

Collaborating to Prevent and Reduce Youth Gang Involvement

Miami Partnership for Action in Communities Task Force (MPACT)

With youth gang membership on the rise across the country, police departments and community groups are trying a range of approaches to deter young people from joining gangs and to prevent the violence and crime that stems from gang activity.

The Miami Partnership for Action in Communities Task Force, known as MPACT, has proven that comprehensive, multi-agency efforts can work. One of the innovative elements of MPACT's strategy—which contributed to its selection for a MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Award—links young people at risk for gang involvement with jobs building affordable, energy-efficient homes. With its multiple partners, MPACT is tying together the myriad of strands needed to weave the strong social fabric that underpins a healthy

and vital community—one that supports its youth and counts on them as contributors to neighborhood revitalization.

HISTORY OF MPACT

MPACT began as a four-year demonstration project developed and managed by the Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the Miami-Dade Schools Police Department (M-DSPD). As one of four anti-gang pilot programs funded by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) around the country, MPACT drew its program design from research and lessons of the Chicago-based Comprehensive Gang Model. In the three years since the OJJDP pilot ended, MPACT has sustained itself and become a mainstay among community safety and social services agencies in Miami-Dade County. MPACT has served seven Miami-Dade public schools and their surrounding communities since 2004 and has recently expanded into an additional thirteen schools. At

this moment, MPACT brings program services to students in twenty schools within Miami-Dade.

MPACT is a collaboration of law enforcement agencies within Miami-Dade, the Miami-Dade public school system, various city and state departments, community groups, social service agencies and local businesses. Together, the partners work to provide youth with the appropriate guidance and services needed to help them develop valuable

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This publication is part of a series published by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation's Community Safety Initiative as part of the MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Awards program. Sponsored by MetLife Foundation since 2002, the Awards celebrate and promote exemplary community safety strategies bolstered by collaboration between police and neighborhood leaders. LISC and MetLife Foundation believe that public safety is an integral component of building strong and healthy communities. Law enforcement and community building—from economic development to youth programs to neighborhood beautification efforts—yield greater benefits for neighborhoods when they are strategically integrated. For more information about LISC or the MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Awards, please visit www.lisc.org. For more information about the Foundation, please visit www.metlife.com



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Students who achieve their goals and graduate from the program are honored in a ceremony attended by parents, teachers, MPACT staff and community members.

The strength of the program lies in MPACT's ability to offer wraparound care geared to each participant's particular needs. The program coordinates the resources of various program partners to keep services up, crime down and youth and communities safe.

skills and stay out of gangs. Drawing on the resources of many institutional partners, MPACT's model emphasizes these core themes: **1) education, 2) community involvement, 3) mentoring, 4) social intervention, 5) personal and social responsibility, 6) job skills development, and 7) career awareness.** The strength of the program lies in MPACT's ability to offer wraparound care geared to each participant's particular needs. The program coordinates the resources of various program partners to keep services up, crime down and youth and communities safe.

The MPACT team consists of full-time and part-time staff that includes a project coordinator, an administrative assistant, clerical support staff, tutors and outreach workers. Additionally, the program has a volunteer Steering Committee which is made up of representatives from education, social service agencies, probation/parole, uniformed police officers and addi-

tional representatives from law enforcement. Working with the staff, members of the Steering Committee assist in the coordination and guidance of the MPACT program. Many of the Steering Committee members are also on the Intervention Team. That team is comprised of representatives from agencies and schools who work directly with youth participants and manage their cases.

IDENTIFYING TARGET COMMUNITIES

The Miami-Dade County Public School District, the fourth largest school district in the nation, is made up of 378 schools serving over 353,000 students. The district manages schools in all 36 of the cities, towns and communities in the county, the demographics of which vary immensely. Miami-Dade was chosen as one of the OJJDP model sites because while the overall number of felonies committed by juveniles decreased between

1993 and 1997, there were increases in gang activities, including aggravated violent crimes against persons, weapons violations and drug incidents. Also, police-intelligence gang data indicated that in 1992 there were 68 gangs with 3,617 gang members in Miami-Dade County. By 1998, this number had grown to 84 gangs with approximately 5,000 gang members.

