

Milwaukee Teens Learn Crucial Conversations® to Succeed in Work & Life



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF GREATER MILWAUKEE

ABOUT BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF GREATER MILWAUKEE

Children have been coming to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee since 1887, when Annabell Cook Whitcomb transformed two basement rooms at Plymouth Church in downtown Milwaukee into a Club for boys.

Today, the organization is one of the largest and longest running youth-serving agencies in Milwaukee, offering structured after-school and summer programming to more than 43,000 children and teens each year. Within the safety of the Clubs, youth have access to academic support, free meals, role models, and opportunities to build character and explore new interests."

CHALLENGE

Gone are the days when the most serious discipline problems among school-age kids involved chewing gum in class, truancy, and playground squabbles. Today, the challenges young people face, especially in the inner city, are much more serious.

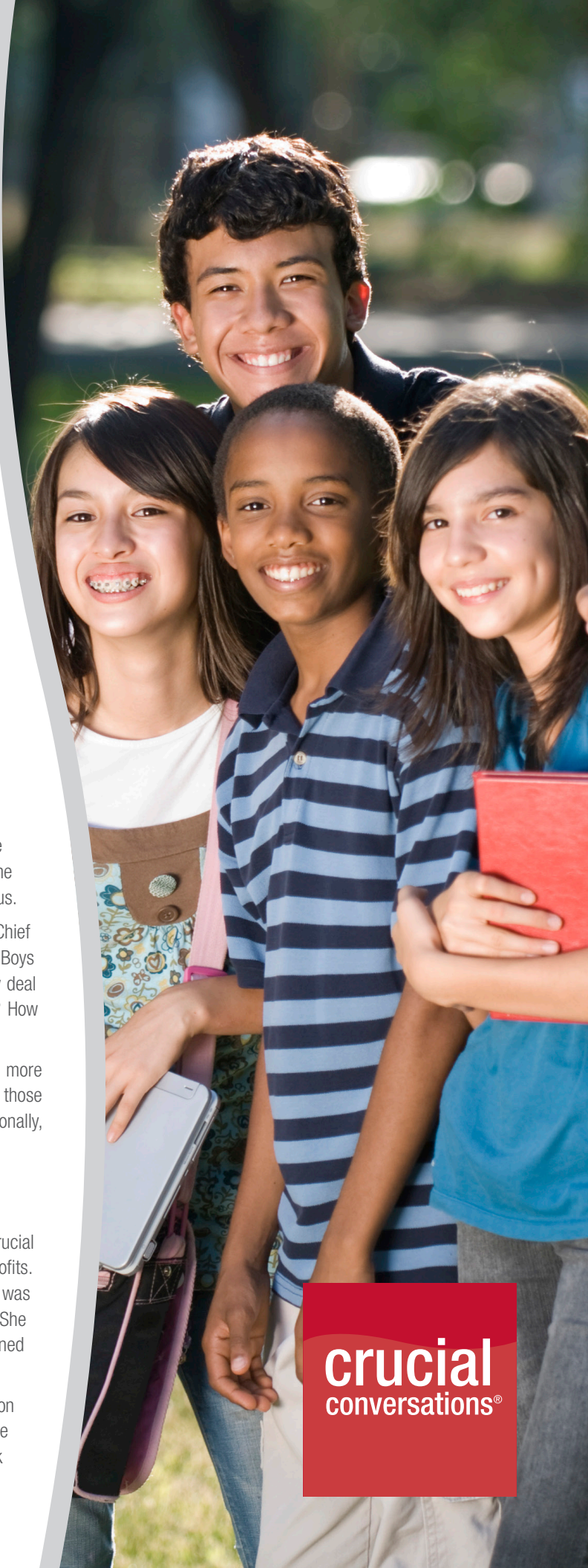
"Here in Milwaukee we deal with a lot of youth violence," said Denisha Tate, Chief Strategic Officer of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, one of the largest Boys & Girls Clubs organizations in the country. "As their leaders, we don't typically deal with petty issues. Instead, we constantly ask, 'How many lives can we save? How many kids can we keep from being incarcerated?'"

The Greater Milwaukee network alone has forty-three individual clubs serving more than 43,000 youth. On any given day, club leaders see more than 5,000 of those young people—ranging from kindergarteners to high school seniors. Occasionally, they also see freshman and sophomore college students.

SOLUTION

The staff of the Milwaukee Boys & Girls Clubs were first exposed to Crucial Conversations through The United Way, which hosted the training for local nonprofits. Boys & Girls Club leader who attended the Crucial Conversations Training was impressed and saw it as a perfect way to increase the organization's impact. She insisted on exposing more of her staff to the training and brought what she learned back to Boys & Girls Clubs.

