



Vancouver BladeRunners Program establishes International Partnerships

Staff from Vancouver's BladeRunners program traveled to New Orleans and Miami during September 23rd thru Sept 29th 2007 to share the internationally recognized award winning program model with local community and youth groups.

The trip was a direct result of a referral from local philanthropist, Paul Kenny, of the Kenny Family Foundation. He new that the BladeRunners Model "could make a world of good in New Orleans", where rebuilding is expected to take up to 20 years. BladeRunners representatives visited local community agencies throughout New Orleans including Café Reconcile, Youth Empowerment Program (YEP), Turning Point Partners and CrossRoads Missions.

We first met with Café Reconcile, a highly recognized hospitality-training program that has just started a construction-training program. Immediately we were told that the trip was already a success because there are many wounded souls in New Orleans and a caring international visit helps. We met with both staff and participants to exchange program information and share best practices. Our BladeRunners Model, especially our hands-on 24/7 support was well received. BladeRunners staff also met with a representative from CrossRoads Missions, which is a partner organization and trainer for Café Reconcile and builds new affordable homes after Hurricane Katrina.

We also met with staff from the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP). This is a program for young offenders to receive support and to develop a personalized action plan with YEP staff, their social worker, their parole officer and a child advocate. YEP also referred us to meet with a restorative justice expert from Turning Point Partners. We received a detailed understanding about justice services for youth and partnerships within the education system.

While in Miami, we met with the staff at the YWCA Greater Miami-Dade Youth Build USA program. This is a construction program for youth to learn employability and life skills while working on social housing renovations. This program is delivered from a neighborhood in Miami that is recognized as the poorest in the USA.

We believe our visits had a direct impact on the youth and communities of all programs involved because we have all made a commitment to implement some of the best practices we have exchanged with each other. Participation in a mini conference, coordinator exchanges and development of sister programs are a few of the examples of possible next steps.