

W/B HIDTA Treatment and Prevention Spotlight

Badges for Baseball

Inspired by one of the most iconic baseball families in history, Cal Ripken, Jr. and Bill Ripken created the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation to honor the legacy of family patriarch, longtime coach, and mentor, Cal Ripken, Sr. The Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation helps to strengthen America's most distressed communities by supporting at-risk youth and addressing community needs through their National Youth Mentoring Initiatives, Youth Development Parks and National STEM Center Initiatives. For 24 years, the Ripken Foundation has worked tirelessly to implement programs that directly address the problems facing at-risk youth with their signature, year-round crime prevention/mentoring program, Badges for Baseball, created in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice.

Badges for Baseball is a youth outreach initiative designed to build positive relationships between young people and the law enforcement officers who serve their communities. Through baseball and other team-based activities, Badges for Baseball provides youth with positive adult mentors, teaches critical life lessons about teamwork, respect, and leadership, and encourages them to make healthy choices on and off the field. These constructive activities take place during after school hours and summertime to reduce opportunities for involvement in criminal activity and substance use. The main goals of the program are to support local mentoring organizations to reduce crime, strengthen trust in law enforcement, and provide a safe, supportive environment for youth development.



Local program partners are essential to the success of all youth. The Foundation is most proud of the strong, lasting relationships they've built with local program partners in communities that the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA serves, including but not limited to the Richmond Police Department and Prince William County Community Services.

These partnerships are at the center of the Badges for Baseball program and are essential to its success. By working closely with dedicated officers and community leaders, the program is able to expand their mission and ensure that youth receive not only high-quality programming but also consistent, positive mentorship. Trusted relationships help create environments where young people can thrive, and they reinforce the core values of respect, teamwork, and leadership. Seeing officers and youth connect in meaningful, impactful ways is one of the greatest accomplishments of their work.

Nationally, mentors have reported the following outcomes:

- 81% of youth with improved self-efficacy and social competencies.
- 83% reduction in problem behaviors.
- 85% of youth have a more positive relationships with law enforcement.

Many participants enter the program with limited or negative perceptions of law enforcement, but through consistent interaction, mentorship, and shared experiences, youth begin to see officers as allies, mentors, and role models who care about their futures. This shift not only improves trust in local law enforcement but also helps foster a greater sense of safety and belonging in their communities. Participants show noticeable growth in key social competencies such as teamwork, communication, and leadership. These changes are a powerful testament to the impact of building positive, community-based relationships.

With support from the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA, Badges for Baseball has reached over 1,500 youth in High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas across Maryland and Virginia, with nearly 1,000 directly impacted by the program. Reaching so many participants in high-risk areas speaks of the strength of their partnerships and the meaningful impact the program continues to have on vulnerable communities.

In addition, program partners bring youth to the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation's annual overnight summer camp in Aberdeen, Maryland. For many participants, this is their first experience away from home and in a setting focused on skill-building, teamwork, and mentorship. The camp provides an unforgettable opportunity for young people to connect with peers from other communities, engage with positive role models, and reinforce the values they've learned throughout the program. These experiences deepen the program's impact and create lasting memories that support each child's growth and development.



Funding from the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA has been critical in helping the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation achieve its goals. Through this support, the Ripken Foundation provides seven youth-serving organizations across Maryland and Virginia with the resources they need to successfully implement the program including equipment, training materials, and mentorship support. This funding ensures that each site can offer consistent, high-quality programming.

Additionally, HIDTA's partnership allows the Ripken Foundation to offer unique direct service events and support of local mentoring organizations that provide meaningful experiences for participating youth, such as community engagement activities, skills clinics, and interactive sessions with law enforcement officers. These events not only enhance the impact of the program but also help build trust, promote healthy choices, and steer young people away from risky behaviors. Overall, HIDTA's support plays a vital role in creating safe, supportive environments where youth can grow into responsible, confident members of their communities.



Moving forward, the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation is most excited to continue expanding their reach and impact. This includes continued expansion into West Virginia and creating new relationships to support youth development organizations in rural areas. They are also excited to relaunch their I'm GREAT program with a revised curriculum and train-the-trainer model in Fall 2025. I'm GREAT (Girls Respecting Each Other And Themselves) is a year-round youth development and mentoring program for middle school-aged girls that aims to positively impact them through female mentorship.

DeAndrea Williams, the Grants Coordinator at Richmond Police Department, stated, "Any time we can bring officers together with children, we expect a positive impact and the Badges for Baseball program has proven just that. With Richmond recently experiencing several acts of gun violence involving young people, this kind of engagement is more important than ever. The program creates safe, supportive spaces where kids can be mentored by officers, build trust, and learn essential skills for resolving conflict and becoming positive role models in their communities. We've seen a significant shift in how these young people view law enforcement, as well as a stronger understanding of their own duties as citizens of the Commonwealth."