



## Cops reach out to teens in Franklin Field project 'A lot of us are the same as you'

By Peter Gelzinis

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**Finding Common Ground: Keith Harrison, 18, talks to a group of Boston Police officers.  
Photo by Angela Rowlings**

"My childhood was (expletive)."

Jahad Hasan's voice was soft, yet just loud enough to cut through the hushed silence of a renovated basement in the Franklin Field project.

"I didn't have a lot of good things in my life," he said. "Out of 13 brothers and sisters on my father's side, only me and my sister are left. The others are gone, lost to drugs and whatever."

The dozen teenagers who sat mesmerized in a semicircle of folding chairs listened with an aching recognition. They could see themselves in Jahad Hasan's confessional, which was a bit strange considering he wore the uniform of a **Boston Police** officer.

"Being able to stand here and share this with you," the young officer said, "I'm truly blessed."

YPI, or Youth and Police Initiative, is the formal name for what took place inside this Dorchester teen center Wednesday night.

What actually happened was a searing truth session, one that grew out of an encounter between a dozen cops from the Area B-3 station a few blocks down Blue Hill Ave., and a corresponding sample of Franklin Field kids.

Izzy Sosa, three years on the job, spoke of his Puerto Rican heritage, two uncles who've also worn the uniform and the abusive father who is now no more than a painful memory.

"A lot of us are the same as you guys," Sosa told his rapt audience. "We come from the same places, we've experienced the same things and we've been fortunate enough to survive some bad choices."

Sosa spoke candidly about flunking out of the police academy during his first attempt. "When I was lucky enough to get a second chance, my daughter whispered to me on the first day: 'Daddy, this time don't let them kick you out.' I never studied so hard in my life. But I did it. And so can you."

Crime stats can't quantify such a moment. Yet Jahad Hasan, who collected two medals of honor last year, along with a third for his dedication to the job, believes "what I did here tonight is maybe more important than chasing down some drug dealer who's trying to shoot at you. These kids need to see us as human beings first, people who've come up on the same streets. It means everything, as far as I'm concerned."

Paul Lewis, the consultant who's overseen such events in Baltimore and New York, told the cops, "I've never seen police go that deep before."

"I do this job because I love it," Jahad Hasan told the kids. "It's helped save my life and taught me to care for people. I may not know many of you, but I care about you and I would lay down my life for any of you."