

PARENT

# NEWSLETTER



ABOVE PHOTO: The Martinsburg Initiative's March Madness Event at Martinsburg High School featured drills and skills. Students play each other in a game.

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*With over 50 attendees, the day was filled with energy, teamwork, and fun.*

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*Building relationships & supporting social-emotional & academic growth*



# MARCH MADNESS

*We had an amazing time hosting our first annual March Madness basketball event! With over 50 attendees, the day was filled with energy, teamwork, and fun.*

BY TMI STAFF

Participants were divided into groups by age and gender, enjoyed pizza and prizes, and stayed active throughout the event.

We are incredibly grateful to our dedicated coaches, Brian Potts, Matt Miller, Brian Hairston, Tom Kearns, and Vicky Bullett, for making this event such a success. A special thank you to Martinsburg High School for allowing us to use their facilities and helping us create a safe, welcoming space for families.

"It was incredible to see so many young people come together for a day of positive, sober fun and physical activity," said Rebecca, Grant and Support Services Coordinator with The Martinsburg Initiative.



We were especially honored to have Vicky Bullett join us, she shared an inspiring message with the kids and spent the day coaching and encouraging everyone on the court.

**"EVENTS LIKE THIS REMIND US HOW POWERFUL COMMUNITY SUPPORT CAN BE IN CREATING MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES FOR OUR FAMILIES."**

# BUILDING BETTER FUTURES

*TMI Brings Nurturing Parenting Program to Eastern Regional Jail*

BY TMI STAFF

*Since February 2026, The Martinsburg Initiative has partnered with Eastern Regional Jail in Berkeley County to bring its Nurturing Parenting program inside the facility, offering incarcerated mothers tools, support, and community as they work toward becoming the best parents they can be.*

Led by Family Outreach Coordinator Maddie Ragosta, the program launched on February 2nd and has since engaged a consistent group of seven to nine women each week. The curriculum focuses on building healthy parent-child relationships, but what has emerged goes beyond the lessons themselves.

"One of the most meaningful highlights has been the opportunity for participants to come together and build a sense of community," Ragosta said. Though each mother enters the program carrying her own unique experiences and challenges, a shared commitment to growth has brought the group together. Ragosta has watched the women support one another, engage in open and honest conversations, and encourage each other week after week – a dynamic she describes as incredibly powerful.



**THE EXPERIENCE HAS ALSO DEEPENED RAGOSTA'S OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORK. "THIS EXPERIENCE HAS REINFORCED THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION, EMPATHY, AND SUPPORT IN THE PARENTING JOURNEY," SHE SAID.**

Creating a safe, nonjudgmental space has allowed participants to reflect, learn, and grow; the desire these mothers have to build healthier relationships with their children is unmistakable.

The partnership reflects TMI's broader mission to strengthen families and foster connected communities, meeting people where they are and providing the support needed to create lasting, positive change, even in the most difficult of circumstances.



A Veterinary Sedative Is Spreading Through the U.S. Drug Supply.

# DOCTORS AREN'T READY FOR IT.

TMI STAFF

*Medetomidine, known as "rhino tranq," is showing up in nearly all fentanyl sold in the Northeast. It causes overdoses naloxone cannot reverse and a dangerous withdrawal that can damage the heart and brain.*

A powerful veterinary sedative originally developed to anesthetize large animals is quietly reshaping the U.S. overdose crisis. Medetomidine, which is more potent than both clonidine and xylazine and not approved for human use, has been found in illegal fentanyl supplies across at least 18 states and Washington, D.C., and its prevalence is accelerating at an alarming pace.



*Forensic laboratory reports submitted to the National Forensic Laboratory Information System jumped from 247 in 2023 to 8,233 in 2025 — a rise of over 3,000% in two years.*

The drug is most concentrated in the Northeast, where more than half of all U.S. detections occur, followed by the Midwest. Eight of the 20 government-monitored drug-testing sites found medetomidine in over half of all opioid-positive samples.



