

MODULE 7:  
THE NEXT CRITICAL ISSUE

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OCTOBER 26, 2020

The Critical Issue that I will focus on will be the Future of Police Engagement in our Communities. The challenges of 2020: The Covid-19 pandemic, civil unrest, police defunding, loss of trust with our communities, proposed legislation for drastic change in policing, and the rising violent crime rate, has exasperated our police force.

The “Warrior vs Guardian” philosophy of policing is transitioning heavily to the guardian mentality. With that, policing engagement will be challenged to lead the way in bridging the trust and partnership with a fractured community. Media and negative perceptions of officer involved shootings have created a narrative that has affected the community bonds, fracturing the bridge of trust between the police and the community they serve. Community engagement and humanizing those that wear the badge will be crucial in revitalizing a healthy collaboration and progression to ensuring the safety of our neighborhoods.

“In California, juvenile crime peaks from 2 to 6 p.m. on school days, with about 35 percent of all juvenile crime on those days occurring during the hours following the last school bell” (Council for a strong America, 2019). Programs such as The Watts



Rams, where police officers in a gang riddled south LA community partnered with the LA Rams and brought youth football to the children from the inner city, provide much needed positive engagement. LAPD Officer Zarren Thompson spearheaded an effort to provide the youth the opportunity to

not only don shoulder pads, helmet, and a football jersey, they also learn to work in unison in facing challenges and adversity. Organized team sports provides the discipline, dedication, and the mutual respect of others. The Watts Rams program empower these kids to focus on football and positive teamwork, while providing a safe environment.

The parents of these kids as well as the community are introduced to these officers who have devoted their time to improve the gang riddled violent neighborhoods. The officers actions have potentially changed the direction and the



lives of these youngsters with this opportunity.

Our hispanic and African-American communities struggle to combat gang crime and recruitment. A program like the Watts Rams provides the gateway to avoid the negative environment of gang, drugs, and the false glamour of the thug lifestyle. “Work past the badge and give us a chance,” explains

Thompson, “and I guarantee you, we will make a difference in your child’s life” (2020).

Operations Shoes From Santa (OSS) was created by two LAPD officers, whose yearly program provides over a thousand pair of new shoes to children from financially challenged families. This venture has been a mainstay with the Olympic division of the LAPD since 2012. Officers in collaboration with neighboring schools in the community, identify the youth and their families that are in need for much needed shoes.



These families and their siblings are invited to the station for a night of festivities and a pair of brand new shoes. This type of engagement is crucial to provide for the youth in the

community. In 2012, LAPD Chief Beck commented on the officers' engagement efforts as he stated, "They always look for ways to reach out to the community and make things better. This is such a great example of that. ...It's a terrific bunch of men and women. They have a real bond with the community, and that's evidenced by what they're doing here. They spend a lot of time, a lot of energy — they used a lot of



contacts to make this happen. It's just very heart-warming" (Blevins, 2012).

The LAPD Read Along program provides weekly officer-led story time reads in six different libraries to enrich and promote literacy and learning for our youth.

“Getting them reading at a young age and heading in that direction gives them a much better chance of success,' explains LAPD Officer Joseph Oseguera. He adds that feedback about the program has been positive and the LAPD



Read Along is helping the department strengthen its relationships with families” (Chamberlain, 2017).

“If you’re not listening to the community and keeping your finger on the pulse of their needs, you’re going to miss the boat,” says San Bernardino Police Department Lieutenant Mike Madden. “You don’t want to wait until an emergency comes up to try to rally the community behind you. The relationships and trust must be established long before that time” (Chamberlain, 2017). This statement is vital for departments across the nation to consider as the future of engagement will face considerable challenges of distrust, racial inequality perception, and proper service to the community.

“In 2011, the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was born. A collaboration between the LAPD and the city Housing Authority, the program placed an additional 30 officers in public housing developments in Watts. To head up the initiative, the police turned to Sergeant Emada Tingirides...(who) looked for officers who were interested in relationship building, not suppression. More than 300 applied. Over the course of the



following year, the police started a football team, the Watts Bears (now the Rams), as well as a Girl Scout troop. They sponsored dances and raised money for scholarships.

The results over the next few years were staggering. Shootings by young men and women fell by two-thirds.

Homicides dropped nearly to zero in the



housing developments where the program was in place” (Buntin, 2015). The CSP program serves as a model and a philosophy for officers supporting and partnering with a specific community in need, utilizing positive engagement rather than traditional enforcement methods to achieve crime reduction, as well as quality of life improvement.

A recent UCLA study conducted by Adjunct Professor Jorja Leap found that, “CSP serve(s) as a model for department-wide LAPD policing efforts. The relationship-based focus could also be helpful in other crisis situations, including public health problems such as opioid abuse or the current coronavirus pandemic” (Dunseith, 2020). Leap further explained the multi-usage approach for this type of program as “It could be extremely useful for epidemic crises, including homelessness and the pandemic... This is the type of approach that represents a new and important paradigm in law enforcement” (Dunseith, 2020).

The success of the CSP program and its continued expansion to more communities is crucial for long term benefits. The recruitment and acquisition of officers that will work and find success within this program will be the challenging hurdle for departments nationwide. The "Guardian" mentality of the officers have to be adopted for this partnership and trust to take place.

Engagement and participation in a Community Police Academy is another important cog in educating and providing transparency to our daily challenges and duties. Departments such as the LAPD, "Provide community members with an inside look at the Police department and various facets of law enforcement...during the eleven-week academy, students will be introduced to police operations...organization of the LAPD and its history" (LAPD, 2020).

In conclusion, the future of police engagement will require the properly trained and motivated officer, willing to work collaboratively using multiple programs with diverse groups, to foster trust and help make positive changes in the communities they serve.

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