



Quick Links

- [Virginia LISC](#)
- [National LISC website](#)
- [Previous Newsletters](#)
- [Donate to LISC](#)

Donate To VA LISC

Donate

Spotlight Funder

**Thank you to
Capital One for
supporting our
Highland Park
corridor work, our
Northside Financial
Opportunity Center
and our SEED
Program in Church
Hill!**

Virginia LISC
413 Stuart Circle, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23220

Off the streets and onto the basketball court

The smell of sweat lingered in the air of the packed gym as a young mom and her four-year-old son squeezed into some of the last available seats overlooking the basketball court. College games don't even draw crowds like this. Yet, on a Tuesday night in the middle of July, people sat elbow to elbow, the atmosphere hot with anticipation.



Safer Streets League players gather for a 45-minute workshop before a game. No workshops, no jump shots. Picture courtesy of GiTonya Parker, business services, Richmond Police Department.

"It's been like this every Tuesday and Thursday since the league started," said GiTonya Parker, business services, the Richmond Police Department.

The RVA's League for Safer Streets midnight basketball--the brainchild of Jawad Abdu and Paul Taylor and paid for by Virginia LISC--was a success the minute it began.

The league brought together teams from seven of Richmond's most crime-ridden neighborhoods in an effort to keep young adults busy and off the streets on summer nights. The Richmond Police Department officers volunteered their time to oversee the games.

"I grew up in the Richmond that was on the news at least three times a week for crime," said Abdu. "It was a dangerous place in the '90s and today people are dying because these young adults have nothing to do. Paul and I wanted to fix that," he said.

The teams included: Whitcomb Court, Creighton Court, Mosby Court, Fairfield Court, Fairfield Apartments, Highland Park and Church Hill. Each team consisted of 7-12 men, ranging from age 17 to 28.

The one stipulation for playing on the league was that each team member was required to participate in a 45-minute workshop before every game, and the rule was, "no workshops, no jump shots." There were different topics for each workshop-responsibility, employment opportunities, child support, fatherhood, PTSD, respect for women-issues that Taylor and Abdu felt should be addressed with these young men.

"When I heard about Abdu and Taylor's idea to start a summer basketball league aimed at keeping young men in our neighborhoods active and engaged, I offered to find resources for it," said Candice Streett, executive director of Virginia LISC. "Not only were the games taking place in Highland Park, where we are focusing a lot of our neighborhood work, but the program addresses crime, safety and healthy living."

The league tore down boundaries in more ways than one. Neighborhoods that had been at war with each other for decades, played basketball against each other, leaving violence off the court. Police officers and players formed relationships. Mothers, fathers, girlfriends, wives and children all packed the stands, eager to watch their husbands, boyfriends, sons and fathers on the court. Young men gained mentors in Taylor and Abdu, who both had spent decades themselves in prison and wanted to help others avoid that path.

And most importantly, crimes in these neighborhoods dropped during the six weeks of games.

"During that six weeks, we didn't have any really violent crime in our communities, and I think it was attributed to the program that these guys--Mr. Paul Taylor and Mr. Jawad Abdu--had the vision for," said Chief Durham of the Richmond Police Department. "Soon after the program ended, the violence sparked up again, so we've got to find ways to continue this work for the long haul," he said.

Both Taylor and Abdu were overwhelmed with the success of the program and eager to find the support to continue the league in seasons to come.

"The workshops are the real substance of this program," said Taylor. They learn conflict resolution, get connected to job opportunities and learn a different way of doing things."

Abdu agreed, saying, "I'm so proud that the vision Taylor and I talked about for years in prison became a reality, and now we want to make sure we find a way to make it a sustainable reality."

Now, LISC is working with Taylor, Abdu and Richmond Police Chief Durham to identify resources for a 12-week winter league.