*What makes medetomidine particularly dangerous is not just its sedative potency; it's that our standard emergency response is only partially effective against it. Unlike fentanyl, medetomidine cannot be reversed by naloxone.*

"While apnea may be reversed with naloxone, sedation from medetomidine may not be reversed — patients can remain deeply unconscious even after the opioid effect is addressed" - CDC Health Alert Network.



## TWO DISTINCT THREATS: OVERDOSE AND WITHDRAWAL

Clinicians and first responders are now contending with two separate emergencies tied to the same substance. The first is acute overdose: medetomidine causes profound, prolonged sedation alongside dramatic drops in heart rate and dangerously low blood pressure. Since fentanyl is almost always co-present, naloxone remains the essential first step to restore breathing. But the sedation can persist long after the opioid effect is reversed, leaving patients in a medically precarious state.



### OVERDOSE SIGNS

- Extreme sedation, unresponsive
- Heart rate as low as 32 bpm
- Dangerously low blood pressure
- Pinpoint pupils, slow breathing
- Sedation persists after naloxone



### WITHDRAWAL SIGNS

- Severe high blood pressure
- Heart rate over 100 bpm
- Uncontrollable nausea, vomiting
- Tremor, chest pain
- Fluctuating consciousness



### *The second threat is withdrawal.*

When someone who has been regularly exposed to medetomidine stops using it, their body can enter a state of severe autonomic crisis. Symptoms typically begin within hours and peak between 18 and 36 hours after last use. Unlike opioid withdrawal, which is rarely fatal in otherwise healthy adults, medetomidine withdrawal has been linked to heart attacks and posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome, a condition that can cause seizures and vision loss.

From September 2024 through January 2025 alone, 165 patients across three Philadelphia health systems were hospitalized for fentanyl withdrawal complicated by severe autonomic dysfunction believed to be caused by medetomidine. Similar surges hit Pittsburgh and Maryland, where hospitals reported patients requiring intensive care and intravenous sedation to manage the crisis.

## WHAT TO DO

The CDC advises that naloxone should still be administered in any suspected overdose, since fentanyl is almost always co-present. Emergency responders should give repeat doses every 2–3 minutes to ensure the person is breathing, then place them in the recovery position. Sedation from medetomidine will subside on its own over time. Anyone experiencing withdrawal symptoms — particularly severe vomiting, chest pain, or fluctuating consciousness — needs emergency medical care immediately.

If you or someone you know uses fentanyl and experiences severe nausea, chest pain, or goes in and out of awareness, call 911 immediately. For overdose response questions, contact Poison Control. For substance use treatment, call or text SAMHSA's helpline.

**POISON CONTROL: 1-800-222-1222**

**SAMHSA: 1-800-662-4357**



BY TMI STAFF

This past winter, The Martinsburg Initiative had the privilege of operating the Martinsburg Cold Weather Shelter (MCWS) in partnership with WVU Medicine C.O.R.E. Team and local churches, and with the generous support of the Martinsburg City Council. The impact was nothing short of remarkable.

From January 3rd through March 21st, 2026, the MCWS opened its doors across six rotating church locations in downtown Martinsburg, serving 62 unique individuals over eleven weeks. In a county where overnight winter temperatures regularly dip into the twenties, and where this season brought many days with temperatures in the single digits, the need for a safe, low-barrier place to sleep was urgent and undeniable.

# WARMTH, HOPE, AND NEW BEGINNINGS:

A LOOK BACK AT THE MARTINSBURG  
COLD WEATHER SHELTER

That need was underscored by 2025's Point-in-Time Count, finding 241 people experiencing homelessness in Berkeley County, more than double the number counted the previous year.

## *Meeting People Where They Are*

What makes the MCWS model so powerful is its accessibility. Many guests had difficulty accessing other shelters due to eligibility requirements, capacity limitations, or personal circumstances. By removing those barriers, the shelter became a lifeline for some of Berkeley County's most vulnerable residents, including individuals living with mental illness, substance use disorders, and chronic disabilities.



