



## City of Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

October 20, 2022

The Honorable Justin Wilson  
Members of City Council  
City of Alexandria  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of City Council,

On behalf of the City of Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force, I am writing this letter asking that you consider providing additional financial support for the Intervention, Prevention & Education (IPE) Program in your upcoming budget discussions.

The IPE Program provides gang intervention, prevention & education services for youth at risk of gang/crew involvement, currently gang/crew involved, and victimized by gangs/crews primarily through accessible, therapeutic individual and family case management.

Our Gang Prevention Community Task Force's mission is to create a gang free community through collaboration, community outreach, and advocacy. In line with the City Council 2022 Priority, *Support Youth and Families*, and echoing our mission of advocacy to help gang prevention, we strongly feel that directing additional funding to the IPE Program will allow us both to better meet our outlined priorities. The IPE Program is a successful city funded program, managed by Northern Virginia Family Service, and one that should be further supported.

As currently funded, IPE has two full time Youth Counselors to adequately handle up to (12) concurrent cases each, or (24) simultaneous cases as a program. As originally funded, an average case would last up to three months. The complexity faced by cases today has extended the average time to five months. The resulting impact is that too many cases (youth) are unable to receive the help they need. The needy youth wait for services, while the challenges they are facing continue. The longer a youth waits, the less likely they are to accept services when finally offered and more likely they are to become more gang/crew involved and victimized in the meantime.

At the writing of this letter, twelve kids cannot receive the IPE Program support they need as the result of a resource constraint, i.e., one additional youth counselor.

*As an appendix, please find two examples of successful IPE participants. The success exhibited by the IPE Program is tangible and no child should be turned away when asking for support because of insufficient staffing and or resources.*

Councilman Canek Aguirre (Alexandria City Council), Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins (Member, Alexandria City Council), Mr. Willie Bailey (Alexandria City School Board), Ms. Noraine Buttar (City Manager's Representative/DCHS Representative), Mr. Michael Burch (Alexandria City High School Representative), Mr. Tim Brannon (Middle School Representative), Ms. Rachael Dischner (Elementary School Representative), Mr. Steve Nelson (African American Community Representative), Mr. Thomas Walczykowski (Member, At-Large), Mr. Bryan Kirkes (Citizen At-Large) Mr. Jim Dillon (Chair/Business Community Representative), Ms. Marilyn Nevy-Cruz (Vice Chair/Latino Community Representative), Mr. Khalil Coates (At-Large Member Representing Youth of the City)



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Our ask is as follows:

1. *City Council consider fully funding the IPE Program at its Fiscal Year 2023 full cost of \$243,000 versus its current flat funding from FY2017 of \$170,000 (included with the Court Service Unit budget and \$42,500 from AFHS for a combined \$212,500).*
2. *City Council move to add an additional full-time Northern Virginia Family Service employee at an additional cost of \$121,500.*
3. *City Council approve a discretionary fund of \$8,000, per Youth Counselor, to be used to act as a discretionary wallet to fund pro social activities for youth. Total request \$24,000.*

*Examples of pro social activities include, signing children up for sports leagues, art classes, or necessary supplies or equipment.*

The successes shown by the IPE Program exhibited by formerly high-risk children include:

- School performance
  - Improved behavior, attendance, or GPA
- Family functioning
  - Communication, structures, relationships.
- Gang involvement
  - Reduced or eliminated
- Informal and personal
  - Life skills, goal settings, negative behavior reduction

In support of our combined mission, and moreover to help the needs of our young residents, we are asking that City Council consider fully funding the asks outlined in this letter.

We understand the tremendous strain that the city and its residents face in this time of uncertainty and appreciate the efforts that City Council emits. The City of Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force looks forward to continuing an open dialogue between our two teams.

Sincerely,

Jim Dillon

Chairperson - City of Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

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Appendix

### Jocelyn\*

Jocelyn is a 13-year-old who was referred to the IPE program by her middle school counselor due to a recent suspension for a fight, as well as concerns about late arrivals, academic challenges, and a sibling with recent legal involvement. At the start of the program, Jocelyn's dad shared that Jocelyn was often defiant of the house rules and frequently lied about who she was hanging out with after school. Jocelyn's IPE Counselor worked with Jocelyn on decision making, healthy relationships, effective communication, gang intervention, substance abuse and internet safety. With the help of her IPE Counselor, Jocelyn signed up for a boxing class at her local recreation center, which she enjoyed enough to make a concerted effort to be on time for every class. AS the case continued, the IPE Counselor and Jocelyn continued to focus on decision making and finding a trusted adult in school to go to in times of need. As she built trust with her IPE Counselor, Jocelyn shared that she was using substances, including opioids, and needed help. Her IPE Counselor supported Jocelyn's parents in connecting her to services for her substance abuse. When Jocelyn's IPE case closed, Jocelyn was going to school on time, had distanced herself from friends she previously used substances with, she had improved her grades and her interest in school, and appeared more focused overall. Jocelyn and her parents were spending more time together, going to parks, pools, shopping, and watching movies together at home. Jocelyn's father shared that he was more patient with Jocelyn now, she helped around the house more and no longer locked herself in her room. Jocelyn shared that she now has a better relationship with her parents, feels freer and happier, and has no plans to return to using substances. Lastly, Jocelyn shared that if she could take away would be to be more kind and patient with herself and to choose friends carefully.

\*Client's name has been changed and consented to sharing experience.

### Roberto\*

Roberto is a 14-year-old referred to IPE by his school due to a violent incident related to online posts by a local gang, which resulted in further threats of violence towards Roberto and his friends. When he started working with IPE, Roberto had significant challenges managing his anger and trouble following the rules at home, including going out without asking for permission. His mother was also concerned because since he started middle school he was involved in fights, he stopped communicating with his stepdad, and stayed in his room for hours.

The IPE counselor worked with Roberto on goals related to anger management, keeping clear boundaries at home, and gang education (refusal skills, peer pressure, healthy relationships,). The IPE counselor worked with Roberto's parents on how to be more consistent with house rules, learning strategies to negotiate with their son, and positive rewards. Roberto participated in the IPE Program for about 5 months, and during this time he learned to express his anger in a healthier way, while his parents learned how to be more patient with him and to communicate with their son in an effective and healthy manner. Now, mother and son have a good relationship and Roberto improved his relationship with his stepdad. He made new friends at school and benefited from his participation in the Alexandria Soccer Association. According to the school counselor, Roberto made a significant progress regarding his grades (increasing from F's to B's) and behavior at school, as he was not involved in any other negative incidents.

\*Client's name has been changed and consented to sharing experience.

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