to speak to the domestic violence detective to report abuse. She was connected with a representative from a community abuse prevention agency who could offer her services and possible shelter. The "Talking with Police" program, which grew out of a defined student need, has been one of the very best so far for the Vista Adult EL Civics/ESL student population.