**STAFF CONNECTED GUESTS WITH AN IMPRESSIVE RANGE OF SERVICES:**

**42%**

*Received services from the WV Coalition to End Homelessness*

**26%**

*Received Clothing*

**22%**

*Received Transportation Assistance*

**16%**

*Were connected to both housing resources and medical care*

*For many guests, the MCWS offered something they hadn't experienced in a long time: belonging. One staff member reflected on what that meant for the people they served:*

"We've had several individuals tell us, point-blank, that they haven't eaten a real meal in months. One resident recently shared that they never expected to be treated with such kindness at a shelter – they expected a bed, but they found a community. That kindness is the foundation that allows them to dream again. Because they feel seen and supported, they are doing hard work."

That sense of community extended to the little moments, too, including gathering around the TV on Super Bowl Sunday, something many unhoused individuals rarely get to experience.



## LIVES CHANGED IN JUST ELEVEN WEEKS

*The numbers tell part of the story, but the real measure of success is in what guests were able to accomplish once their basic needs were met. This season, six shelter guests became housed and seven gained employment, milestones that began with something as simple as a warm, safe place to sleep.*

TMI's own Nannette Redmon was at the heart of several of these victories. "I had the pleasure of supporting a working individual at our shelter who was navigating some personal hurdles," she shared. "After helping him navigate the [housing] application and follow-up process, I took him to view the unit. He was officially accepted and moved in shortly after. He was incredibly grateful for the fresh start." And the wins kept coming. "[Three guests at the Martinsburg Cold Weather Shelter] all just landed new jobs, so I made sure they had the essentials to hit the ground running on day one."

The transformation could happen quickly. One staff member described a young adult who arrived on the very first day the shelter opened:

*"During intake, staff identified that they met the eligibility criteria for a youth rehousing program and made a referral. Within the first week of their stay, staff provided employment support services, including job search assistance and application guidance. The client secured employment shortly after...In a six-week period, the client moved from unsheltered homelessness to stable employment and permanent housing."*



## A COMMUNITY THAT SHOWED UP

*The MCWS couldn't have done it without the remarkable support of the Martinsburg community. What began as a request for a few meals during a snowstorm grew into nightly hot meal donations for nearly the entire shelter season. Volunteers helped move supplies week after week. On the very last morning of the shelter, a group arrived unannounced, which left the staff moved:*

"A gentleman showed up and asked if he could bring tents the next morning. The next morning, he and a handful of volunteers came to distribute tents, sleeping bags, paracord, tarps, and more to the guests who had to return to living outdoors. We found out that they were from St. Bernadette Catholic Church and have been doing homeless outreach for years. We had purchased some supplies, but this was such a huge boost."

That sense of community extended to the little moments, too, including gathering around the TV on Super Bowl Sunday, something many unhoused individuals rarely get to experience.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The MCWS set out to prevent weather-related illness and death this winter. It did that – and so much more. When people's most basic needs are met, they are freed to dream again, to work, and to rebuild. The success of this season also makes clear that Berkeley County needs more shelter beds, more resources, and more community partnerships to meet a growing need.

We are proud of every guest, every volunteer, and every staff member who made the Martinsburg Cold Weather Shelter a place of dignity and possibility this winter. We're already looking ahead to next season.

