

The Times

CAPITAL HEALTH, NONPROFIT team up to curb street violence



In a file photo, Mark Parrish, CJOOS program facilitator, left, and Rob Fiorello, CJOOS program coordinator, pose in a room at the Sam Naples Community Center in Trenton where the two run the Comprehensive Juvenile Offenders Outreach Service.

(Keith Muccilli | For The Times of Trenton)

By Cristina Rojas | For NJ.com | December 04, 2015

TRENTON — Street violence is all too familiar in Trenton with scores of people ending up in the hospital because of gunshot wounds, stabbings and violent struggles.

But in a new initiative aimed at curbing violence, Capital Health is partnering with PEI Kids, a nonprofit that runs a program focused on young people who are on the cusp or at risk of becoming more involved with crime.

PEI Kids' Comprehensive Juvenile Offenders Outreach Services is a 15-week program, but for three of the sessions, the teenagers will sit down with doctors, social workers, EMTs and nursing staff to discuss topics from risk-taking behavior and nonviolent resolution to health and well-being and different healthcare professions.

For 14 years, staff and volunteers from PEI Kids have been doing quiet work on Saturday mornings in Trenton, trying — sometimes successfully, sometimes in vain — to straighten out the lives of kids who've racked up auto theft or assault charges before their 18th birthday

Most of the teens, ranging in age from 12 to 17, are referred to the program by Mercer County Family Court or the Juvenile Probation Unit.

PEI Kids executive director Roz Dashiell said she hopes the conversations will help them better understand the repercussions and think twice before acting.

"We really want them to see the bigger picture," PEI Kids executive director Roz Dashiell said. "Families are involved. Communities are involved. There's a ripple effect beyond the perpetrator and victim."

Dr. Steven Johnson, an acute care surgeon at Capital Health Medical Center - Hopewell, said he jumped at the opportunity to join the initiative after working on similar programs in Baltimore and Delaware.

"It was easy to surround myself with the same mission — to not only try to save lives but to try to help prevent some of these things," he said.

He said that too often, young people resort to violence, not words, to resolve conflicts.

"It has become a very difficult problem to solve and it can't be something that we only address when a patient comes into the hospital," he said.

Johnson will help lead a session focused on the impact of violence on the victim, family and community, taking them through a scenario from when they are admitted to the hospital through their recovery and what follows.