

Megan Quattlebaum:

Good afternoon everyone and welcome. My name is Megan Quattlebaum, I'm the director of the Council of State Governments Justice Center. I am so thrilled to have hundreds of you tuning in from across the country today to hear about an exciting new suite of resources we have available to support our partners in law enforcement, as they work with people experiencing homelessness. People experience homelessness for a wide variety of reasons, not the least of which is our ongoing national shortage of affordable housing, but these reasons have nothing to do with law enforcement. All the same, whether they're on routine patrol or responding to a crisis call, law enforcement officers are actually the most likely to be the ones who are encountering people experiencing homelessness in their time of greatest need. Police departments across the country recognizes, and they're increasingly realizing that they actually have an incredible opportunity to be part of the solution.

Megan Quattlebaum:

They're teaming up with partners in housing and the behavioral health system to address this challenge head on. Those leading the way in this space are looking to not only improve law enforcement responses to people who are experiencing homelessness, but to dig deeper and more lasting change by connecting people to the housing and supportive services they need. By making these connections, they're not only meeting a basic human need, but also engaging in one of the most effective strategies we know of to help people reduce or prevent their involvement in the criminal justice system in the first place. Now to mention the fact that stable affordable housing gives people a strong foundation from which to start achieving other goals, like engaging in treatment, getting their physical health on track and seeking and maintaining employment. Today, we are thrilled to have an absolutely incredible program lined up for you, which we hope will equip and inspire you to start or expand this life-changing work in your community.

Megan Quattlebaum:

Before I introduce you to our speakers, I want to acknowledge and thank our partners at the United States Department of Justice's, Bureau of Justice Assistance, which supported the development of the Police Mental Health Collaboration toolkit and who have hosted it for several years now. This event today and the resources we're sharing simply wouldn't have been possible without BJA's support. As you watch this broadcast, I encourage you to participate, join the discussion. We'd love to hear your thoughts on how law enforcement can help lead the charge in addressing homelessness. You can do this on social media using the hashtag justice briefing live, or in the Vimeo comments box which you should see at the bottom of your screen. We're going to hold time at the end of the program for your questions, so please use the hashtag and the comment box and submit those along the way. After today's event, we're going to post a video, transcript in the presentation deck at the CSG Justice Center website. Please join our email list and you'll get an update when those are available.

Megan Quattlebaum:

All right, let's get to it. As I said earlier, we have a great program lined up for you today. We are so delighted to have Jeff Olivet, executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness with us today to share how this work fits into a larger federal effort to homelessness, while also centering racial equity. Jeff has worked in the areas of homelessness, behavioral health and public health for more than 25 years, including as a street outreach worker, case manager, coalition builder, activist, national trainer, technical assistance provider and as I think you'll see inspirational public speaker. He previously served as the CEO of the Center for Social Innovation, now C4 Innovations

from 2010 to 2018, and his blogs and podcasts are widely circulated, providing essential thought leadership for the field.

Megan Quattlebaum:

After Jeff's remarks, you're going to see a special video presentation from Stephan Baker, alumnus of the Amity Foundation in Los Angeles, who is going to share his story and his experiences with homelessness and the justice system and who's going to talk about how the connections and supports he got helped him break the cycle of incarceration and homelessness.

Megan Quattlebaum:

Then we moved toward the main event, the unveiling of the new responding to homelessness modules of the PMHC toolkit, which contains a wealth of new content and strategies to help law enforcement agencies and their community partners work effectively with people experiencing homelessness and connect them to what they need most, housing. Maria Fryer, policy advisor at BJA will introduce us to this exciting new resource. Charlie Francis, project manager for housing here at the CSG Justice Center will take us on a tour of all the new content we have in store for you. Finally, Maria will also serve as our esteemed panel moderator and will lead a conversation with an expert panel of practitioners from Sarasota, Florida and Wichita, Kansas, who will share their experiences using collaborative cross-system approaches to addressing homelessness in their communities.

Megan Quattlebaum:

But first, please join me in welcoming Carleton Moore, director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, who will share a message about how supporting law enforcement to do this work is a top priority for BJA. Prior to his appointment at BJA, Director Moore served as the executive director of the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, where he led Ohio's grant-making operations since 2005. He also served as the facilitator for former Ohio governor, John Kasich's Taskforce on Community Police Relations, a precursor to the Ohio Collaborative Community Police Advisory Board. Welcome and thank you so much for joining us today, Director Moore.