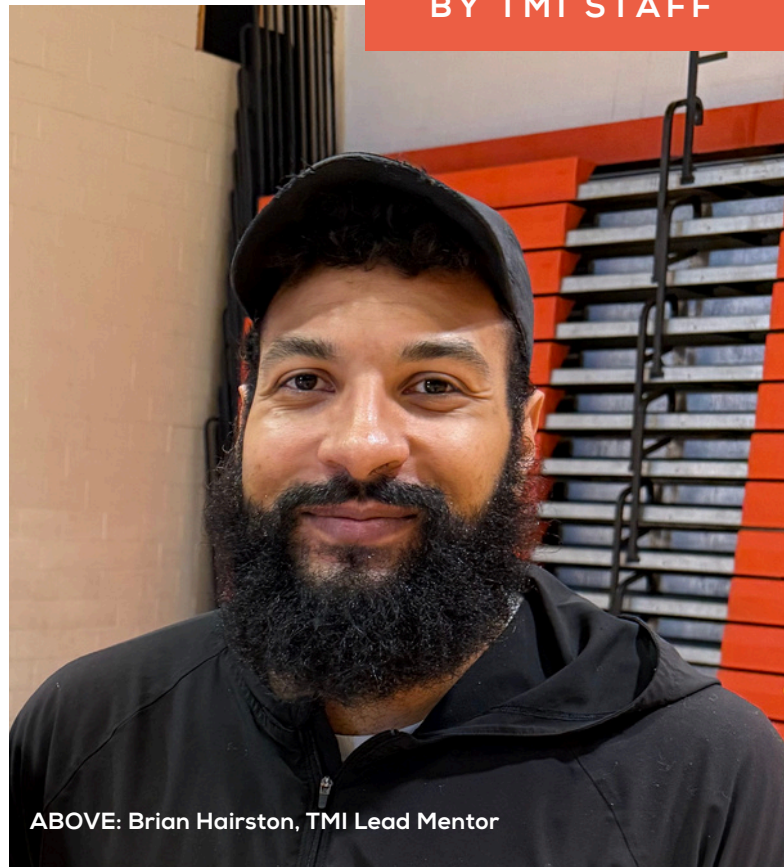
# BRIAN HAIRSTON

As The Martinsburg Initiative's Lead Mentor, Brian Hairston has spent years building relationships with students in Berkeley County.

*During the 2025–2026 school year, his work expanded into Jefferson County, where he has continued his relationship-based approach to mentoring, often building programs and connections in unexpected ways.*

Those relationships have helped him find new ways to connect with students and create mentorship opportunities. One example came from a chance conversation with an English teacher at Charles Town Middle School, which led to the joint idea of starting a student chess club. For Brian, chess is more than just a game – it's a way to build relationships.

"I play chess because it's a nice way to talk to someone," he said. "It takes the pressure off the conversations." The newly formed chess club will also help Brian establish a consistent presence in the school and create a space where students can spend time, talk, and build trust.



ABOVE: Brian Hairston, TMI Lead Mentor

**BRIAN DESCRIBES MANY OF THIS YEAR'S SUCCESSES AS "SERENDIPITOUS CONNECTIONS," EXPLAINING THAT HE OFTEN GOES INTO SCHOOLS WITH A PLAN TO VISIT SPECIFIC STUDENTS BUT ENDS UP BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS AND STAFF ALONG THE WAY.**

Brian connects with students in many different ways, including sports. Having grown up playing basketball, he recently participated in TMI's March Madness basketball event that brought nearly 100 people together. Events like this allow students to have fun while also building relationships with mentors and positive role models.



**HE ALSO MENTORS STUDENTS MORE FORMALLY, SOMETIMES INVITING THEM TO SHARE A MEAL ONCE A MONTH. THESE SMALL MOMENTS, HE SAYS, ALLOW STUDENTS TO RELAX, ENJOY THEMSELVES, AND OPEN UP ABOUT LIFE, SCHOOL, AND THEIR FUTURE.**

**LEFT: Brian Hairston, TMI Lead Mentor**

Some of Brian's most meaningful moments come from everyday conversations. He spends time in the school library reading and talking with students about books, history, and life. In one recent conversation with a student from Ethiopia, he began talking about Greek mythology and how its elements connect to Northern African history. Brian described it as a "jaw-dropping moment" for the student, as they discussed how closely connected cultures and histories really are.

Brian says the most important part of his work is building genuine relationships. "The beautiful thing about this job is that nobody sees me coming. If I'm able to have a genuine human interaction and we can talk about the deep parts of life, things like that happen."

Reflecting on his work, Brian often thinks about his own childhood and the mentors who helped guide him. "This job is special because it is an expression of my life," he said. "I remember growing up and wanting to know how to make it in life. I wished I could find someone older who could help me be successful. Now, when I see students like that, it makes this job magic."

For Brian, mentoring is not just a job; it's a lifelong mission built on conversation, connection, and showing up for students when they need someone in their corner.

