

PAL

GRADS TO BE PROUD OF



Background

Crispin Rea grew up a “PAL” kid. The Police Athletic League (PAL) was just two blocks from his home in a tough neighborhood with frequent drug activity and a high crime rate, including multiple homicides. He was fortunate that his mom ran an after-school program at the PAL Center, so he’d be there virtually every weekday after his middle school classes ended.

It was at the PAL Center that Crispin – a naturally athletic kid – could engage in a variety of sports and other activities under the watchful eye of local police officers with a passion for working with kids. As a PAL kid, Crispin had ongoing, positive interaction with law enforcement officers who helped shape his life and influenced his future career choice.

About the Police Athletic League

The Police Athletic League was a perfect place for a kid like Crispin. It is rooted in the belief that all youth deserve the opportunity to expand their horizons and realize their full potential. A national program – currently operating in approximately 300 police departments across the country – PAL launched in Kansas City in 1998. Then in 2000, the Kansas City, Missouri Parks & Recreation Department generously offered the Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO) Police Department a building they were about to abandon that could be used as the PAL home base.



Crispin Rea

The PAL Board took over the lease – for \$1 per year – and quickly began putting the PAL program into place, establishing a Board of Directors, and raising money to enhance the facility. Thanks to an active and committed Board, along with generous donors, the PAL team has since raised more than \$4 million to renovate the facility and another \$2 million to support

sports and other programs for the kids.

“PAL kids” from over the years include former professional boxer and entrepreneur, George Foreman. From boxing to mountain biking, to martial arts and playing on the PAL baseball field, the program offers a wide range of activities that motivate kids to succeed, helps them build their confidence, and let’s them interface with positive role models.

The local PAL Center, which serves between 50 and 75 kids daily, is staffed by two sergeants, four officers and two Certified Child Life Specialists. And it’s important to note that staff members aren’t just randomly assigned to the PAL Center ... it’s an assignment they request, then go through a rigorous interview process before being selected. The result? Their passion for the kids clearly shows.

That passion came through loud and clear to Crispin during his time at PAL. “Growing up in a neighborhood like mine didn’t offer many opportunities for positive interaction with law enforcement. But at PAL, the officers really cared about us kids. In addition to the PAL Center staff



Crispin Rea: His PAL Experience Helped Launch His Career

Crispin continued to attend the PAL Center as a high school student, well after his mother’s work there ended. His experience at PAL deeply influenced his future career endeavors.

While working on his bachelor’s degree in Political Science and Public Administration at Park University, Crispin became a Communications Officer in the Mayor’s office. He ultimately received both his Master of Public Administration and his Doctor of Law degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and later worked as a Victim Advocate and Youth Programming Facilitator at the Mattie Rhodes Center.

In 2010, at the age of 24, Crispin was elected to serve a four-year term on the Kansas City Public Schools Board. He chaired two committees and – as Board Vice President – also chaired public Board meetings and closed sessions in the absence of the Board President. In 2014, Crispin joined the Jackson County Prosecutors Office and today serves as Assistant Prosecuting Attorney in the Special Victim’s Unit.

Crispin, who recently married, is currently Board Co-Vice President for the Police Athletic League where he passionately supports the work of the PAL staff, fellow Board members, and volunteers who are making a difference in the lives of inner-city youth every day.

According to Crispin, “It’s important for people to understand that the PAL Center offers so much more than just athletic programs. Especially today with the challenges between police departments and urban communities, PAL Centers exist to bridge that gap in the right way. They are proactively trying to build positive relationships with youth. If you want to talk about police reform, the Police Athletic Leagues of the world have to be at the center of those strategies because you want cops to have positive interactions with kids. PAL Centers are one of the most effective ways to do that.”

showing genuine interest in each kid, the Center served as a safe haven from the tough neighborhoods where my friends and I came from.”

The positive impact by PAL on other members of the Kansas City, Missouri community cannot be overlooked. In addition to constructive and encouraging interactions with the kids who attend every day, there’s a big impact on their family members and friends, as well as on the law enforcement officers themselves. According to Sergeant Skip Cox, “Not only are the families of these kids seeing the benefits of our programs, the officers know they are making a difference in the lives of kids who might not otherwise have positive role models.”



The KCMO PAL Center: A Model Program

The Kansas City Police Athletic League has been so successful, it has become a model for other PAL programs across the globe. In addition to frequently hosting officers who run PAL programs in other U.S. cities, Sergeant Cox has even presented to an international police forum in New Zealand where he shared the ways in which the KCMO program has been successful in terms of helping build character in participants, strengthening police-community relations, and helping kids stay off illegal drugs.

For more information about the KCMO Police Athletic League, visit kcpal.org.