Carleton Moore:

Good afternoon. Thank you, Megan. On behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistant, I want to welcome you to this exciting event, on a topic that is of great importance, not only to us at BJA, but also to this administration and the nation as a whole. In recent years, we've been having some important conversations about the role of law enforcement and its relationship to our communities. These conversations are much needed and long overdue, but the fact remains that in most communities across the United States, when someone is in crisis, law enforcement officers are still the first and sometimes the only responders on the scene. For this reason, people experiencing homelessness are more likely than the general population to come into contact with law enforcement. This is especially true for those who spend their nights on the streets or in other places not meant for human habitation. One of the main reasons for this is because they are forced to conduct many basic activities of daily living, like sleeping and going to the bathroom outside.

Carleton Moore:

Many communities have laws and ordinances that make these activities illegal. Our law enforcement partners across the country often express frustration at their limited options in these situations. They know that simply issuing a citation or making an arrest does nothing to solve the underlying issue or

make their community safer. They know that without additional support, a person is likely to end up back on the street facing the same problems. In addition, once someone is involved with the criminal justice system, they are also at increased risk for future homelessness. All too often, we see a vicious cycle of homelessness and justice involvement that is difficult to break. Sadly, Black, Latinx and indigenous Americans are the most likely to be trapped in this cycle, as they are already overrepresented both in the justice system and among people experiencing homelessness, we can do better. More and more law enforcement leaders from communities across the country, urban, suburban and rural, large and small are recognizing that their officers are a critical part of this solution. Police officers are out on the streets day after day. The relationships they build through this ongoing engagement can make all the difference, in connecting someone to care and resources they desperately need, especially safe, affordable housing. Which we know from research and experience is fundamental to breaking the vicious cycle. Today you'll hear from two communities who have been doing this work for several years, Sarasota, Florida and Wichita, Kansas.

Carleton Moore:

They both have a compelling story about the difference that ongoing outreach engagement and connections to housing have made in their communities and in the lives of the people they serve. At BJA, we've also heard from so many communities who want to start or expand this work, but may not know where to begin. That is why we are thrilled today to announce the launch of our newly updated, mental health collaboration toolkit. The updated site includes a brand new section for law enforcement and community partners on effective responses to people experiencing homelessness. We know that your time is precious and so we've tried to make it easy to get to, and digest the content you need. Whether you're a chief with a short window between meetings, or an officer in your patrol car pulling this info up on a phone or a tablet, whether you're looking to develop a homeless outreach program for the first time, how to conduct more impactful outreach in your community or want to learn more about what other communities have been doing.

Carleton Moore:

Our toolkit has just the info you need. At BJA, it's our privilege to partner with you and we hope that these new resources will support you in the critical work you do every day. As I noted before, finding solutions to some of our toughest problems around homelessness and the criminal justice system is a priority that we share across the federal government. On that note, I'd like to introduce my colleague, Jeff Olivet, executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Jeff will share more about how this work fits with their larger goal of preventing and ending homeless in America.

Jeff Olivet:

Thank you Director Moore, and thank you to the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Bureau of Justice Assistance for having me. My name's Jeff Olivet, I'm the executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. We are the only federal agency with a sole mission focused on preventing and ending homelessness in America. We at USICH are excited to see law enforcement and community agencies come together around the work of embarking on a new way of responding. We're seeing a shift from criminalization of homelessness to active collaboration to solve homelessness, which at its core is a housing and services problem. In other words, if we want to end homelessness, we need to connect people with housing and supports period. USICH knows that first responders have a vital role to play working in close collaboration with housing and behavioral health systems to build these vital life-saving connections.

Jeff Olivet:

That's why I'm so pleased to be here today with my federal partners from BJA, to mark the launch of the new PMHC toolkit modules on homelessness, which will serve as a valuable resource to help build these connections across the field. Additionally, USICH is in the process of creating a new federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. We've spent hundreds of hours collecting feedback and conducting close to 100 listening sessions with people from 650 communities across the country, including more than 500 people who have experienced homelessness. Our plan will confront the criminalization of homelessness that we see happening across the country, it will advance a housing first approach to end the crisis, and it will be built on a foundation of equity. Our work together today deeply reflects these values, so let me first speak about the criminalization of, and discrimination against people without a home. Experiencing homelessness does not make someone a criminal, just like having a home does not make someone innocent.