"It's the pleasure of a lifetime to do what I'm doing," he said.



BY TMI STAFF

ABOVE: Adrienne Borgman

By integrating socio-emotional coaching into daily play, I model healthy impulses and modify behavioral habits. This approach allows students to build resilience and achieve developmental milestones in a safe space, effectively replacing maladaptive behaviors with positive social skills before they enter kindergarten.

I currently provide targeted skill-building individually and in groups for students in eight schools while offering indirect case management to their families. By connecting households to vital community resources, I help them navigate the challenges of poverty, substance use, and mental health to build protective factors against toxic stress and improve long-term well-being.

# HEAR FROM ADRIENNE!

*Since completing my BSW and a 1,000-hour internship with The Martinsburg Initiative, I've dedicated my work to supporting 52 Pre-Kindergarten classrooms across Berkeley County.*

## *Supporting social-emotional & academic growth*

Supporting Social-Emotional and Academic growth begins with the power of early intervention and consultation. New research highlights how targeted support transforms the classroom and the home. Trigg et al. (2026) found that early childhood mental health consultation significantly reduces behavioral concerns and teacher stress, particularly among those who feel overwhelmed. Similarly, a recent study on the Coping and Parenting Competence (CAPC) intervention found that just 7 weeks of targeted support significantly reduced anxiety and improved confidence among parents of preschool children with special educational needs (Lau et al., 2026).



Then it becomes a process of navigating learning differences. Roughly 1 in 5 children in the U.S. has a learning or attention issue. Dr. Jacqueline Rodriguez, CEO of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, emphasizes that the shift toward "neurodivergent" language helps children own their identities.

There are a few expert-backed strategies, which include talking early. Discuss diagnoses as a team so children can learn to say, "I learn differently." Reframe the narrative to protect their confidence by explaining that a different brain doesn't mean a less capable one. As well as practicing advocacy. It is helpful to role-play how to ask teachers for extra time or specific supports. However, for a child's self-advocacy to be successful, it must be met with an accurate clinical understanding of their experiences. This is why distinguishing between different sources of behavioral distress is so vital. To provide the right tools, we must ensure the 'why' behind a child's behavior is properly understood—particularly when distinguishing between developmental disorders and the lasting effects of trauma.

In the aftermath of traumatic events, children often exhibit symptoms that mimic other disorders. It is essential to distinguish between trauma-related distress and conditions like ADHD or ODD. While ADHD symptoms are typically persistent across all settings, trauma-related behaviors (such as distractibility or defiance) often appear specifically after an event or fluctuate based on environmental triggers. Taking a trauma-informed approach—asking "What happened to you?" instead of "What's wrong with you?"—is crucial to ensure children receive the correct support rather than ineffective punitive measures.

## References

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*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2026). Serious emotional disturbances in children, youth, and young adults (Publication No. PEP26-01-006). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://library.samhsa.gov>*

THOUSANDS OF US ARE IN RECOVERY.

**YOU CAN BE TOO.**



**WHEN IT'S TIME, WE'RE HERE.**

**CALL 1-844-HELP4WV**



FUNDED IN PART BY



# EVERY CHILD DESERVES A GOOD START

If you have an Infant or toddler at home and have concerns about their development with moving, talking, hearing, vision, playing, learning, or growing, we are here to help.

West Virginia's Infant and Toddler Early Intervention Program. Telehealth and In Person appointments are available at NO COST TO YOU.

