



The Voice of the Heroes: Afghan Police Radio Station Garneres Public Support

By **Mohammad Ayub Salangi**, General, Acting Minister of Interior, Senior Deputy of Interior Minister for Security, Kabul, Afghanistan

To fight crimes and terrorism in a better manner while garnering public support, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has launched a police radio station in Kabul City.

Radio Police FM is the first of its kind in Afghanistan and is on the air in Kabul and neighboring provinces. It is set up in a new, high-tech studio in the Public Affairs Directorate of the MoI, and has a staff of 10, including two presenters. The radio airs programs in Dari and Pashto languages from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily, except on Fridays, when the station follows a half-day schedule.

At the inauguration ceremony of the Radio Police FM in January 2015, General Mohamad Ayoub Salangi, Acting Minister of Interior and Senior Deputy Interior Minister for Security—also a member of IACP—said that “[Radio Police] is an excellent way to bridge the gap between public and police and teach people about laws. Moreover, the public will be urged to support police in order to improve law enforcement.”

General Salangi also said that the police would leave no stone unturned to implement laws without any discrimination, adding, “The purpose of this initiative is to strengthen the relations between the people and police and through Radio Police FM, people will be able to help the police in preventing enemies’ plans from succeeding.”

Once fully in place, Radio Police FM will feature a mix of entertainment, such as music, call-in shows, Afghan Police information, and first-hand news. It will not only entertain, but also inform the public about the service and achievements of people and in which areas public support is needed. For instance, the Chief of Community Policing will run a weekly show, promoting the 1-1-9 emergency hotline to report crimes, cases of corruption, and suspicious activities. This will encourage people to help the police, report crimes and criminals, and provide feedback on policing efforts.

Afghans, in general, and Kabul citizens, in particular, have voiced their pleasure over establishment of Radio Police FM. In

interviews, some Kabul citizens said that this radio program will be instrumental in educating the public and increasing awareness of law enforcement efforts without any favoritism, ultimately closing the distance between the public and police.

In an encouraging move to recognize Afghanistan’s National Security Forces, and particularly to appreciate the sacrifices of Afghan National Police, the Director of Public Affairs department of MoI named the program, “The Voice of the Heroes,” as a colloquial name for the newly established Police Radio FM 96.5.

MoI’s public affairs department believes that Radio Police FM is not a one-way channel of communication; it will actively engage with listeners and eventually instill trust and confidence in the police force. This radio channel will enable listeners to communicate directly with MoI officials and share their concerns, complaints, and suggestions, and receive security-related information firsthand.

Other important objectives of this radio program are to help counter the malicious propaganda of insurgents, strengthen counterterrorism and counter-narcotics efforts, and fight against crimes in Afghanistan.

According to MoI officials, Radio Police FM is the start of a large-scale project that will initially cover Kabul province and its surroundings, and, in the near future, its coverage will extend to other provinces of Afghanistan.

The current Radio Police FM programs in Kabul will be fine-tuned according to the audiences’ needs before reaching out to the provinces in the near future.

Moreover, the station will hopefully provide an opportunity for MoI’s international advisers to inform audiences of their mandate and the continuing support they are offering to

reform policing and the wider justice sector in Afghanistan.

The launch of Radio Police FM comes as the MoI’s 1-1-9 emergency helpline is gaining traction in six provinces of Afghanistan, allowing citizens to inform the police about any suspicious activities that they see or hear about.

MoI’s emergency 1-1-9 helpline has already helped the police in neutralizing a number of insurgent plans in different parts of the country. So far, this service has helped MoI and Afghan Police institutions in the provinces establish constructive ties with the public by receiving information from them that allowed police to prevent hundreds of explosions, including suicide bombings, in different areas of Afghanistan, especially on roads and highways. ♦





Reaching Out to Diverse Communities via Social Media

By **Sandra Spagnoli**, Chief of Police, San Leandro, California, Police Department

The San Leandro, California, Police Department has implemented Weibo, a Chinese social media resource, to improve communications with the Chinese community in San Leandro and throughout the Bay Area region. In a report by the *Business Insider* in 2013, San Leandro was ranked the fifth most diverse city in the United States.¹ Additionally, Weibo has millions of users in the Bay Area and throughout the United States. Community outreach can be a challenge for local governments due to language barriers and trust. Recognizing the need to be able to work with the entire community, the San Leandro Police Department sought effective ways to enhance communications with the significantly large Chinese population it serves.