Jeff Olivet:

In fact as most of you know, people living on the streets and in shelters and in encampments are far more likely to be victims of violent crime than perpetrators of violent crime. It is one of the many things that makes homelessness so dangerous for the people who experience it. Housing and services, not handcuffs are the solution to homelessness. Yet across the country, sleeping and other acts of daily living for people without a home are treated as a criminal activity by many law ordinances that criminalize homelessness. Under these measures, a terrible cycle takes hold, where homelessness may be hidden from public view for a time, but little is done to address the underlying issues. As a result, communities remain unsafe and all too often, people without a home end up back on the street once again. We are pleased today to support law enforcement doing this work differently. Today you're going to hear from two communities that have done just that, intensive and ineffective enforcement measures, they're doing more. The more patient and fruitful process of building trust through engagement and connections to the housing and services that will truly make a difference.

Jeff Olivet:

This approach is called Housing First, and it's based on what we hear from people who are currently homeless or who have experienced homelessness, and that is that they need rapid connections to a home where they can be treated with respect. That means no curfews, no forced treatment and no oversharing of past traumas as a requirement for housing. It's housing where they can choose the kind of help they need to solve all of the other issues they face. At the core of Housing first, is the belief that housing is a human right and that it is the foundation for healthy, safe and productive communities. But housing without services doesn't always work, and services without housing is not effective.

Jeff Olivet:

So Housing First immediately treats the life-threatening condition of homelessness with housing first, then it provides the supports for all of the other issues people face. Health problems, mental health issues, substance use, unemployment, domestic violence and many more, and this approach works. Housing First has repeatedly been shown to be highly effective in keeping people housed, keeping people out of the justice system and making sure that people are engaged in treatment and recovery. Now we just need to bring it to scale. Let me double down on the equity piece. For centuries, communities of color have been decimated, excluded and denied equitable access to resources, housing and systems that can help people stay housed. These include healthcare, education and employment. As director Moore noted, the same communities are overrepresented today among people experiencing

homelessness, that is communities of color and they are also involved in the justice system at disproportionate rates.

Jeff Olivet:

It is this toxic and shameful inheritance that we hold today, but I have hope and I have hope because of the work that I see going on in the homelessness sector, and because of all of the law enforcement partners who are here today. President Biden has issued a challenge to every part of the federal government including my agency, the USICH to advance an equity agenda, and we will do everything in our power to marshal the resources and expertise of the federal government to support you in doing that as well. We know that we have significant challenges ahead of us. Homelessness has been rising each year since 2016 and in 2020 for the first time, more individuals experiencing homelessness were living on the streets, in encampment and in cars, in other words unsheltered homelessness, than those living in shelter or temporary housing.

Jeff Olivet:

Communities across the United States are rising to meet this challenge, I've seen it with my own eyes. They're building creative responses like those advanced in the Police Mental Health Collaboration toolkit. Through more coordinated, cohesive and system-wide policy responses to homelessness, we can move beyond treating homelessness as a crime and toward increased connections to housing and supports needed to break the cycle. In closing, from the bottom of my heart, thank you to all of the law enforcement folks who are here today. We see so many of you trying to do the right thing and working really really hard, in the most difficult of circumstances. Law enforcement leadership is central to achieving our goal of preventing and ending homelessness, and we're thrilled that so many of you are here today to take up that challenge. Thank you to BJA for your leadership in this area, equipping justice system stakeholders with the tools they need to partner well, center equity and design programs that work.

Jeff Olivet:

Thank you also to our partners at the Council of State Governments Justice Center for bringing us together today, and always centering housing as the most critical support to reduce justice contact for people with behavioral health needs. Now I have the distinct special video from Stephan Baker, an alumnus of the Amity Foundation in Los Angeles. We at USICH know that many of the most effective and equitable innovations such as Housing First were born from listening to people with lived experience. Mr. Baker has deep expertise in the systems we are aligning and improving, and his story has a lot to teach.

