



Issue 92

Houston PAL Officers Teach BrainWise to Hundreds of Children and Teenagers

BrainWise Builds Trusting Relationships. Sergeant Letricia Brown and her team of police officers faced a challenge. In 2019, they were asked to relaunch the Greater Houston Police Department's Police Activities League (PAL) and build trusting relationships between youth, law enforcement, and the community. She said, "We did not have much direction. We had nothing."



Sergeant Letricia Brown

That changed when they attended BrainWise instructor Matt Sena's presentation at the New Orleans PAL conference in 2021. Her officers exclaimed, "Sarge, we have to do this!" She agreed and made BrainWise the foundation of their program. Afterwards, the officers said, "We get it, we understand it, and the kids love it!" She watched them become comfortable teaching the program.

They customized examples by using problems the children faced at home and school, as well as issues in the community and world. She said the officers understood how "Everyone Has Problems" is different for each participant and how it helps children recognize that a big problem for them may not be a problem for someone else. All the Wise Ways resonated with the kids and the officers liked the simplicity of the explanations.

We take the Constellation of Support, Red Flag Warnings, Lizard Brain/Wizard Brain and the other concepts and help the children apply them to what they see in real life," she said.

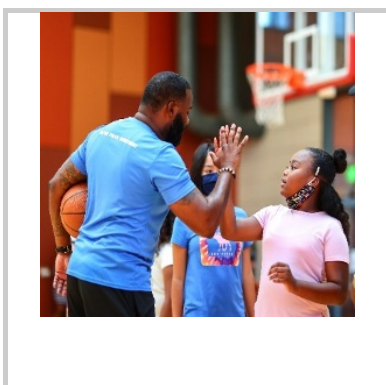


Sergeant Brown (center) and Officers of the Greater Houston Police Activities League

Sergeant Brown shared stories, including how the officers said they prepared to teach the classes. “I never thought that I, as an officer, would be taking the material home to study it before we go into a class to teach it,” one told her. Another said she goes home on Sundays after church, spreads out the materials and prepares for the weekly session. Sergeant Brown beamed, “It is neat to see how invested they are and how they make sure they are delivering BrainWise in a positive way.”

BrainWise Delivery. [Unlike other PAL organizations](#), Houston does not have a dedicated facility. The officers contact Houston schools in target neighborhoods and meet with school counselors and faculty to decide how they will deliver the lessons. Most are group sessions, but students are all ages and range from regular students to students with behavioral issues. The goal is for an officer to visit two schools a day and teach two BrainWise sessions at each school four days a week, visiting eight schools weekly during the school year.

The classes range between 10 to 30 kids, and the sessions are held for 45 to 60 minutes. Although teachers are in the classroom, they use the PAL sessions as “break time” and often are not involved. When officers have a large group, two to three will work together and help each other.



Greater Houston PAL Officers with Students

BrainWise Changes Behaviors. Sergeant Brown says officers are rewarded by seeing behaviors that show the kids are learning important skills. She shared examples, including one that she, faculty, and parents witnessed between two students during a heated girls’ basketball game.

The referee did not call any fouls on the opposing team’s player who kept bumping into a PAL student. Emotions between the girls continued to rise and at the end of the game, after a taunt from the offending player, the PAL student

moved toward her. Suddenly she stopped, turned around, and walked back. The other girl said, “Hey, where are you going? We’re not done with this.”

The student went to the PAL officer and said, “I’m trying to use my Wizard Brain, but that person is trying to make me use my Lizard Brain.”

Her mother witnessed the incident. She did not know the terms “Wizard Brain” and “Lizard Brain,” but understood what happened and expressed her surprise, “So you all are teaching things that are helpful to them!” Previously, the mother thought PAL may be trying to brainwash kids.

BrainWise Meets a Need. Sergeant Brown said, “These kids are hungry for knowledge and guidance. When you have officers teaching BrainWise concepts, it’s a ‘no-brainer.’ We have seen them change from resistance to participation, and teachers comment all the time about the positive changes they see in their students.”

She said that BrainWise helps the officers in everything they do. “When we are responding to calls, we are aware it’s because people may be using their Lizard Brain. This helps us understand their behaviors, why they are doing it, and be prepared for what to expect.” Words she uses to describe BrainWise are: NECESSARY, HELPFUL, and A GOOD FOUNDATION.

“My officers see success with BrainWise. All the time, they tell me that BrainWise helps them.”

Scientific studies are seldom shared with non-scientists. As a public health and psychiatric nurse, I learned how to simplify explanations to help patients of all ages and abilities understand medical findings and procedures. I used this approach to develop BrainWise and explain why the 10 Wise Ways are important to learn.

This newsletter shared the success of police officers who teach BrainWise in schools to children and teenagers. The presence of police in schools can be a “red flag” in communities that have a history of strained police relations. Greater Houston PAL has created trust between law enforcement and youth and the community. They attribute their success to using BrainWise as the foundation for their programs.

Thank you for teaching BrainWise.



Take care,
Dr. Pat

On a Lighter Note

The following Edutopia video titled “Can SEL Transform School Policing?” explores how integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into schools has

helped police officers build a more positive school atmosphere. The video complements the work PAL officers in Houston and in chapters throughout the nation are doing to help children and parents make responsible decisions.



Can SEL Transform School Policing?

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