The San Leandro Police Department made a commitment to find a new and innovative solution for better and more effective communication with the Chinese-speaking community. Sina Weibo (Weibo) was identified as a potential solution to aid in the communications efforts. Weibo is a Chinese microblogging social media site based in China. Similar to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Weibo is one of the most popular sites in China and used by well over 30 percent of Internet users with a market penetration similar to that of Twitter in the United States. As of 2012, it has over 503 million registered users, many of whom reside in the United States and San Francisco Bay Area. About 100 million messages are posted each day on Weibo. After researching this social media platform, the department identified this tool as having the greatest potential to most effectively communicate with the local Chinese community. There was only one other law enforcement agency using this platform, the Alhambra Police Department in California, with 40,000 followers, which is where San Leandro learned about the platform.

Social media outreach has been instituted by many public agencies across the United States. The major challenge to sustain a successful program is allocating a dedicated resource to manage the sites. Because Weibo is a Chinese social media

site, finding a bilingual staff member to manage the site proved to be an initial challenge for the department. The department recognized this as an opportunity to reach out to the community to collaborate on this project, thereby partnering with someone who could assist the department in a meaningful way. One of the founding members of the Chief's Advisory Board was Mr. Cartier Lee. As a Chinese-speaking bilingual community member, he volunteered to take on this specialized and unique task. In October 2014, Mr. Lee stepped up to the challenge and created a Weibo account for the San Leandro Police Department. He helped to create a manner for the department to send out crime prevention information; share updates and program information; and, more importantly, gather input from the Chinese community. He also helps communicate important information, as well as answering questions and providing the needed access to the department and staff. The program was an instant success and has grown exponentially.

Key to the success of Weibo is assigning dedicated staff to manage the account. Mr. Lee has volunteered countless hours to managing the Weibo site. Through his hard work and dedication, the San Leandro Police Department now has more than 221,000 followers, which is significant since it was only recently launched. The feedback from community members has been tremendous. The department has received phone calls, Christmas cards, and written correspondence from Chinese community members thanking the agency for this effort to improve communication and relationships. Perhaps the most gratifying result has been the interest from several California law enforcement agencies that are now corresponding with the San Leandro Police Department in order to bring the program to their agency. This one effort by the San Leandro Police Department has the potential to positively impact the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the Chinese-speaking community throughout California. Through the use of social media and community involvement,

the department has been able to improve community relations at no cost to the taxpayers. The results are measurable through the large number of followers (which is growing weekly) and daily correspondence with community members. Additionally, the department has collaborated with local media partners to maximize the exposure and increase the publicity and awareness of this effort. The department now has monthly interviews with *Sing Tao News* and continues to receive callers during the show who are thanking the department for the communication, program information, and overall efforts at building partnerships with the Chinese community. The program continues to prosper and grow, mostly due to the efforts of a dedicated volunteer for the department. It is significant to note that the program is fully operating with volunteer efforts only, which provide immeasurable results to the department.

Communicating with a highly diverse community can be a challenge for local government, especially for a law enforcement agency. The San Leandro Police Department has embraced the challenge; Weibo has created an opportunity to meet these important goals to enhance communication with the Chinese-speaking community. ❖

Note:

¹Megan Willett, "The Most Diverse Cities In The US," *Business Insider*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-most-diverse-cities-in-the-us-2013-7> (accessed August 13, 2015).



Cartier Lee has been a founding member of the Police Chief's Advisory Board and volunteers his time to coordinate Weibo.



AC4P Policing: Cultivating Positive Police-Community Relations

By **E. Scott Geller**, PhD, Alumni Distinguished Professor, Center for Applied Behavior Systems, Department of Psychology, Virginia Tech, and **Bobby Kipper**, Director, National Center for the Prevention of Community Violence

Throughout the years, experts have struggled to define the term “police culture.” For most, this label means a reactive approach to keeping people safe by using punitive consequences to punish or detain perpetrators of crimes. As a result, more attention is given to the negative *reactive* side of policing than a positive *proactive* approach to preventing crime by cultivating an interdependent culture of residents looking out for the safety, health, and well-being of each other. We believe police officers can play a critical and integral role in achieving such a community of compassion—a culture of actively caring for people (AC4P).