The MPACT Steering Committee started off the project by surveying the gang problem in the county using both qualitative and quantitative data on juvenile crime collected by various law enforcement agencies. The process included:

► Stage 1 – Geographical Mapping

Based on a map representing data from multiple agencies in the county, MPACT selected three areas that were experiencing high incidents of juvenile crime. Further data collection and analysis was completed for: North West Miami-Dade County, the north area of Miami Beach and a section of Hialeah. Both Miami Beach and Hialeah were under the jurisdiction of their own police departments, while North West Miami-Dade was under the jurisdiction of the Miami-Dade County Police Department.

MPACT examined crime data for the three areas between 1999 and 2001. They found crimes against persons were more prevalent in NW Miami-Dade than in Hialeah and Miami Beach. Miami Beach experienced more crimes against property and drug-related incidents than the other two areas.

► Stage 2 – Crime Trends Analysis

Strong working relationships with each of the law enforcement agencies allowed MPACT to collect cumulative information on trends over time in the areas of burglary/vandalism, crimes against persons, drug violations and other offenses such as graffiti or curfew violations. While Miami Beach and Hialeah crime data showed decreases in criminal activity in each area between the years 1999 and 2001, NW Miami-Dade regis-



Before participants begin work on a job site they must participate in personal development courses and trainings and meet with supervisors to learn about expectations and responsibilities.

MPACT APPLIES THE 5 KEY STRATEGIES OF THE OJJDP COMPREHENSIVE GANG MODEL

1. Suppression: Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision or monitoring of gang youth by agencies of the criminal justice system, community-based agencies, schools and grass-roots organizations.

▶ MPACT sought to enhance the investigations, monitoring and documentation of gang activity for targeted gang members by probation/parole officers for youth involved in the criminal justice system. MPACT also secured a commitment from probation/parole, juvenile probation and the State Attorney's Office to refer criminally-involved offenders from the target area to the MPACT program for intensive intervention services and case management.

2. Social Intervention: Schools, youth-service agencies, grass-roots organizations, faith-based institutions, police and other criminal justice groups "reach out" and act as links between gang-involved youth, their families and community-based support services.

▶ MPACT created an Intervention Team made up of representatives from law enforcement, education, probation/parole and social service agencies. The team meets weekly to devise and review customized intervention plans for each participant.

3. Organizational Change and Development: The development and implementation of policies and procedures results in effective use of available and potential resources, within and across agencies, to better address the gang problem.

▶ Schools in the target area each appointed a representative, typically the Assistant Principal, Safe Schools Facilitator or counselor, to provide information (behavior, grades, attendance, etc.) on targeted students to the Intervention Team. The representative also provides updates on the school's gang activities and trends to the broader partnership.



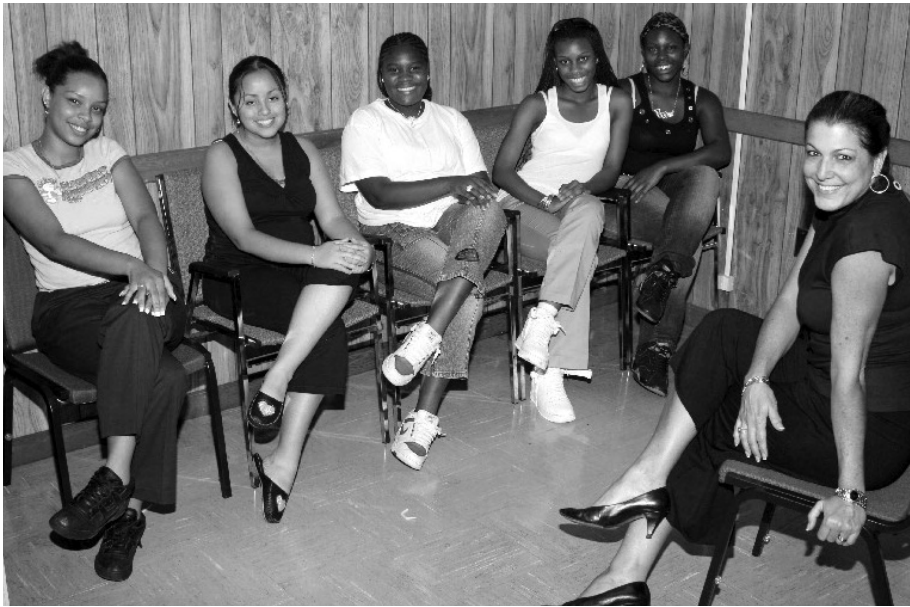
School staff are trained by the M-DSPD to recognize gang indicators such as this tattoo signifying membership in a local gang.

