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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

One of a series focusing  
on efforts to improve  
the health of residents in  
the Sacramento region.

# Not your ordinary nonprofit

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Christmas 2019 came early for Julius Thibodeaux. Fifteen days before the holiday, Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg announced during a City Council meeting that City Manager Howard Chan had reached a decision on efforts to reduce local youth violence: Chan was extending the city's two-year-old, \$1.5 million contract with Advance Peace Sacramento for two more years.

The mayor's words delighted Thibodeaux, APS's strategy program manager. His team contributed heavily to the city having no teen murders in 2018 and 2019 – results that city officials could only dream about when they entered into partnership with APS.

Taking the mic in the council chambers, the grateful Thibodeaux told the city's leaders: "You can feel good about your investment ... You're doing things that are different – things that are new."

APS is not your ordinary nonprofit. From a downtown office, Thibodeaux directs a squad of Senior Fellows, ages 18-29, known as Neighborhood Change Agents. All were previously incarcerated before turning their lives around and returning to their hoods in Oak Park, Del Paso Heights and South Sacramento, where they now mentor Junior Fellows: youth 12 to 17 – including gang members – who are the most likely to be perpetrators and/or victims of shootings.

Along with positive guidance, the youth receive incentives to be law-abiding, said Thibodeaux, who served 23 years in prison for a firearm-related conviction.

In recruiting mentors, "I wasn't looking for someone who could tell war stories about what they had been through, but someone who had influence in their neighborhoods, and who would bring a skill set of how to de-escalate gun violence and be skilled in conflict resolution," he said in an interview.

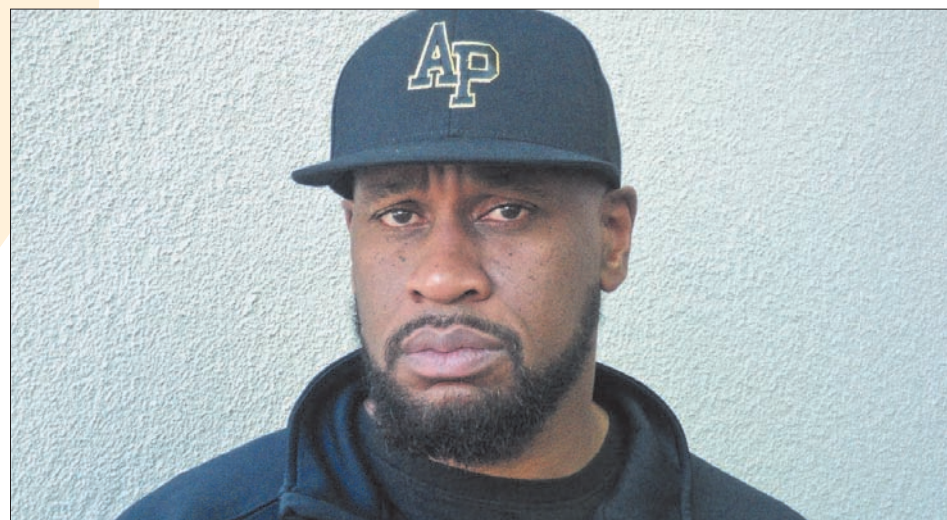
**"YOU DON'T GET  
ENOUGH CREDIT  
FOR THE WORK  
THAT YOU AND  
YOUR TEAM ARE  
DOING."**

**Rick Jennings**  
Sacramento City Councilman

APS will continue working with its fellow advocates for nonviolence like Black Child Legacy, Thibodeaux said.

APS's four-year contract stipulated that Chan could end the agreement after two years if the city was unhappy with APS's performance.

While the renewed pact won't mean additional city funding for APS, it does mean the city will honor its ongoing commitment and award APS \$750,000 over the next two years, city spokesman Tim Swanson said in an e-mail. APS also receives funding from the state, CalVIP and The California Endowment.



"The youngsters are making better decisions" that help them avoid gun violence, Julius Thibodeaux of Advance Peace Sacramento said. "Some of them have jobs, or have taken up internships ... Make sure you give the young people credit." Photo by Edgar Sanchez

At the December meeting, Councilman Rick Jennings told Thibodeaux:

"You don't get enough credit for the work that you and your team are doing. Now we have more time to really implement this strategy so we can be the model program for the country."

APS has continued to provide services and supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Thibodeaux, a mom told him gratefully, "Even though we've been locked down, APS has been checking on us, making sure that we have food, water and hygiene."

## BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

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