

READI4Youth (Reduce Crime, Empower, Advise, Dream Initiative for Youth)

When students used to bump into teachers in the halls of ██████████ K-8 School in Cleveland, they never thought to apologize. When they bumped into each other, fights would start. The example middle-school aged kids were setting for younger grades as they disrupted hallways and classrooms, was not so positive. As one teacher told us, 'Frankly, these kids had an attitude problem and needed to improve their character.'

READI4Youth is a 12-session, in-school or after-school character education and violence prevention program that was created to address these issues with urban 10-13-year-olds at a pivotal time in their lives. The non-profit group Project Love® *Remember the Children Foundation* brings 16 years of proven success in life skills training for youth to the program. Through helping each student build positive skills that include anger and impulse management and creating a personal success vision, **READI4Youth** fosters a more respectful culture for learning in schools, improves school retention, and prevents youth delinquency and gang involvement. A school-wide staff training in program principles kicks off the year so that educators can reinforce program concepts daily.

Partnering with the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office and WVIZ/PBS ideastream, Project Love piloted **READI4Youth** with 560 5th-8th graders in two Cleveland schools and one Boys & Girls Club in 2007-08 and two additional schools in 2008-09 and with great success. Results of an external school climate survey conducted by Cleveland schools in 2008 and 2009, reveal significant school climate improvements at Empire and Robert Jamison, the last two schools where Project Love conducted READI4Youth, in contrast with other K-8 buildings where the program was not held.

Going forward, Project Love will partner with WVIZ to provide two special distance learning sessions that add a justice/safety component to **READI4Youth**. These programs will inform kids about potential threats to their safety and future from gangs and allow them to meet and talk with panels of successful role models to help them envision their own successful future. Hundreds of other students nationwide can participate interactively by distance learning. Previous programs about gangs and Internet safety were attended by over 400 READI4Youth participants in the WVIZ studio and hundreds of other Ohio teens by distance learning.

At a time when both school and law enforcement budgets have been drastically cut, this kind of proactive program that increases students' respect for other students and adults and prevents crime, is just what our schools and communities need. **READI4Youth** impacts kids at a time in their lives when they are deciding whether or not to stay in school and go on to college, join a gang or experiment with illegal substances. And the program fills a clear need identified by individual school principals and students themselves in the Cleveland schools' recent 'Human Ware Audit' to improve social-emotional learning and create a more safe and respectful school climate for that age group.

If funded, Project Love will provide READI4Youth for 300 6th – 8th graders at two K-8 buildings in 2010-2011 at a cost of only \$272 per student. Schools will be selected in partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

When one considers that even one night in juvenile detention costs Cuyahoga County \$250 and the average stay is 22 nights (or \$5,500), **READI4Youth** is an outstanding investment, steering young people to make positive life choices and improving anger and impulse management skills. Now, kids at Gracemount say 'excuse me' when they bump into someone, count to three before overreacting, and are working toward a personal vision of success. Through **READI4Youth**, we can make many more Ohio kids ready for life.