4. Opportunities Provision: The development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeted at gang-involved youth.

▶ As an example, participants receiving On-the-Job Training (OJT) are assigned to vocational classes held in area schools or after school at a designated community location where they receive classroom instruction followed by 40 hours of job readiness training and 10 hours of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) testing and certification. Each student is then assigned to an on-the-job training site identified by MPACT.

5. Community Mobilization: Involvement of local citizens (including former gang youth), community groups and agencies and the coordination of programs and staff functions within and across partnering institutions.

▶ MPACT has held numerous training sessions, gang awareness forums and community meetings to provide information on issues ranging from: identifying gang activity in the community; crime reporting; and warning signs of possible gang involvement. The program has also participated in panel discussions and conferences to showcase the work of MPACT.



At left: Female participants are offered Life Skills training classes where they learn poise and positive self-image. Above: MPACT Project Director Renee Parker addresses the media during the ribbon cutting ceremony for a newly constructed affordable home built by Palmetto Homes Inc. with the help of students in the MPACT on-the-job training program.

tered an increase in crimes against persons and an increase in crimes against property.

MPACT ultimately selected the 12-14 square mile area of North West Miami-Dade as a target community given the increasing crime trends and the severity of crimes being committed against persons. The area contains Miami Gardens (formally known as Carol City), Opa Locka and Miami Lakes.

► Stage 3 – Data Collection

In an effort to understand the complex nature of the gang problem, MPACT, with the help of researchers from the University of Miami, spent a year collecting additional quantitative and qualitative juvenile gang-related crime data on NW Miami-Dade. The most relevant data came from two sources: Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and interviews with gang members. UCRs are completed by law enforcement agencies across the country and voluntarily submitted to the FBI, which then aggregates the data in an annual public release. MPACT used this process as an opportunity to track youth gang-related incidents. The county and school police departments trained 90 officers in the target area on how to correctly

identify and record gang-related crimes on UCRs. The UCR dataset provided more information on gang-related crime patterns than had been previously available, and helped overcome the challenge of differing reporting systems used by the various law enforcement agencies working in the target area.

The other source of data came from 30 interviews MPACT conducted with gang members and formerly gang-involved youth identified through police intelligence. MPACT leaders also spent time examining community and school data, gathering demographic informa-

“With everyone working together, stopping the gang problem cannot be held back by City boundaries.”

— Captain Ian Moffett, Commander for Central Operations, Miami-Dade Schools Police

tion, conducting focus groups, interviewing school staff and community leaders and distributing student and community surveys.

Given the evolving nature of gangs and gang violence, the police officers involved with MPACT continue to collect data and now use an automated system to compile the information. At the program’s

inception, law enforcement used GangNet, a simple user-interface which allowed officers to record and track gang members and their activities and share the information across departments, agencies, states and regions. The program was managed by the State of Florida and was put in place before MPACT, yet the county never mandated that the 36 different city, town and county police departments in Miami-Dade County input gang crime data into the system. MPACT recognized the importance of having countywide crime data available to track increasingly mobile gangs and gang members. The program reached out to the

Miami Dade Police Chiefs Association, and they adopted a resolution to participate in the routing of gang related information. The GangNet system was replaced when its data was integrated with information from two other systems into a program called InSite. InSite further increased efficiency by consolidating these three separate systems into one centralized system that is accessed by a single web-based application.

RECRUITING YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

In the fall of 2003, MPACT began identifying at-risk youth for recruitment into the program. The project chose its target population using UCR information which showed the majority of gang members were young males between the ages of 12-22. Within this population, MPACT targeted individuals as being gang-affiliated or potentially gang-affiliated either through self-admission, law enforcement intelligence or reports from school staff and residents. Gang involvement indicators included being a younger sibling of a known gang member, or exhibiting specific behaviors, associates or activities.

