

## **Sheriff's Camp and Lessons Learned**

By: Kathy A. Downes, Executive Director Bright Tomorrows

This week, Bright Tomorrows staff had the privilege of going to the Sheriff's Camp to talk to the youth in the program about child abuse. We were struck by what an amazing and important program the Sheriff's Camp is. We watched the local law enforcement officers give of their hearts and time to let each of the ten to thirteen year old boys and girls in the program know that they are important and matter.

The Sheriff's Camp program targets youth that have been identified as "at risk" because of life situations or poor choices. The program builds relationships and alliances for these children with law enforcement, giving the strong message that the law is there to help and protect them, not to harm them.

Bright Tomorrows talked to these youth about the negative and hurtful messages children can feel and carry with them when they have been abused; feelings of worthlessness, brokenness, uselessness, and overall hopelessness. Research shows that more than 20% of adults and children nationally have been victimized by child sexual abuse and could be carrying around these negative feelings.

We asked the Sheriff's Camp participants what they thought would be important for children who had been abused to know. The message they sent with us to tell children who have been abused is, *"You're a good person and if something ugly happens, you are still good."*

There is hope and healing from abuse that can come from counseling, our justice system, faith or spiritual beliefs, and the love and support of caring family and friends. Each of us plays a part in helping the people in our lives to know that they are worthwhile, needed, and important. For more information about Bright Tomorrows visit [www.brightcac.org](http://www.brightcac.org).