



TRENDING CHANGES IN POLICING

by - Commander Eric Prutzman, St. Joseph Police Department

As we move forward in policing, we continually need to reevaluate how calls for service are handled and what type of response is needed. The community and its citizens deserve the best policing has to offer along with assurance those resources are properly utilized.



As a police force, we have seen an increasing demand for officers to deal with social and mental health issues that never were or should have been handled by police. Those individuals who have mental health issues need resources trained in dealing with crisis and long-term intervention. Substance abuse leads to other long-term issues and societal problems. With both mental health and substance abuse, individuals can quickly find themselves in a homeless situation which police departments are not adequately suited to deal with. Most of these are not criminal in nature, but society often demands police involvement.

With these types of issues, police officers expend numerous hours dealing with individuals when they could spend more time working with neighborhoods and reducing crime. As a community, we need to leverage assistance from the state and federal government to provide adequate funding and resources to provide assistance to these individuals. Substance abuse counselors, social workers and

trained mental health professionals are needed while these individuals are in crisis. A team approach of medical and appropriate responders can reduce the number of calls and the amount of time police officers must spend when dealing with these situations.

Most police officers are trained in initial response to deal with individuals, but should be dispatched when there is a high potential for violence, such as when an individual has a weapon. Many situations may require only medical and crisis intervention personnel as the individuals are not criminal, just disturbing to those who see these situations unfold. Police officers are here to protect the community from criminal activity, work towards the prevention of crime and interact with citizens and neighborhoods to make an overall better community for our residents.



We are fortunate our officers are trained in mental health first aid, with some receiving more advanced Crisis Intervention Team training. We also have an individual from Family Guidance Center working closely with the police department to assist on these incidents. As the community moves forward, let us look at new ways to deal with our

homeless, those having mental health challenges and substance abuse. National models suggest police should only be sent when there is an imminent risk of harm to the medical and mental health responders. Redirecting police calls for service to a medical or mental health response with individuals who are trained specifically in dealing with these situations is an appropriate approach.

The community already has some of these resources in place, just how to best utilize these resources takes another look and approach. Some will require funding sources or potentially looking at how these resources are funded and if it is being utilized in the best possible manner. This must be a local, state and federal partnership.