Captain Ian Moffett, M-DSPD Commander for Central Operations and MPACT Steering Committee member, credits the success of the program to the joint efforts by law enforcement and school staff to recruit high-risk youth before problems emerged or escalated. The MDPD and the M-DSPD contributed to this effort by stepping up patrols in schools and neighborhoods throughout the target area, a move which enhanced their intelligence about local gangs as well as their ability to identify potential program participants. "The officers working in the schools and neighborhoods knew these kids on a first name basis and had a good understanding of the situations they were in. Being able to identify the kids who would benefit from the program most was critical to program success," said Captain Moffett.



A long time senior resident of the neighborhood received a newly constructed affordable home, built in part by youth participating in the MPACT on-the-job training program.

To inform and engage school administrators and staff, MPACT conducted trainings in all seven participating schools in the target area on gang identifiers and MPACT services. Many school staff then

plan and case manager to track their progress. As the needs of the participants vary, MPACT offers tailored referrals and services for each client.

Fourteen low income single family homes have been built throughout urban Miami with the help of youth enrolled in the program. Everyone involved benefits, including the youth, Palmetto Homes and the community at large.

helped identify potential candidates for the program, though Project Director Renee Parker noted that MPACT had to work with some to recognize the extent of the local gang problem before they gained their full buy-in.

Enrollment has increased nearly every year since MPACT began accepting referrals. In December 2003, the program had five clients. By October of 2007, MPACT had 160 active participants. Every participant in the MPACT program has a service

COORDINATING SERVICES

With so many different partners involved, investing in central coordination has been key to MPACT's success. Parker, MPACT Project Director, serves as a hub for information and provides the critical structural coordination needed to keep information flowing and strategies integrated.

Rallying participation from schools, businesses and entities such as the Florida State Attorney's Office, Miami-Dade Urban Empowerment Zone and the Citi-

THE MPACT STEERING COMMITTEE:

Community and Social Service Organizations

- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Counseling and Educational Consulting
- Florida Economic Empowerment & Development (FEED)
- Harvest Fire Worship Center
- Jackson North Community Mental Health Center
- Juvenile Assessment Center
- Liberty Square Council, Inc.
- Miami Gardens Church of Christ
- Oasis House Ministries
- Palmetto Homes Inc.
- The Chrysalis Center
- Youth Gang Resource Center

Law Enforcement

- Miami-Dade Police Department
- Miami-Dade Public Schools Police Department

Public Schools

- American Senior High School
- Booker T. Washington Senior High School
- Carol City Middle School
- Douglas McArthur North Senior High School
- Hialeah Miami Lakes Senior High School

- Homestead Senior High School
- Jan Mann Opportunity School
- Miami Edison Senior High School
- Lake Stevens Middle School
- MacArthur South Senior High School
- Miami Carol City Senior High School
- Miami Central Senior High School
- Miami Edison Middle School
- Miami Jackson Senior High School
- Miami Killian Senior High School
- Miami Norland Senior High School
- Miami Northwestern Senior High School
- Miami Southridge Senior High School
- North Miami Beach Senior High School
- North Miami Senior High School

State Agencies

- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Florida Department of Corrections
- Florida Department of Human Services
- Florida Department of Juvenile Justice
- Florida State Attorney's Office

Universities

- Barry University

COMPREHENSIVE IN-HOUSE AND REFERRAL SERVICES OFFERED BY MPACT

The MPACT model customizes services for participating youth. A case manager assesses needs and identifies suitable referral services from MPACT's partner agencies. Parker states, "We break through some of the red tape to get youth directly to the services they need." The program offers:

▶ Individual Mentoring and On-Site Support Groups

- Group sessions bring youth facing similar issues and barriers together to support and learn from one another. Topics include: educational goals, employability skills, career counseling, pregnancy/STD prevention, family planning, personal hygiene, health and nutrition, substance abuse and conflict resolution.
- Individual Mentoring is offered through faith based organizations and non-profits such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

▶ Mental Health and Counseling Services

- Referrals to group, family or individual mental health services.
- Services specific to needs of the at-risk young adult clients include anger management, family crisis resolution and bilingual counselors.

