

Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department
Officer Shannon Finis

In July of 2013 I, Officer Shannon Finis started at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Academy. Approximately six months later I found myself training in the Eastway Division of Charlotte. Back in 2014 The Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department had officers complete an NPE Project, the objective was that the officers in training could recognize a problem in the community and find and use the different resources available to solve the problem.

I was given the task of cleaning up an area near Garinger High School located in the Eastway Division. Several houses near the school were vacant and boarded up and a lot of the students from the school were skipping, breaking into these houses, having sex, drinking alcohol and using drugs. Terrybrook Lane is a one block, dead end Street directly behind the football field at Garinger High School and was a problem area with high calls for service. I teamed up with community members, CODE Enforcement, other officers and the property management to work to change the area for the better.

Just like the Broken Windows Theory there was no pride in the area as it was rundown and it was literally a breeding ground for criminal activity. On June 14, 2014 I orchestrated a neighborhood clean-up day. We cleaned up all of the trash, trimmed trees and brush, removed graffiti and planted several gardens. We had food, music and performances that drew the community members out to communicate and assist with the clean-up.

The next day, June 15th it was extremely hot so before my shift I went out and watered the flowers we had planted so our work would not be for nothing. I came back the day after and the day after and before I knew it several children started come out to see what I was doing and help. One young man (6 years old), Pablo told me he didn't think I was ever going to come back after the clean-up day and he was so happy I did. He even asked for his own flower to plant at his house to take care of.

Watering the gardens turned into games on the street, I taught the kids all of the old school stuff like Red Rover, Ships across the Ocean and What Time is it Mr. Fox. From there it turned into monthly movie nights that involved the whole block, then pumpkin carving for Halloween and a big Christmas Dinner with the kids, their families and several CMPD officers.

In order to support my efforts financially I started a nonprofit called The Terrybrook Project (www.theterrybrookproject.org). With it being a low income area the residents often changed and when we had activities on the street I had several kids, but there were five families that are all now my family that have stuck with me for four years. After a few months of meeting with the kids most of them got evicted and moved from Terrybrook. That posed a challenge because I had to figure out transportation for everyone instead of just showing up on the street. The group started with Pablo and Q, they were waiting for me every time I came on the street. Pablo loved the police and would go speak and hug any

officer that came through after June 14th because he felt comfortable like we were all his friends. P and Q went on quite a few adventures together before the group really took its shape. Next was Junior, when he finally wasn't afraid to leave his mother's side he joined and came with us hiking and to the beach. For a while I did more with P, Q, and J because they didn't have brothers or sisters that could attend. One of my families has over 8 siblings and the other has 5, I couldn't fit all of them in my car so sadly I saw the whole group for larger events only such as our annual camping trips, movie nights, pool parties and Christmas dinner.

In 2015 we had our first camping trip in South Carolina and this weekend July 13-15 we will be having our 3rd annual camping trip! I have been fortunate to pair up with The Charlotte Sheraton who hosts our Christmas Dinner, a movie night and a pool party for the kids and their families.

The Terrybrook kids range from the age of 5 to 15 and there are 15 kids in the group. Transportation and funding are major hurdles in keeping this group together but every time they get together it's like they don't miss a beat and it is so much fun and so awesome to see them together.

Last year, the summer of 2017 I expanded a bit to reach an older group. One of my passions in life is the game of basketball. I grew up playing, played and college and learned a lot from the game. I created a basketball camp called Camp Fusion (www.campfusionclt.org). The camp hosts 48 kids (24 boys/24 girls) from several CMS high schools. Each of the campers participates on their high school basketball team. The camp is free to them and it is overnight at Johnson and Wales University. All of the camp counselors are CMPD police officers. The goal of the camp is to build positive relationships amongst the athletes and the police as well as amongst themselves. Last year's camp went really well and we have kids waitlisted for this year's camp!

2017 in Charlotte saw an increase in homicides. One of those homicides was a young man that played basketball at Garinger High School. That young man's best friend was one of my campers and also played basketball at Garinger High School. He didn't take the death well and started hanging out with gang bangers and getting in trouble at school. I also found out that two more of my campers both with the potential to play in college were ineligible for the upcoming season. This wasn't right and it wasn't okay so I started a mentoring/tutoring program (Charlotte Heights) with the men's basketball program at Garinger where we met every Monday after school. Again these guys had the support of several officers who came on their own time to help. We took the group hiking, camping, to a play and they had a few guest speakers, we are working on Summer College tours as well.

I do most of this work on my own time, its community policing in a sense but it's not always the day to day functions of an officer. I can do this work because I am an officer. Being a police officer has blessed me with the opportunity to help and continue to help so many. I wanted to be a police officer ever since I was a kid. I grew up in a rough neighborhood and saw how children were so negatively impacted and I wanted to be able to help or change that. I have a great team of officers that help me try to achieve that.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to apply for this grant. My charity of choice would be The Terrybrook Project. Funding is my biggest hurdle and this grant would allow me to do even more with the kids (the whole group) this year!