



**Every student can be a crime stopper.  
Here's how it's done.**

Crimestoppers USA<sup>SM</sup> is a well known and highly respected organization dedicated to using ordinary citizens to help stop, prevent and report crime. Its hallmark has always been the anonymous tip. People all over the country can call Crimestoppers' Safe Tip Hotline to report a crime that they have witnessed, without fear of recriminations. But the people most likely to witness crimes—young adults—were the ones least likely to call.

Until, that is, Crimestoppers turned to Character Links for help.

#### **Using journals to help juveniles.**

After plastering high schools with posters featuring their 800 number, and seeing them either removed or disregarded over time, Crimestoppers realized that they would have to find another, more effective way to reach teen-agers. "We heard about Character Links through a local business that had used them for a different type of awareness campaign," says Darlene Cuszanso, the Executive Director of Crimestoppers in New Orleans, "and we realized this could be a great vehicle for what we were trying to do."

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Instead of using Character Links' Home Pages to reach families in local school districts, Crimestoppers decided to take their campaign right to the students themselves with an innovative idea.

They created personal journals for students to write in. Teachers were given a series of 12 questions to ask students, which they would then answer in their journals. At the end of the 12 questions, the students wrote a short essay about their feelings and their personal connections to the topics that related to crime.

#### **A dialogue with the self yields unexpected results.**

As these adolescents began to create what amounted to a dialogue with themselves about self-respect, responsibility, self-control and non-violence, a change began to take place in their behavior. Amazingly, there was 100% participation in this exercise on the part of the students. Even more amazing was the fact that two students used their journals to confess to crimes they had committed.

In the New Orleans area, the Safe Tip hotline began to ring off the hook. "We estimate there was a 35% increase in call volume after we ran this program," reports Cuszanso. "Also, we got two tips from these essays that led to crimes being solved."

#### **Creating active young crime stoppers.**

As a result of this program, every adolescent in the largest school district in New Orleans is now very aware of what Crimestoppers is about. They have been encouraged to report crimes they witness or hear about, and to evaluate their own behavior so as to decrease the likelihood that they themselves will commit crimes in the future.

"Sometimes the simplest answer is the best," says Cuszanso, "and we took that route, with great success." In the process, they also helped turn passive youngsters into active crime stoppers, a boon in one of the most crime-ridden cities in our country.

Character Links is a program designed to counteract a culture of negativity by educating children about the importance of good behavior and making good choices in life. Teachers spent five minutes each day discussing one of 52 Character Qualities, and students continue the discussion at home with their families. Character Links welcomes civic and business leaders who want to partner with local school districts to promote their products or services while showing the community their commitment to impacting children in a positive way. For more information, call 1-877-858-8341 or visit [www.characterlinks.com](http://www.characterlinks.com).