▶ Drug and Alcohol Counseling

- Clients with drug or alcohol issues receive mandatory referrals to agencies that provide drug treatment and counseling before they can continue with the work component of the program.

▶ Educational Assistance

- Clients receive tailored plans to address any educational deficits, learning disabilities or other needs.
- Tutors are available at MPACT or through volunteers in the local faith community who work with clients on their individualized treatment plans.
- Assistance is offered to clients in leveraging financial aid and applying for college.
- College scholarships are awarded to successful program participants during the annual award ceremony.

▶ Job Training and Placement

- Partner agencies offer career assessment, interest testing and skills analysis.
- The program provides opportunities to learn a trade, participate in volunteer opportunities, get a GED or high school diploma and help in finding a job through workshops in resume writing and interviewing techniques.

zens' Crime Watch of Miami-Dade is a key part of Parker's role. Recognizing that gang-involved youth are a difficult population to serve, she helps vet prospective partners and negotiates Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that specify each entity's commitments to the project. Parker states, "We really exist as a brokering agency. We don't necessarily provide all of the services, rather we provide access to the services. The strength of the program lies in our ability to partner with established agencies who are experts and successful at what they do."

MPACT has also created structures to facilitate an uncommonly high level of information-sharing across jurisdictional boundaries of police agencies. Weekly Intervention Team meetings provide a forum for liaison officers working in different communities to strategize together and update each other on gang activity in the target area and on criminal involvement of project participants. This has enhanced the outcomes of increased patrols, rapid incident response and investigations that are the core components of police involvement in MPACT. Captain Moffett states, "Information sharing between partners has allowed us to collaborate and effectively monitor gang activity throughout the target area. With everyone working together, stopping the gang problem cannot be held back by city boundaries."

BUILDING JOB SKILLS AND STRONG COMMUNITIES SIMULTANEOUSLY

MPACT's approach includes one component which distinguishes it from other programs of its kind. As part of the On The Job Training (OJT) services offered to participants, MPACT provides youth interested in the construction trades with opportunities to build affordable, modern and energy efficient homes for low-income individuals and families in the Miami area, thus building their own skills while rebuilding neighborhoods.

MPACT found that the promise of a paying job is a significant draw for program participants. Those who participate in OJT



Younger clients participate in volunteer projects organized by MPACT and its partners.

learn a trade, are assigned to a job and receive a small stipend for the hours they work. MPACT offers in-class vocational instruction, job readiness skills training and certification in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards.

Palmetto Homes Inc. – the main MPACT partner for the housing OJT program – began working with the collaborative in 2002. The organization’s founder, Ario Lundy, had his own history with gangs and criminality that inspired and prepared him to supervise and mentor at-risk young adults. Approximately 50 youth have passed through Lundy’s organization working on construction crews.

He has seen significant changes in the young men within the five short months it takes to complete a project. “They speak differently. They are more open, they listen, they have a complete change of character. They are in a new setting that helps them thrive. Not every kid is going to be a doctor or a lawyer, they need some guidance in finding a job they are good at and they enjoy. We provide an opportunity for them to do that,” Lundy states.

Fourteen low-income single family homes have been built throughout urban Miami with the help of youth enrolled in the program. Everyone involved benefits,

including the youth, Palmetto Homes and the community at large.

EXPANDING SERVICES TO REACH ADDITIONAL POPULATIONS

Because of the popularity of the OJT program and its effectiveness in deterring gang involvement, MPACT has worked to add new community partners and to offer a range of employment and volunteer opportunities. Participants can choose to receive training on a specific skill set such as electrical wiring, landscaping, painting or carpentry. Responding to an increase in female gang affiliation, MPACT now offers clerical

training and employment at school district and university offices and at MPACT, with a target audience of female youth in the program.

MPACT has learned throughout its years that a cookie-cutter approach to services is not an effective strategy. “Each school or neighborhood has its own gang-related crime issue and its own resources available to deal with that issue,” Parker explained. “MPACT’s job is to seek out all available resources and combine them, getting everyone on board and working together so that we can get these kids away from what they don’t need and hooked into what they do need.”

