



## Student-created Project PERK working to foster relationship between law enforcement, young people

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## Student-created Project PERK working to foster relationship between law enforcement, young people

At a time when national news stories on the relationship between law enforcement and citizens have created renewed discussions on the value of community policing, one Hartsville teen has decided to become part of the local effort to build bridges between Hartsville's police and its youth.

In the past year, Brittany Joyce, a senior in Hartsville High School's International Baccalaureate program, has developed Project PERK, or Police Encouraging

Responsibility and Kindness, a program offering gift certificate rewards to students when law enforcement and school resource officers find them making commendable decisions and actions.

The community service project came out of a proposal which Joyce made to the Riley Institute at Furman University's Emerging Public Leaders Program (EPL). After she submitted an essay describing the strengths and challenges of her hometown, she became one of 16 students chosen to participate in the EPL. During a week of training at Furman University, they learned about poverty, leadership and project management before developing a service project to address an area of needed improvements in their communities. Joyce chose a project that would assist police in building positive relationships with Hartsville's young people. In March, the EPL students will return to Furman to present their project results, and one winner will receive \$500 grant for their project.

Under the guidance of the Community Foundation for a Better Hartsville (CFBH) and its board chairman Curtis Lee, Joyce has developed the PERK project's mission, sought donations, and helped establish the effort with the Hartsville Police Department. The program aims to



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January 2014	<p>motivate students in making good decisions, curb crime among youth, encourage police to seek out positive behavior in students and foster a relationship of trust between police and young people. Through PERK, police will reward students for positive behavior in the form of gift certificates donated by local businesses and residents.</p> <p>PERK is kicking off with school resource officers at Thornwell Elementary School, Hartsville Middle School, and Hartsville High School as well as additional selected Hartsville Police officers. The goal is for these officials to have face-to-face contact with young people in positive situations rather than in confrontational situations only.</p> <p>Local businesses including Sonic, McDonalds, Markette convenience stores, Wendy's, Subway and Zaxby's have jumped on board by donating gift certificates, and Joyce is seeking donations from additional businesses as well. She has also gained support in donations and prayers from her church, St. Luke United Methodist, where she spoke at a Sunday church service and a United Methodist Men's breakfast, as well as from family and friends. Monetary donations are used to purchase movie tickets and to pay for other costs. Joyce estimates that that the combined financial and certificate donations exceed \$3,000, and she hopes to collect more. Joyce is quick to point out that the PERK program is a group effort.</p> <p>"My friends and brother have helped with organizing certificates," she said. "My parents have helped with running errands. My mentors include City Councilman and IB Program Director Johnny Andrews, Police Chief James Hudson, City Manager Natalie Zeigler, CFBH Board Chairman Curtis Lee, Youth Summit Facilitator Aimee Cox-King, Emerging Public Leaders Program Coordinator Melanie Armstrong, and many other people who have guided and encouraged me. These leaders have made me feel that even teens can play a part in improving Hartsville in a meaningful and positive way. I am grateful for the support of Hartsville's leaders, local businesses, police officers and others. Everyone has been enthusiastically supportive of PERK," says Joyce.</p>

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Parks and Leisure	<p>Chief Hudson and Joyce have asked officers to keep a record of students who receive certificates. They hope to be able to identify changes in behavior and geographical locations of acts of kindness.</p> <p>"Wouldn't it be fantastic to have a map of Hartsville where points are plotted for positive acts, instead of just points where crime is committed?" she said. "Early in the planning stages of PERK, Curtis Lee suggested this idea. Why not? Why can't we focus on the good, instead of just the bad?"</p> <p>She admits that it's been a challenge to juggle senior-year studies, college applications, cross country practice, school activities, and the demands of organizing a community project like PERK. However, she insists that it has been worth it.</p> <p>"In my wildest dreams, I didn't think this project would be so relevant and timely. Through recent national events involving issues of police brutality, youth crime, and public protests, we see anger, distrust, and biases. However, we can all agree on one thing: strong communication, open dialogue, and relationship building can foster better understanding and cooperation. My hope is that, through PERK, maybe kids can see that police are here to help and to protect. Maybe police will see that kids act out for a reason and could use positive role models. These certificates can help an officer start that conversation with a student."</p> <p>Hartsville City Manager Natalie Zeigler has worked with Joyce since the project first took shape in the spring of 2014. She described the effort as a valuable addition to the Police Department's work in engaging the community.</p>

"Effective police departments always need to find new ways to reach out to the residents they

serve," Zeigler said. "Brittany Joyce's efforts with Project PERK can take that engagement straight to a group of people who can be difficult to reach by the police when they are doing what's right. She has taken what she has learned through the Emerging Public Leaders Program to heart, and the Hartsville community is fortunate to have dedicated citizens like her."

For more information on the project, contact Brittany Joyce at [brittanyjoyce101@gmail.com](mailto:brittanyjoyce101@gmail.com).

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