"We thought the training was wonderful and immediately sent all our organization leadership to get trained," explained Tate. "Soon after, I thought, 'We can do more with this; let's teach it ourselves.'" As a result, four Boys & Girls Clubs trainers took the VitalSmarts certification course and became Crucial Conversations trainers.



crucial
conversations®

Tate and her team were so thrilled with the impact the training had on their leadership that they wondered about the potential impact of training their students. They envisioned the teen members receiving the same skills that were enlightening the leaders.

Tate and her team tailored the exercises in the course to make it relevant for their teens. "For example, we talked about conversations they had with their parents, other adults, roommates, and people they dated, etc. Everything we discussed was relevant to them." In addition, Tate incorporated local news articles and relevant social issues the teens faced including violence in their neighborhoods. "We talked about what was happening right now, what was affecting them. And we gave them the opportunity to share their opinions and solutions on tough issues."

Realizing it's not always easy to keep the attention of a fourteen-year-old boy or girl in a classroom setting, Tate's team decided to let them use their smartphones as part of the training. "We asked them to pull out their phones, and we'd say, 'Who can find a video about this topic?'" It helped keep them engaged, and that's when they really opened up." The students were also given a homework assignment to practice their new skills. "They often came back and talked about their experience in the next class," said Tate.

RESULTS

Before the training, Tate surveyed the kids and asked: "Are you comfortable holding conversations with adults? With your parents? With your friends?" In that first untrained group, three-fourths (75 percent) were not comfortable talking with adults. And half (50 percent) were not comfortable talking with friends. Tate knew they had their work cut out for them.

About Crucial Conversations® Training—Whenever you're not getting the results you're looking for, it's likely that a crucial conversation is keeping you stuck. Whether it's a problem with poor quality, slow time-to-market, declining customer satisfaction, or a strained relationship, if you can't talk honestly, you can expect poor results.

This award-winning training infuses classroom time with original video clips and examples. Course pacing is active and engaging, with structured rehearsals and intense class participation. The Crucial Conversations course delivers a powerful set of influence tools that builds teams, enriches relationships, and improves end results. Participants acquire the skills that help them step up to and handle high-stakes issues.

About VitalSmarts—An innovator in corporate training and leadership development, VitalSmarts combines three decades of original research with 50 years of the best social science to help leaders and organizations change human behavior and achieve new levels of performance. We've identified four high-leverage skill sets that, when used in combination, create healthy corporate cultures. These skills are taught in our award-winning training programs and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles: *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Accountability*, *Influencer*, and *Change Anything*. VitalSmarts has trained more than one million people worldwide. www.vitalsmarts.com

During the first two summers, fifty kids completed the six-week Crucial Conversations course. The next summer, enrollment doubled. Now, one hundred youth have participated.

And how has it been received? "The results have been absolutely amazing," said Tate. "The kids are empowered to speak up. They use the Crucial Conversations terminology. They have their books on hand. And they go out into the community and become leaders."

One success story she tells is of a sixteen-year-old boy, Michael, who after completing Boys & Girls Clubs' Crucial Conversations Training got a job with a US Cellular store. On his first day at work he showed up early wanting to make a good impression. The store team was also in early to be trained on their new billing system. A problem arose with the system and the associates were baffled about what to do. That's when Michael perked up. "I can help!" he said. The manager turned around and asked, "Who are you?" "I'm your intern for the summer—from Boys & Girls Clubs," Michael replied. Not only was Michael interested in computers and knowledgeable enough to help solve the problem, but he had also been trained to confidently speak up in those kinds of crucial moments.

"Michael was five minutes into his first job, and because his confidence was through the roof, he had already helped his employer solve a problem," Tate explained. "And the employer made that young man feel like he was an important part of that store's success."

Two years after the first survey was taken, Tate and her staff polled the students again. The results were astounding. The students reported feeling 100 percent comfortable in holding conversations with adults, with their parents, and with their friends.

What's more, after the second year's course, twenty-seven of the fifty youth got school-year

job placements, reported Tate. "Being trained in the art of Crucial Conversations gave the teens the confidence they needed to secure the jobs—and the companies appreciated the skills they brought to the workplace."

Tate explained that in the entry-level job world, it's not easy for most kids to stand out among headhunting practices and complicated applications. But that has changed with Crucial Conversations.

"Before, our kids lacked confidence to jump into the job world successfully," said Tate. "Now, they have something that others don't have. Crucial Conversations is a résumé builder. An employer sees it and puts their résumé at the front of the pack. It's amazing."

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee is excited about entering each new school year and helping their students achieve academically and confidently use the skills they learn in Crucial Conversations.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE: PRIOR TO FIRST TRAINING

- Are you comfortable talking with adults/parents?
Yes = 75% No = 25%
- Are you comfortable talking with friends?
Yes = 50%

TWO YEARS LATER

- Are you comfortable talking with adults/parents?
Yes = 100% No = 0
- Are you comfortable talking with friends?
Yes = 100% No = 0