

OPERATION CONVERSATION: COPS & KIDS



In **Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids** workshops, inner-city youth from some of New York City's toughest neighborhoods and police officers from the New York City Police Department (NYPD) meet to engage in conversations as well as performance and improvisation to foster positive interactions and a deeper understanding of the challenges and stressors of both groups. At Police Athletic League (PAL) centers and other locations around the city, groups of about 10 officers and 10 young people meet for workshops at least once a month. Initial concerns and tensions between the officers and youth lessen as they engage in improvisations and performance with one another.

The innovative police-community relations program is led by **Dr. Lenora Fulani, founder of the All Stars Project (ASP)** and a community activist who works to transform the lives of youth and poor communities using the developmental power of performance. The ASP has a number of performance programs for youth, but **Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids** was developed a decade ago. In 2011, Fulani and the ASP

finalized a formal partnership with the NYPD, and the program is now part of officer training for all NYPD officers. Twice a year—in July and January—graduates of the most recent NYPD academy attend a performance of **Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids** at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. The most recent performance had more than 500 new officers and a similar number of community members, seated in alternating rows. After the performance, community members and officers engage in conversation, which often includes laughter, some tears, and empathy.

The creative and innovative program uses performance and improvisation to engage officers and youth in discussions about the challenges of living and working in poor, inner-city communities. The workshops help to break down barriers between young people and NYPD officers to help them feel more comfortable and lead to stronger positive connections between police and the community. More information about the program is available at the **All Stars Project** website and **Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids**.