

# Buffalo group's decades-long mission of bringing city youth & police together more critical now

 [wivb.com/news/top-stories/buffalo-groups-decades-long-mission-of-bringing-city-youth-police-together-more-critical-now](https://www.wivb.com/news/top-stories/buffalo-groups-decades-long-mission-of-bringing-city-youth-police-together-more-critical-now)

By Erica Brecher

August 9, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB)—One local group has been working to build relationships between city youth and police long before George Floyd's death brought racial injustices back into the limelight.

F.A.T.H.E.R.S. has been bringing both groups of people together for 20 years while supporting inner city kids.

Leonard Lane is proud to be supporting city youth and bringing them together with local police officers for two decades, and his programs are working. F.A.T.H.E.R.S. has expanded its reach, now working with police in Amherst and Cheektowaga, as well as Buffalo.

However, some of the trust he and Captain Steve Nichols have worked to build has waned in recent months.

"Now we want to try to build that relationship up again so that the community can feel safe again, so the community can feel that they can be trusted again," Lane said.

Captain Nichols has been working toward the same goals for even longer. Born and raised in Buffalo's lower West Side, Nichols has always felt compelled to connect with others.

"I actually started getting involved as a police officer while I was a lieutenant, and even before that. When I was on patrol here in the C District, I really started getting involved, and we started doing ice cream sundae giveaways, and just socializing, and just trying to meet people and get to know people," Nichols said.

Nichols believes those efforts truly make a difference, and he says he tries to do his job by a Martin Luther King Jr. quote.

"He said 'Men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other. They don't know each other because they don't communicate. They don't communicate because they are separated.' And we've tried to build, we've tried to get away from that separation," Nichols said.

Nichols says the Buffalo Police Department under Commissioner Byron Lockwood has more programs than ever before to work on community trust.

They include "Shop Talk," where officers hang out at barbershops; a form of role play, where officers play the part someone being pulled over to understand how someone in the driver's seat may feel; and the department even a partnership with Shea's Buffalo, in which an acting coach works with officers on toning down body language.

He has this advice for officers working with people who, right now, do not trust police:

“When somebody gets nasty with you, take a step back. Before you react, just one quick question to yourself: do I know that person? You don’t. They’re not talking to you, they’re talking to this,” he said, pointing to his badge. “That’s who they’re talking to. And if you can understand that and get that in your head, it makes the job a lot easier.”

As for where to go from here, Lane wants to see more officers out of their cars interacting on the streets.

“Getting them to start the little pep games, maybe the little basketball games, maybe a little touch football. But getting them back out in the field because we have a new generation of officers out here in the field today, and a lot of times those officers don’t know us, and we don’t know them,” Lane said.

Neither Nichols nor Lane want police officers and black men all painted with the same brush, and that’s why they’ll keep at it, building bridges to empathy and understanding.

“We can’t do it alone,” Nichols said. “We have to do it as a team.”

*Erica Brecher is an anchor and reporter who has been part of the News 4 team since 2018. See more of her work here.*

Copyright 2020 Nexstar Broadcasting, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.