The AC4P Movement

Scott Geller coined the term “actively caring” in 1990 while working with a team of safety leaders at Exxon Chemical in Baytown, Texas. His vision was to cultivate a brother/sister keeper’s culture in which everyone looks out for each other’s safety on a daily basis. The team agreed “actively caring for people” was an ideal label for this company-wide paradigm shift. Most people do care about the well-being of others, but relatively few individuals “act” on behalf of such caring. The challenge was to get everyone to act effectively on their caring—to *actively care*.

Following the Virginia Tech (VT) tragedy on April 16, 2007, when an armed student took the lives of 32 students and faculty and injured 17 others, the AC4P concept took on a new focus and prominence for Dr. Geller and his students. In a time of great uncertainty and reflection, those most affected by the tragedy were not thinking about themselves, but rather were acting to help classmates, friends, and even strangers heal. This collective effort was manifested in an AC4P movement for culture change, making the inclusive spirit of the Hokie community even stronger. Dr. Geller and his students envisioned applying the principle of positive reinforcement to spread this AC4P movement beyond VT’s Blacksburg campus.

They took green silicon wristbands, embossed with “Actively Caring for People,” and added a numbering system to enable

computer tracking of the AC4P process: *See, Act, Pass, and Share* (SAPS). The SAPS process asks individuals and groups to look for AC4P behavior and reward such AC4P behavior with a green wristband.

Wristband recipients are then requested to look for AC4P behavior in others and pass on the wristband. They are asked to document this exchange (including the nature of their AC4P behavior) at the AC4P website, along with the wristband number. In this way, a positive recognition process is tracked worldwide as AC4P communication.

Let’s consider the profound value of police officers becoming AC4P agents of cultivating cultures of interdependent compassion. We believe such a proactive AC4P approach can help shift the common perception of the police officer as one who reacts to criminal activity with negative consequences to the police officer as a community servant who helps to prevent crime with positive consequences. Now more than ever this perceptual and protocol shift is needed.

Shifting Perceptions and Procedures

Bobby Kipper’s career in policing began in the mid-seventies when he became a police officer in his hometown in southeastern Virginia. He spent the first decade in the department patrolling various neighborhoods and learning that police basically exist as a reactive force to reduce community conflict and crime. He and his colleagues played the role of the community’s “hammer” against crime. Disorder and disobedience were met with negative consequences. Such reactive policing was defined as incident-driven policing.

Substantial research has established this form of policing to have limited impact on preventing or reducing crime. Bobby argues this has negatively affected the perception of the police officer’s role in the community through the lens of both police officers and the citizens they serve. No one calls the police when things are orderly and positive, and few commend a police officer for preventing unlawful behavior. Instead, interpersonal interactions involving police focus on the negative choices and behaviors of the citizens. And the media’s focus on a few

dramatically adverse interactions between police and citizens exacerbates a negative perception and mistrust of police officers.

The division between reactive-punitive and proactive-relational policing is the cause of much controversy facing law enforcement today. There’s no doubt law enforcement could have a greater impact through proactive relationship-building than the typical reactionary measures. The need to institutionalize a change in thinking, attitude, and behavior is obvious. How can we make this happen?

First, we must move beyond programs and adopt a process mind-set. Programs end, but a process continues, evolves, and successively improves. We believe this process can be AC4P Policing. AC4P has been researched, implemented, and proven successful in various settings across the world, from industry to educational and community settings. But it has not yet been implemented by police officers.

The AC4P process is based on applied behavioral science and involves a shift in mind-set about the role and nature of “consequences.” With AC4P, consequences are used to increase the quantity and improve the quality of desirable behavior. Police officers need to be educated about the rationale behind using more positive than negative consequences to manage behavior and trained on how to deliver positive consequences in ways that help to cultivate interpersonal trust and actively caring behavior among police officers and the citizens they serve. ❖

For more information contact Bobby Kipper at bobbykipper@solveviolence.com. To learn more about the AC4P movement, visit www.ac4p.org.



Mindful Conversations: Historical Trauma, Policing, and Cultural Competence

By **Sharlene Graham Boltz, JD**, Professor of Law, Salmon P. Chase College of Law, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, Kentucky

Recent events in Baltimore, Maryland, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, have revealed festering wounds that serve to thwart effective policing in the United States. These wounds persist as a consequence of a collective absence of courage to confront difficult issues with mindful, intentional reflection and self-examination of those systems that exacerbate the historical traumas experienced by our inner-city communities. The protests on the streets are an expression of frustration and outrage by citizens who are historically traumatized by systems they are powerless to alter. And yet, as tensions mount, the time to consider alternative approaches to address the concerns of traumatized citizens and frustrated law enforcement is urgent. Time is up!

Mark Wynn, former Nashville, Tennessee, police lieutenant and nationally recognized expert stated, "When you train someone to be a cop, anyone in this country, you train them to challenge when confronted. You train them to interrogate when suspicious. You train them to [use] fighting skills that no one else has. You train them how to use weapons. You train them how to deal with conflict. You teach them all these skills, and then you add all of that to someone who is violent, you've got a lethal combination on your hands..."¹ While these comments were provided in the context of domestic abuse, those statements are no less true when the issue involves perceptions

of misuse, if not the realities of abuse, of power by a law enforcement officer. If the stated goal is to provide a community with effective policing by law enforcement, then such policing must be provided with a deep understanding of historical trauma and a deliberate infusion of cultural competence. The answer requires a commitment to engage in systemic, moderated, and mindful trauma-informed conversations that examine historical traumas, policing agendas, and the cultural competencies desperately needed to address persistent tensions. No quick fixes will suffice. No limited series of public town hall meetings, which merely provide a forum for all sides to give voice to grievances, will serve the purpose of peaceful and purposeful informed policing of diverse communities.

Mindful conversations of the issues expressed by these protests can be painful. The conversations will expose bias and prejudice, both implicit and explicit, which are uncomfortable and painful to witness. And yet, as anyone who has experienced the process necessary to clean a wound so that healing can occur will attest, pain and discomfort is unavoidable and necessary.

Three collaborative models of restorative justice are worthy of consideration when designing a structured process of mindful conversations. The first program to consider is the Peacemaking Program of the Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation, which seeks to establish a transformative process

of healing from conflict. A component of the Peacemaking Program, particularly relevant to current tensions experienced between law enforcement and communities, is the Life Value Engagements Program. Life Value Engagements consist of a designated instructor who guides an individual or a group through a deliberative process of problem solving. The Life Value Engagements Program requires personal accountability and a willingness by the participants to grapple with sensitive issues through dynamic dialogues through the lens of stories and teaching, thus allowing for levels of self-realization to emerge.²

A second model to consider is based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions created in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa. Truth Commissions are utilized internationally by countries emerging from severe social conflict. These commissions operate on the principle assumption that the investigative process itself and resulting historical narratives will lead to justice and reconciliation. Admittedly, Truth Commissions have received mixed reviews for their effectiveness.³ However, the structure and other lessons learned by their creation that can contribute to the restoration of faith and trust in law enforcement are noteworthy.

Final consideration should be given to the work of Lee Mun Wah and The Art of Mindful Facilitation.⁴ The practice of mindful facilitation seeks to stimulate authentic dialogues on race, gender, and sexism issues that can plague an institution. The mindfully facilitated conversation structure is informative and would support the goal to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the public, develop cultural competencies, and provide effective community policing.

This mindful conversation should be moderated by individuals trained in mindful engagement of difficult conversations and educated in the concerns of law enforcement and the citizenry. Those dialogues should be conducted internally within police departments and state-wide law enforcement agencies, as well as externally with the citizens directly impacted by historical trauma. Some of the issues raised will not be novel



and will involve complex, intersecting issues of class, race, and ethnicity, as well as historical policing practices that have contributed to the traumatization of the community at issue. However, systemic change demands that participants roll up their collective sleeves, be brave and committed, and get to work.

The cost of systemic engagement in mindful conversations does not exceed the amounts paid to citizens who have experienced excessive policing that reveals the absence of cultural competence and an understanding of historical traumas. The cost of moderated, mindful conversations is an investment in effective community-policing

strategies that engage the concerns of all constituencies. The trauma experience caused by the death of a human being on our city streets merits the greatest scrutiny by all professionals who answer the call to serve. ❖

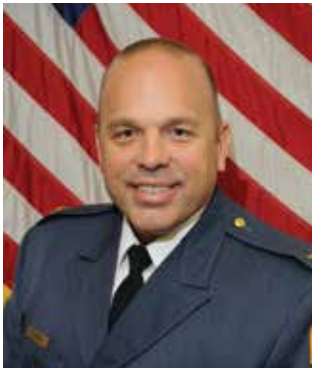
Notes:

¹Mark Wynn (police lieutenant (ret.)), Nashville, TN, Police Department), interview by FRONTLINE, "How to Combat Officer-Involved Domestic Violence," November 23, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/criminal-justice/death-in-st-augustine/how-to-combat-officer-involved-domestic-violence> (accessed July 27, 2015).

²Peacemaking Program of the Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation, *Plan of Operations*, July 30, 2012, <http://www.navajocourts.org/Peacemaking/Plan/PPPO2013-2-25.pdf> (accessed July 27, 2015).

³Michal Ben-Josef Hirsch, Megan Mackenzie, and Mohamed Sesay, "Measuring the Impacts of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Placing the Global 'Success' of TRCs in Local Perspective," *Cooperation and Conflict* 47, no. 3 (September 2012): 386–403.

⁴Lee Mun Wah, *The Art of Mindful Facilitation* (Los Angeles, CA: StirFry Seminars and Consulting, 2004).



Safe Summer Nights: Community Engagement—One Hotdog at a Time

By **Todd Axtell**, Assistant Chief, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Police Department

Law enforcement agencies understand that community engagement builds trust and reduces criminal activity within the communities we serve. What we, as law enforcement professionals, sometimes forget is that we do not have to go about this important task of engaging with the community by ourselves. It is okay to accept help and guidance from our community partners. In Saint Paul, Minnesota, we learned that we needed our community partners to do it right.

During the spring of 2014, Tom Campion, a Saint Paul resident and owner of Superb Meats, contacted me with an idea. Over breakfast, Mr. Campion offered to recruit some local business owners and community leaders to join him in serving food in the most challenged areas of Saint Paul. He wanted to bring the Saint Paul community together in a way that had not been done before. Mr. Campion offered to donate, prepare, and serve hotdogs and hamburgers for the community in cooperation with the Saint Paul Police Department.

The goal was that the community would not just come out to eat a free meal, but get to know their neighbors and, even more importantly, their neighborhood police officers. A simple plan for a hotdog and hamburger cookout snowballed into a 13-week program throughout Saint

Paul called Safe Summer Nights. This program ultimately evolved into a large joint cooperative operation between the Saint Paul Police Department and other neighborhood businesses. Mr. Campion drew overwhelming support from local restaurateurs and businesses, in addition to other anonymous donors and dozens of volunteers. The dedicated group of volunteers and organizers contributed food, beverages, and treats, along with their valuable personal time. Together, they served more than 10,000 meals at recreation centers and parks throughout Saint Paul during the summer of 2014.

These Safe Summer Nights events attracted thousands of attendees and enabled our officers and residents to become acquainted over a meal, rather than during times of trouble. Specialty units—including SWAT, ODU, Motors, K9, and Mounted—and street officers attended the events. The program was a big hit with the kids and our community at large. Saint Paul Parks and Recreation provided a climbing wall and bounce gym, and officers gave out "Junior Crime-Fighter" stickers and baseball cards to the youngsters. While parents chatted with officers, their kids enjoyed time visiting with our canines and horses and sitting on our police motorcycles. One of our more creative officers

volunteered to be a face-painter. The connections we made with the community at these 13 events over the summer were priceless.

Aside from building community relationships, Safe Summer Nights had a remarkable effect on crime as well. During the evenings when these events occurred, crime was non-existent in those neighborhoods and overall crime dropped over 6 percent in Saint Paul (2014 vs. 2013). We understand that there is no specific community outreach event that will reduce crime on its own, but we have no doubt that Safe Summer Nights greatly contributed to the community's livability and sense of safety during those events.

Mr. Campion's dedication to and stewardship of Safe Summer Nights events connected our community to police in a way that we had not observed before in Saint Paul, Minnesota. This created lasting bonds of cooperation and improved trust and understanding.

The Safe Summer Nights program was so successful that it is continuing in an even bigger way this year (2015). The program has been recognized in the media and received many awards from the American Red Cross and other accredited organizations. ❖



Community Policing Efforts in Columbia Heights, Minnesota

Matthew J. Stiehm, EdD, Consultant, Stiehm Solutions Consulting, LLC; **Scott Nadeau**, Chief, Columbia Heights, Minnesota, Police Department; and **Erik Johnston**, Sergeant, Columbia Heights, Minnesota, Police Department

In 2008, the Columbia Heights Police Department (CHPD) was stuck in a rut of high crime per capita and repeated calls for service. The new administration recognized a change in policing strategy was needed to make any meaningful headway. What resulted was an organizational transformation that put community-oriented policing (COP) at the forefront and a department-wide philosophy that converted patrol officers from call-takers to empowered problem solvers.

Inception and Implementation

To initiate this transformation, the CHPD implemented the position of Community Policing Coordinator—a sworn officer whose full-time job was split between establishing community partnerships and acting as a liaison for other officers tasked with community policing responsibilities. Officers were trained by direct supervisors through in-service activities on best practice methods for dealing with problem areas and building relationships using a combination of intelligence-led and COP-based policing methods. While the coordinator often served as a spearhead for various community-based efforts, the heavy lifting was done by all of the officers and supervisors throughout the department. Officers of the CHPD were first encouraged to become involved in at least one of the police department's community policing initiatives designed to forge positive relationships with the community. Eventually, non-sworn officers were introduced into the lineup and participation in community policing initiatives became required.

Having officers interface with the public, especially the community's youth, in a positive way quickly transformed the relationship between the officers and the community they served. After three years of having officers heavily involved in community policing initiatives, the time spent by officers on proactive COP activities went from almost zero to over 4,000 hours in one year.

The change in strategies resulted in measured improvements in many areas. The most notable difference was a consecutive 30-year low in reported crime, with the

Columbia Heights crime rate decreasing to a much better rate than county, regional, state, and U.S. indices. The CHPD received recognition from local and county elected officials, received the International Association of Chiefs of Police Community Policing Award for 2012, and observed a drastic reduction in youth-related crimes and arrests of juveniles. In 2014, a community survey was conducted by the CHPD, and 94 percent of the respondents rated the police department positively and indicated that they felt safe from crime in their neighborhood.

Evaluation

Between 2007 and 2013, crime went down in every category, with many categories seeing reductions over 50 percent, including both violent and property crimes. An analysis shows that juvenile arrests did not fall in the first year of COP-related efforts, but fell considerably over time, totaling 50 percent during the six-year period. Adult arrests also showed a sharp decline.

In summary, the CHPD recorded a significant reduction in both reported crime and juvenile arrests following the implementation of a department-wide community policing philosophy. At the same time, the police department improved its relationship with the community and strategic partners. Our findings support the assertion that COP effectiveness is tied to organizational structure, direction, and support. We continue to make the case that COP is not the job of the one or the few, but is really a core department philosophy that requires participation at all levels. The following is a list of recommendations based on the experience in Columbia Heights.

Recommendations

The COP approach requires that a more traditional law enforcement agency transform itself to align with COP principles.

- Help officers understand the core principles of COP through training on all aspects of COP and actively involve officers in the learning process.

- The best way to plan for a transition to COP is to have a detailed strategic plan that covers all of the goals and objectives desired. All department personnel, including line staff, should have input on the plan, and the plan should be reviewed regularly (e.g., monthly or quarterly) to ensure that the transition, goals, and objectives are being accomplished.
- Incorporate community feedback and consider a variety of forums in which you can receive this feedback, which should be incorporated into strategic planning and decision-making processes.
- Ensure that COP is not just the job of the few, but is everyone's job on some level. It is only through active participation that most officers will have a full understanding of the true meaning and benefits of COP. Officers not properly trained or actively involved in COP will often have misconceptions on what COP is and what it seeks to do in the community. Officers should be actively encouraged or required to participate in COP-related activities on a regular basis.
- Agency resources and budgets should be aligned with making COP a priority and ensure that resource allocation is consistent with the agency's COP strategy. ❖

A full copy of the research study may be found at www.chpolice.com.



Houston's Homeless Outreach Team

By **George T. Buenik**, Executive Assistant Chief, Houston, Police Department, Houston, Texas

Police officers in major cities have been tasked to deal with people suffering from mental illnesses and drug addictions, as well as people who are living on the streets. City and county jails often find themselves housing persons with mental illness, drug addicts, and homeless people. Most of these incarcerated people have committed some minor crimes that have come to the attention of the police, but jail may not be the proper place for them. Social service agencies have a better chance of assisting and changing people's situations than incarceration in jails. Houston Police Department's (HPD) Police Chief, Charles A. McClelland, Jr., firmly believes in this philosophy, and he created the department's Mental Health Division (MHD), which is currently commanded by Captain Wendy Baimbridge. The Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) was placed under the supervision of this division because many of the chronic homeless population struggle with mental illnesses or drug addictions.

HPD started up HOT in 2011 to provide better service to those people with mental illness and those people living on the street. The HOT team is made up of one sergeant, four officers, and three case managers from the Mental Health and the Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA) of Harris County, Texas. Sergeant Steve Wick, the team's current supervisor, developed and implemented the program. The team works closely with several organizations, including but not limited to SEARCH Homeless Services, Star of Hope, Salvation Army, U.S.VETS, DeGeorge Veterans Housing, and Goodwill. MHMRA case managers ride with Houston police officers in a marked vehicle to address calls for service involving either people with mental illness or people who are homeless to provide them with advice, services, referrals, transportation, and housing alternatives. The HOT also proactively approaches consumers in a friendly non-confrontational manner to check on their wellness. HOT's mission is to reduce the number of people living homeless on the streets of Hous-

ton. It includes intervention and outreach efforts for individuals who are homeless due to life-altering events, mental illness, addictions, or other disabilities. The team's duties and responsibilities include engaging the homeless community and acting as a liaison between the homeless community, service providers, law enforcement agencies, and the citizens of Houston. They further provide for the safety of the community, consumer, and Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) caseworker. HOT provides valuable assistance and expertise to police officers on the street who do not interact with this population on a daily basis.

HOT officers assisting the homeless found out that many did not have the proper identification to obtain state and federal benefits. HOT has worked with the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Social Security Administration to develop a process for obtaining replacement identifi-

cation for people who are homeless. This process has allowed many people to properly claim benefits that they were eligible for, but could not receive due to lack of proper identification. It also has enhanced the police relationships with Houston's homeless population. HOT officers know the names of the people living on the street and check with them on a regular basis to see how they are doing. Homeless people now come forward to report when they are victims of crime. This relationship has also assisted in developing information on criminal leads in and around the areas where the homeless reside. Officers know who lives in certain areas and can approach them for assistance in solving cases.

HOT makes approximately 200 consumer contacts per month and made over 4,500 referrals for service in 2014.¹ Officers patrol areas where the homeless congregate on foot patrols and with marked vehicles and bicycles. An all-terrain vehicle is also used to reach homeless encampments in heavy brush or wooded areas.

The success of the MHD is due in large part to the collaboration that exists between the Houston Police Department, mental health professionals in Houston and Harris County, and advocacy groups. HOT has received national and international recognition for their collaborative approach to addressing the homeless issues utilizing community policing strategies. We believe that HPD is the leader in this fieldwork, and this program has benefited all police officers, MHMRA case managers, Houston citizens, and the consumers who receive the services provided. ♦

Note:

¹Houston Police Department, Mental Health Division, *2014 Annual Report*, Homeless Outreach Team (July 2015).