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**(304) 267-3595 ext 132**





JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
 <p>16<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (CHARLES TOWN)</p>	 <p>20<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (MARTINSBURG)</p>	 <p>1<sup>ST</sup>-15<sup>TH</sup>: UNITY CAMPAIGN</p>  <p>20<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (CT)</p>  <p>21<sup>ST</sup>: MARCH MADNESS BASKETBALL EVENT</p>
APRIL	MAY	JUNE
 <p>13<sup>TH</sup> - 17<sup>TH</sup> : CIT TRAINING</p>  <p>17<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (MARTINSBURG)</p>  <p>25<sup>TH</sup>: COMMUNITY BABY SHOWER</p>	 <p>15<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (CHARLES TOWN)</p>	 <p>19<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (MARTINSBURG)</p>  <p>SUMMER KICKOFF COMMUNITY BBQ (EXACT DATE TBD)</p>
JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
 <p>17<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (CHARLES TOWN)</p>  <p>27<sup>TH</sup> - 31<sup>ST</sup>: CAMP SUNSHINE</p>	 <p>6<sup>TH</sup>: BACKPACK GIVEAWAY</p>  <p>21<sup>ST</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (MARTINSBURG)</p>	 <p>SAVE A LIFE DAY</p>  <p>DAY OF CARING</p>  <p>18<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (CHARLES TOWN)</p>
OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
 <p>15<sup>TH</sup>: COSTUME GIVEAWAY</p>  <p>16<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (MARTINSBURG)</p>  <p>23<sup>RD</sup>: TRUNK OR TREAT</p>  <p>TBD: ELEVATE YOUTH ELEVATE JOY</p>	 <p>5<sup>TH</sup>: WINTER COAT GIVEAWAY</p>  <p>20<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY (CHARLES TOWN)</p>  <p>FOOD DRIVE (DATE TBD)</p>	 <p>14<sup>TH</sup> - 18<sup>TH</sup>: TOYS &amp; JOYS</p>  <p>18<sup>TH</sup>: LOVING OUR COMMUNITY</p>

The Martinsburg Initiative and Community  
Cup Coffee and More present:

# Senior Support



The Martinsburg Initiative's Social Workers will be on-site weekly to assist senior citizens with vital resources, including:

- Help staying safely housed
- Utility relief & benefits navigation
- Medicare/Medicaid guidance
- Health & wellness info
- Caregiver and behavioral health referrals
- Providing free "Stay Safe at Home" Kits for eligible seniors

No appointment needed — just stop in for coffee and connection!

📍 **Community Coffee Cup and More**  
🕒 **Every Tuesday | 10 AM – 12 PM**



THE  
**MARTINSBURG**  
INITIATIVE



PHOTO: Coffee and Care Weekly Senior Wellness Events held at The Community Cup and cohosted by TMI. Get help and resources from TMI Social Workers and enjoy coffee and conversation.



*Get the facts about electronic cigarettes, their health effects and the risks of using e-cigarettes.*

E-cigarettes (also called “vapes”) have been the most commonly used tobacco product among U.S. youth since 2014. Educators can make a real difference by engaging in meaningful conversations with their students about the dangers of vaping for young people and ways to quit.

CDC launched the Empower Vape-Free Youth™ campaign in 2023 to encourage middle and high school educators to speak with students about the risks of e-cigarettes and nicotine addiction. The campaign also provides resources for educators to help students avoid or quit vaping.

**EMPOWER**  
**Vape-Free**  
**YOUTH™**



Info Provided by the Center for  
Disease Control and Prevention



**i talk**  
they hear you®



# START TALKING BEFORE SHE HEADS OFF TO SCHOOL.

It's never too early to have a conversation about alcohol and other drugs.

The sooner you talk about the dangers of underage drinking and substance use, the greater chance you have of influencing your child's decisions about using alcohol and other drugs. For tips on how—and when—to begin the conversation, visit

[www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov](http://www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov)

#TalkTheyHearYou

PEP20-03-01-041



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration



# A MODEL SOLUTION

## TO A NATIONAL PROBLEM

*Our mission is to prevent substance use disorders, build strong families, and empower the Martinsburg community through police, school, community, health, and education partnerships.*

1

### **Increase awareness**

of how to prevent substance use disorder through community empowerment.

2

### **Mitigate negative consequences**

Resulting from substance misuse or trauma through community interventions, medication overdose.

3

### **Identify, risk stratify and offer appropriate interventions**

for individuals experiencing risk factors of trauma or substance misuse.

4

### **Evaluate and report performance.**



THE  
**MARTINSBURG**  
INITIATIVE

A POLICE, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP