

NCPD: A CASE STUDY

In 2018, Metanoia, a faith-based nonprofit in North Charleston, facilitated the enrollment of three North Charleston Police Department (NCPD) senior officers to attend one of our Racial Equity Institute two-day workshops.

Their feedback inspired Chief Reginald Burgess to look for a way for all 340 of NCPD's officers to be trained at our REI workshops.



THE NCPD

NCPD serves roughly 90,000 residents, plus many more day workers and visitors. Its mission is to “provide professional public safety services while working in partnership with the citizens of North Charleston to identify, prevent and solve the problems of crime, social disorder and neighborhood decay, thereby improving the quality of life in our community.”

Chief Burgess (at left) recognized that the participation of his officers in our workshops would support NCPD's three central strategic themes: strengthening partnerships with the community it serves; reducing crime; and creating safe neighborhoods. “We are always looking for opportunities to further build trust and open dialogue with our citizens and communities,” he says.

THE CHALLENGES

Much of the interaction between officers and the community takes place by dispatch. With a call for service, there is already a predetermined reason why officers are there. North Charleston is a fast-paced city, and it's not unusual to have 35 calls pending each night. As a result, officers are forced to go from call to call to call. They get a quick snapshot of problems in the community without knowing the root causes of what might have led to a particular incident.

In addition to responding to a multitude of calls and patrolling, officers are also obligated to engage

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in additional training, both online and in person. Officers were wary of adding another training, particularly one that they perceived would in part present a negative portrayal of the police.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Metanoia's initial support for the three senior officers helped pave the way to a deeper understanding of REI and the need for NCPD officers to attend our workshops. We were the first to bring REI to Charleston, institutionalize it in the Lowcountry, and now expand its reach across the Southeast. Knowing our extensive, deep history in our region since 1907 also made NCPD's decision an easy one.

Once Chief Burgess committed to provide our REI workshops to his officers, a meeting took place between NCPD, Metanoia, the Coastal Community Foundation, and us. Chief Burgess shared NCPD's strategic plan, and we discussed how REI supports it. The result was a three-year Coastal Community Foundation grant to share the cost of officers' REI participation with NCPD.

NCPD RESPONSE TO REI



Since April 2019, five officers have participated each month in an REI workshop attended by other members of the community.

Former training officer Captain Andrew Glover (at left), of the NCPD Accountability Bureau, serves as NCPD lead liaison and works closely with our equity training coordinator to monitor the participation of officers and address any issues. Quarterly meetings with Chief Burgess and his commanders offer another opportunity for updates and problem solving.

What needed to be obtained first, recalls Captain Glover, was buy-in from the officers. Anticipating a negative portrayal of the police, they were initially guarded. When they realized REI was not about individual biases but the way racism shows up in all systems, including in criminal justice, many felt more receptive.

As with some other REI community participants, the officers were mandated to attend REI, and were

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not as open. “Sometimes these officers go to the class, and they talk to other officers who aren’t as open to certain classes, and they’ll get an opinion from that person on the class. But then they’ll go, and say, “No, this right here is perfect. This tells us why we’re doing what we’re doing in the community.

“When they go to classes, they think it is going to be tactically directed toward their job, they think it is going to be a tool they can use on their belt to make an arrest or continue to do their job. But when they come back, mind blown sound, this class breaks down why these issues are happening these days, and they absolutely love it. Some people will come in and say, ‘Fishing pond,’ and I’ll know exactly what they mean, while others who have not attended will say, ‘What are they talking about?’”

Because officers attend REI with community members, their demeanor is seen during the workshops. After one workshop, a community member called Chief Burgess to inform him about the demeanor of two officers during the workshop. Chief Burgess addressed them and held them accountable. He welcomes the scrutiny.

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It opens their mind so when they go to a call now, they think there’s a lot that could have happened to get this individual to this point of anger, this point of break. We’re not here because of the one incident that’s happening now, there’s a background to this. Things have been happening over time.

CAPTAIN ANDREW GLOVER

THE RESULTS

As of this writing, 108 NCPD officers of all ranks have attended our REI workshops.

Many officers have ‘aha’ moments during REI. Before COVID, when workshops were held in person, officers were able to sit alongside community members, delve into the history of racism in the US, and participate in small groups. This allowed officers to interact with the community in a completely

different manner than on the streets, and provided an opportunity to see each other's humanity.

It has taken some time, but the tone has changed after two years of officer participation in REI. Instead of Captain Glover serving as the only advocate for REI, officers are hearing about REI from their peers. REI is now a must-do and is eagerly sought after by officers.

"In the beginning, I picked who would attend, but recently I switched it up to see where we're going, to see the mindset, and I asked who wants to go," says Captain Glover. "I sent emails asking for volunteers to attend the next REI class, and within five minutes, the class was filled. I have a pool of people waiting to go."

NCPD intends to continue its partnership with us until all its officers have attended REI, and to use what is measured and learned to help develop policies and practices that will reduce disparities.

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A paradigm shift has occurred: from officers being told to attend REI to officers volunteering and being excited about attending, and seeing it as a valuable training. It makes my job easier.

CAPTAIN ANDREW GLOVER

WHAT OTHER PARTICIPANTS SAY

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This was a great seminar that broke things down in a digestible way. I have a lot to think about and this helped me shift my perspective in a myriad of ways. Context matters, and this seminar gave me historical context that I needed to fully understand the scope of what we as a nation are dealing with today. Thank you to the facilitators and YWCA!

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While I was required to attend, I found the session valuable for my continued healing, as it relates to on-the-job racism I have experienced.