

Red Hook Initiative Report Community Residents For Safe Neighborhoods and Against Stop and Frisk

Our Concerns about Stop and Frisk

According to the latest full annual data collected by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) in 2011, “New Yorkers were stopped by the police 685,724 times. 605,328 were totally innocent (88 percent). 350,743 were Black (53 percent). 223,740 were Latino (34 percent). 61,805 were White (9 percent). 341,581 were aged 14-24 (51 percent)”. Additionally, the NYCLU discovered in first quarter of 2012 that New Yorkers were stopped by the police 203,500 times already, and the statistics remain consistent: 181,457 were totally innocent (89 percent). 108,097 were Black (54 percent). 69,043 were Latino (33 percent). 18,387 were White (9 percent).

(Source:<http://www.nyclu.org/issues/racial-justice/stop-and-frisk-practices>).

If 87% of people stopped and frisked in all of New York City by the NYPD are Black and/or Latino, and 51% are youth between 14 and 24 years old, how many people would that lead to in a neighborhood that is predominantly of that racial/ethnic identity and age? In the NYCHA Red Hook Houses, in which the population has 99% Black and Latino residents, with 35% under the age of 24, “stop and frisk” encounters are concentrated, as are the ramifications.

RHI

Background Historical Information on Stop and Frisk

The Red Hook Initiative (RHI), is a community center located in Red Hook, Brooklyn that is run primarily by Red Hook residents to serve their community. At RHI we believe that social change to overcome systemic inequities begins with empowered youth. In partnership with community adults, we nurture young people in Red Hook to be inspired, resilient, healthy and to envision themselves as co-creators of their lives, community and society. Therefore, it was a natural fit for RHI to join the local neighborhood effort, lead by Occupy Red Hook, to hold the NYPD responsible for biased policing tactics. Occupy Red Hook is an alliance of Red Hook neighbors committed to social justice in the community. The formed through the inspiration of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

RHI chose to stand in solidarity with groups like NYCLU, VOCAL, ACLU, and Occupy Red Hook to demand justice. We began with an effort to better understand the scope of “stop and frisk” in Red Hook, Brooklyn. RHI’s Community Change Workers (CCWs), who are RHI’s organizing and media team, consisting of young adults and mentors, set out to collect the stories of encounters with police in and around the NYCHA Red Hook Houses.

It is vital that biased policing is confronted and addressed in Red Hook, citywide, and nationally. It is of the greatest urgency for those who live in publicly funded low-income housing because of the impact. The connection is related to the historic roots of Stop and Frisk and its relation to drug use and sale.

Stop and Frisk was legally sanctioned in 1968 under the federal Omnibus Crime Control and

Safe Streets Act. The practice was key to what Richard Nixon coined the War on Drugs in 1969. Marijuana arrests are the most common offense associated with stop and frisk. According to the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA), over 50,000 arrests were made in 2010 for marijuana possession, “more than for any other offense” in New York City (Source: DPA, March 2011 report).

If someone is arrested for marijuana possession and lives in public housing, according to the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 and the One Strike and You're Out Initiative launched under President Clinton, they could be evicted. Entire families could be legally homeless whether they knowingly or not, allowed any criminal activity to occur within their apartment or anywhere in the vicinity (Alexander, 2012). The DPA white students who are middle and upper class report higher usage of marijuana. They are underrepresented in arrests, public housing, and stop and frisk encounters. Therefore, Blacks and Latinos are subjected to harsher consequences for the same offenses.

According to Western and Wildeman (2009), the hyper-focus of the government upon crime, is in avoidance of the social and economic needs in low-income communities. Surveillance, arrest, and mass incarceration, is more well funded than the Summer Youth Employment Program, and other needed resources in education, health, and housing (Alexander, 2012). It is the stand of the Red Hook Initiative that this is intricately related to systemic inequities in our society.

We will therefore continue our work on the local and citywide level to confront this injustice and promote community and youth empowerment.

Process and Methodology

RHI's organizers conducted a survey, utilizing Participatory Action Research methods. The team, all of whom are Red Hook residents, designed and distributed the survey to collect their data. Additionally, the team learned interview techniques and basic video production skills to capture the stories and images of the those subjected to “stop and frisk”. The team collected surveys from 761 respondents from February through June 2012.

Additionally, the team decided that documenting the abuses related by residents was not enough. They attended five 76th Precinct meetings to share with the Police Captain their concerns regarding “stop and frisk” in Red Hook. Our RHI community organizers conducted outreach for the meetings alongside Occupy Red Hook members. Oftentimes, because of their effort, the meetings were almost double the regular attendance.

The organizers connected the local occurrence to the citywide outcry regarding biased policing. They attended monthly planning meetings and attended two rallies with Voices Of Community Advocates & Leaders (VOCAL-NY) to denounce “stop and frisk” practices and the mass incarceration of Black and Latino youth. The organizers collected surveys and footage while

door knocking, talking to neighbors at bus stops, health clinic, and other populated public places within the community.

Findings

The 761 respondents were representative of the Red Hook community, including both New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents, private homeowners, and private renters. Demographically, 414 were Black (54%), 181 Latino (23%), 91 White (12%), 56% male, 40% female. Of these respondents, 53% were stopped and frisked. 50% said force was used and 89% said the NYPD was not courteous, professional, or respectful. 26% said that they were arrested and 26% were given a summons. In the 76th Precinct 81% of stops were Black and Latino (Source: Center for Constitutional Rights <http://stopandfrisk.org/stop-and-frisk-map-nyc>). Trends of places where people were stopped and frisked included major streets and intersections in the neighborhood, such as Lorraine Street, West 9th and Columbia Streets, Bush Street, and Dwight Street. Coffey Park was also identified as a place where people have been stopped and frisked, however according to those that responded, lobbies and staircases were also notable. All of the streets listed most repeatedly surround public housing.

In terms of racial and ethnic correlates for being stopped and frisked, Red Hook was different from the city average. In NYC in 2011, 9% of Whites were stopped. In Red Hook, 40% of White respondents had been stopped. Similarly, the statistics were higher in Red Hook for Blacks and Latinos. As mentioned earlier in this report, according to the NYCLU in 2011, 54% and 33% of those stopped and frisked were Blacks and Latinos, respectively. In Red Hook, of those surveyed, 65% were Black and 70% Latino were stopped. Respondents cited “fitting the description” and “suspicious conduct” as primary reasons for being stopped. Many were unsure of the reason. Fear and distrust of police was identified as common repercussions of “stop and frisk” encounters. A common request from respondents was that the NYPD apologize to them after an unjustified stop and frisk.

Next Steps

- Continue to attend the 76th Precinct meetings. Encourage community attendance.
- Meet with the new captain to see what efforts officers can do to ensure just treatment of all community residents.
- Join NYCLU campaign.
- Develop our own phone app and train users to document police brutality and biased policing.
- Continue collaborating with citywide/national campaigns.
- Have local legal clinic with Know Your Rights training.
- Encourage residents to use CCRB procedure.

References

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