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GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP POLICE BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST BEYOND BODY CAMERAS

The deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson MS, Freddie Gray in Baltimore MD, and Tamir Rice in Cleveland OH, as well other encounters with police throughout the country through the years 2014-2016 brought tremendous unrest, concern, and a lack of trust between the police and their communities. This nationwide epidemic of distrust created a dangerous environment for everyone. It is clear that the foundation of effective policing and overall community safety is embedded in the principle of confidence in law enforcement. It was imperative that community leaders take drastic measures to ensure that all community members have faith not only in their police departments but also the local government leaders who are charged with managing the law enforcement officers that serve their communities.

Fortunately, in the community of Gloucester Township the Gloucester Township Police Department and the Gloucester Township local government invested in community policing in 2010 long before the country focused on community partnership models. The Gloucester Township Police Department's new policing model focused heavily on being more visible and interactive with community members, assisting at-risk populations, and so much more. However, despite the strong relationships that existed with community members, there was no denying that the controversies surrounding police departments and their communities all over the country affected every police department. It was paramount that elected officials and local police leaders acknowledged the controversy and implemented strategies to ensure their constituents have faith in the local government and their police department.

Many police agencies believed, and some still do, that the answer to building trust was simply placing a body camera on an officer's shirt. The Gloucester Township Police Department quickly recognized that a body camera alone does not build trust with the community. Beginning in the late summer of 2017 the department launched a specific campaign to build community trust in very unique ways in addition to outfitting all Gloucester Township Police Officers with body worn cameras. The police body camera is simply a tool, and tools do not change mindsets. Policy, education, understanding bias, fostering community partnerships, and creating strategies to fight crime that involve more than arrest changes mindsets.

The flagship of the Building Community Trust Beyond Body Cameras Initiative was the deployment of the department's Community Outreach Vehicle. The Community Outreach Vehicle is a re-purposed 25 foot mobile command vehicle. With the support of Gloucester Township Mayor, David Mayer, and Gloucester Township Council the department turned the former command vehicle into a rolling community center. The vehicle was wrapped in a community theme, outfitted with video games, has an interior meeting room, and is filled with hands on outdoor games such as bean bag toss, Jengo, and Can Jam.

As a result of this new initiative, Police Officers visit neighborhoods and attend community events on a regular basis with the outreach vehicle and while on general patrol. This initiative was about changing

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the mindsets of both the citizens of the community and the officers. A stark difference than agencies who just elected to record officers and not change their beliefs or practices. Neighborhoods are chosen at random and also are selected based on recent occurrences of criminal incidents or police operations. For example, if a drug search warrant is executed in a neighborhood or apartment complex, door hangers are left on residents doors, lawn signs are placed on corners, and social media postings all announce that the Community Outreach Vehicle and officers will be in the neighborhood the next day. The images are powerful - At one moment SWAT Officers are storming a home arresting a person selling drugs and within twenty-four hours children in the very same neighborhood are playing lawn games with officers and parents are talking with a Community Relations Officer in the mobile meeting room. These are relationships that cannot simply be built with a body camera.

In addition to being equipped with games, the Community Outreach Vehicle is also equipped with phone charging stations and visits neighborhoods to help residents charge their phones during power outages – both during the winter storms of 2018 and the summer storms of this most recent summer.

An often overlooked absolutely necessary component of building trust is the development and training of police officers in understanding the communities in which they serve. The entire Building Trust Beyond Body Camera Initiative focused not only on residents getting to know the officers, but perhaps even more importantly is the officers getting to know the community members. The Community Outreach Vehicle was developed to foster instances of non enforcement police contact with neighborhood residents. It is so important for police officers to have positive experiences with the communities they serve as it alters their perspective and humanizes the people they are serving. This type of familiarization and education is priceless when attempting to build trust.

The Community Outreach Vehicle may be the most visible piece of the Building Trust Beyond Body Camera Initiative but it just only one of the many actions associated with this effort. Other measures that were implemented from July 2017 – July 2018 include:

1. De-escalation training for every officer.
2. Use of force training with a use of force simulator for every officer
3. Implicit bias training for every officer.
4. Officer community exposure – new officers are required to work at a food bank, clothing bank or homeless shelter during their initial new hire training.
5. Establishment of specialty community liaison officers – LGBTQ, African American, Latino
6. Establishment of a recruitment team to build a more diverse workforce.
7. Implementation of a volunteer program. Police volunteers assist at events, including events with the Community Outreach Vehicle. The use of volunteers helps build community trust and exposes officer to more diverse community members.
8. Develop a stronger internship program to expose officers to more diverse individuals.
9. Construction of a Children's Garden to assist youth exposed to violence.
10. Create a citizen ride along as part of our Citizens Police Academy.
11. Police policy changes/implementation: Transgender Interactions, Recruitment and Career Opportunities, Hearing Impaired Interactions, Volunteers in Policing, Body Worn Cameras, Bias Free Policing, Liaisons Units, and Social Media.

The overall Building Trust Beyond Body Camera Initiative not only ensured that the Gloucester Township Police Department maintained its positive working relationship with the community, but also has helped developed a new generation of officers who are more culturally competent, better trained, and ultimately safer as they perform their duties. The feedback from community members, civic groups, and neighborhood leaders has been greatly positive. It is understood that police must make arrests, but when a police agency focuses solely or heavily on arrest and ignores or diminishes the role of building relationships and the value of non-enforcement contact they lose their capacity to most efficiently fight crime. Every police agency needs the community to help them fight crime and this initiative has resulted in continued drastic reductions in crime. Overall crime in Gloucester Township has decreased 34% and violent crime has decreased 53% (2009-2017) with even further reductions on pace for the year 2018. Crime reductions in a community transcend into great economic savings as businesses find the community attractive, homeowners seek a safe community, and there is a general atmosphere of safety which is critical to a community's success.

This effort is not a campaign but a long standing change in policing policy and practice. Although some communities may have difficulty acquiring a Community Outreach Vehicle, they can easily accomplish the same goals of community interaction, increased non-enforcement contact, and neighborhood visits after crime activity or criminal incidents with must less expense. An older patrol vehicle designated for the same purpose would easily suffice in a start up program. As noted, the Community Outreach Vehicle was only one piece of this initiative, the many other actions as noted on page two, can be done by any police agency at little or even no cost.

Below is a picture of the Community Outreach Vehicle.