PROGRAM IMPACT

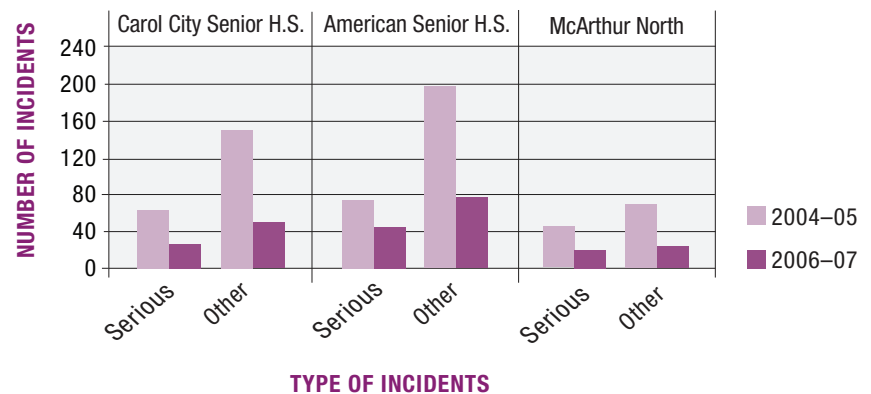
All seven of the participating schools are seeing results as incidents of crime and disruption fall. In schools where the administration supports MPACT, there has been a significant decrease in the presence of gang identifiers in the school setting and incidences of gang conflicts. Other schools of comparable size and population characteristics are not seeing such a decline.

However, the most noteworthy results are seen in the behavior and outlook of

All seven of the participating schools are seeing results as incidents of crime and disruption fall.

By the Numbers – Drops in Crime at Participating Schools

Courtesy of MPACT



MPACT GOALS AND STRATEGIES PRODUCE RESULTS: COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMMING TRANSLATES TO 85% SUCCESS RATE FOR PARTICIPANTS

- ▶ **Increase School Attendance** – After a student has 3 absences, outreach workers will schedule a face-to-face meeting and contact the participant's parents. Contact and monitoring is ongoing to deter absences and truancy.
- ▶ **Increase Grade Point Average** – Educational plans are drawn up for students who have low academic performance. Links to tutors and a curriculum specialist are immediately secured to address deficiencies.
- ▶ **Decrease Drug Use** – Random drug screenings are a mandatory requirement of the program. If a participant's results come back positive, he/she must accept treatment or be suspended from any work related component of the program. Ongoing monitoring ensures youth remain drug free.
- ▶ **Reduce Disciplinary Issues** – Coordination and collaboration between school staff, the police and outreach workers allows MPACT to stay informed of each participant's progress.
- ▶ **Reduce Serious Incidents** – Police presence in schools deters congregating and disorder that may lead to criminal activity.
- ▶ **Achieve Goals** – Participants who successfully complete the program go on to graduate from high school or obtain their GED, gain full time employment and enroll in college courses.



Police Chaplain offers a blessing to the family and their new home during a community ribbon cutting ceremony.

the participants and in the numbers of youth who have come to realize their abilities. 80 youth have successfully completed programs through MPACT: 41 graduated from high school, 51 found employment and 19 attended college. In times of nationwide economic trouble and an increasing unemployment rate, MPACT graduates have found the program's assistance invaluable.

To inform and engage school administrators and staff, MPACT conducted trainings in all seven participating schools in the target area on gang identifiers and MPACT services.

MPACT recently received new funding from the U.S. Department of Labor allowing the program to expand to thirteen additional schools bringing the program service to twenty schools in Miami-Dade. Captain Moffett, who has been with MPACT since its initial days, has seen the project endure through three different federal administrations, four school superintendents, three different school police chiefs and numerous changes with commanders of the Multi Agency Gang Task Force commanded by MDPD. He has seen

the project grow and change immensely, reacting to these outside forces. Moffett believes its survival throughout all these changes is a clear indicator of the strength of MPACT and its value to the communities and youth of Miami-Dade. He states, "We planted a seed for change in this community and it has blossomed into a big, healthy tree. When I take a step back to look at what this program has accomplished, it's a remarkable sight."

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