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Real-world CSI for South Bend teens June 2011

SOUTH BEND — Collecting fingerprints, hunting for evidence, digging up DNA. Sounds like an intense crime scene, and 21 South Bend teens had a chance to help solve the mock mystery.

The South Bend Police Department invited them out for a week of hands-on learning within the force. After Friday, the teens are CSI experts.

They were analyzing fingerprints and examining footprints. Many said investigating a crime is not as easy as it looks on TV.

Think fast.

Act even faster.

"The whole idea is give them a taste of what we do every day in our jobs," said Lt. Richard Powers from the South Bend Police Department.

A job that puts their life on the line, every day.

"I didn't think it was really this hard, I thought it was sit around eat donuts and coffee," said Summer Youth Academy Police Department participant Clayton Brown.

Brown, 14, carefully striped a playground slide of possible suspect fingerprints in a mock investigation site.

"You had to take pictures of the crime scene and everything," Brown said.

This meticulous young man took his time. He has learned that patience equals perfection.

Brown is one of 21 teens in the South Bend Police Department's Summer Youth Academy.

"I learned that police don't have the easiest job," Brown said.

From laying mold on tire tracks to deciphering prints, these teens went all in.

Brown said the adrenaline of being on the force is thrilling.

"You have to think fast about what you're doing, person is in trouble, hostage situation — you have to think fast," Brown said.

Brown's classmate, 15-year-old Kayla Smith, said this is her calling.

"I've always wanted to be a police officer. I don't know why, I just want to save lives," Smith said.

The crash course in criminology opened up some eyes to the risks that come along with the job.

"The danger, you're always in motion, always," Brown said.

But Clayton Brown knows this intense week of learning has its benefits.

"Maybe if I get on the police force when I get older I can get in good with these guys," Brown said.

The South Bend Police Department sponsored this week-long crash course.

The last time they had this camp was in 2008, but this year it was back by popular demand and they had the funds to hold the program.

The teens also spent time with the SWAT team and the K-9 unit throughout the week.