



An Interview with Lisa Thurau...

Tell us about Strategies for Youth.

I founded Strategies for Youth to close what I saw as a major gap/chasm in how youth enter the juvenile justice system, particularly an officers' understanding of how to work with youth. Police Officers are the gatekeepers of the juvenile justice system and yet they are not trained to work with youth. So, in the early ought's, due to massive advances in neuroscience research, Prosecutors, Public Defenders, Judges, and Probation Officers were learning about the teen brain and how to work effectively to correct their behavior. However, law enforcement was not part of the growing understanding of youth behavior and the inherent dangers of criminalizing normative behaviors, especially for youth of color.

Strategies for Youth aims to close that gap by teaching police officers how to work most effectively with youth and warn them of the short and long term damages of criminalizing normative behavior, particularly when relationship building with youth is much more effective. That was the original mission and since then we have expanded our programming to include supporting young people's understanding of how to navigate interactions with law enforcement and the legal consequences of their behaviors; and the short and long term consequences of arrests and court involvement on their educational and employment options. We are now developing programming for parents and caretakers.

Share with us an accomplishment of Strategies for Youth.

The greatest accomplishment is that people are listening and using our training to change their interactions with youth. I always find it astonishing when anyone listens to me, and then even more astonishing when they act on it! After our trainings, we routinely learn arrest rates decline, youth have more understanding of how to interact with law enforcement, and some of the fear and anxiety of interactions is dispelled on both sides.

What would you like people to know about police/youth interactions?

There are 3 things I would like people to know: 1) While some officers instinctively understand how to interact with youth, many benefit from training that explains how youth are wired differently and therefore perceive, process and respond differently. Learning those skills makes a big difference in interactions. Supporting police training to work with youth is key for public safety in all its forms; 2) Police can't fix a lot of what ails American youth--mental health issues, homelessness, abuse, exposure to trauma--so it would be beneficial if the community stopped expecting police officers to step in as "fixers" when that is not their job nor what they are trained to do; and 3) We find that the vast majority of the officers we train want to have positive interactions with youth and most youth want to have positive interactions with law enforcement. Supporting opportunities for such connections is key to community safety.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I like to go to the beach, be with my family and friends, watch movies, travel and explore the world. I especially like to speak to strangers.

If you were given \$1000 and you had to spend it on something fun for yourself, what would you buy?

I really enjoyed thinking about how to answer this question! I would use my frequent flyer miles to fly to the Caribbean, use my hotel points to stay in a modest hotel, and use the cash to rent a catamaran and a person to help me sail it for 3 glorious days...