Stephen Baker:

Once I lost my wife, I had no direction. I had no sense of direction and so I couldn't even handle the bills at home and I ended up losing the house and then I went into homelessness. I had went where other homeless people was at so I could survive. When I got around them people, I started learning certain things and you just can't take care of yourself properly to be able to feel good about yourself. Then I used to just get involved with whatever anybody showed me that I could do to help, be able to have money in my pocket and then I developed a drug [inaudible 00:21:24] because there was nothing else to do. It just happened so quick and yes, the officers kept a close eye on us.

Stephen Baker:

Then once you get caught doing something wrong, the officers will put you in some type of database of being... If it ever happens again, this is the person you look for or the person you go after and find out where that person was at the time of that event when it happened. I started getting caught doing several things, and I was being labeled as the person that was these type of things and they would come looking for me. Even when I didn't do it, they still would come looking for me and I would have numerous encounters with officers. Sometime they'll take me in, they wouldn't believe me. They'll take me in and then they do fingerprints and I developed a criminal record like that.

Stephen Baker:

I've been abused and I knew I needed something, but I just didn't know what it was. But I knew that some type of mental health, I just didn't know the name for it at that particular time. It was mentioned to me, and then that's when I said, I knew I had issues. I knew mental health might help, but it all depends on the approach when I go through mental health, what kind of courses or classes or some type of the events that I'm going to be going to make myself better. But I knew I needed help in that area. I was damaged, I knew I needed help in that area.

Stephen Baker:

I said if I had the opportunity to just have housing, just put me in housing. I know I don't have the money for it right now, I can't afford it right now, but if you open a door up for me and give me resources and classes to go to, and if one thing works, I'm going to keep going, so it's the approach. You encounter with a homeless person, just approach him humbly and says, "Hey man, I'm a mental health worker. I'm my officer. They gave me some leeway to be able to help the homeless, curb their homelessness. What is it that I can do for you that you can believe in and that will help you?"

Stephen Baker:

I think that if you approach someone like that and give them the opportunity to explain how you can help them and what they need or whatnot, then they'll believe in you and then if you help them, they'll know that you're for real. Some people don't believe housing is for real, they think it's temporarily and then they going to be back out on the streets again. It's not really temporarily, it is how you make it. You open up the door for a person and if they get one foot in and that foot is in, they're going to appreciate that and then they're going to start asking you questions. How can I be able to stay here? How can I be able to make... Will I lose this housing? Where can I... Can you help me get a job? Can I work for free first? I did all those things. Once I seen that I had housing, yeah I started asking. Because the person that I was talking to was humble and they didn't want to beat my head in or shoot at me or... They wasn't afraid of me. Being humble to a homeless person really helps. It makes the person want to listen to you.

Stephen Baker:

When I first got housing, I had to pause because it put tears in my eyes, because I thought that this would never happen to me. I didn't think that I was capable of, because of my criminal activity and me having a record and all that, I thought my life was just over with, I'm just going to be homeless forever because I've been to jail doing this, I've been to jail doing that. But I got my record shield, I got certain crimes and on my record shield and I feel good about that. I really feel good about that because I didn't think that will never happen. But now that I know there's people out there that really do care and they want to see a change and there's a lot of people out there just like me that want to change, but they just don't know which way to go and they listen to these stories. They listen to them and I didn't have some

follow my footsteps in there and they have housing too, so this is a good thing. Yeah, it is changed me 100% man. I wouldn't trade any of it for nothing in the world.

Stephen Baker:

Now I'm joining the mental health workers and officers to help people curb this homelessness and I experienced some person that I've helped. They cried and it made me cry, because I know the feeling. It's a good feeling, so I want to see a lot more people like that. Having at home it's nice, I like this. I like fixing up my home. I like putting my pictures. I love it man, it's just good for my son and I just love it. Now I have a primary doctor, my health is better and I feel good. You can't do that homeless, so having housing comes with a whole lot of things that you can get done for yourself and it make you feel like a better person.

Maria Fryer:

Thank you for that powerful reminder from Stephan, on how housing makes all the difference in breaking the cycle of homelessness and incarceration. Good afternoon and thank you everyone for joining us today. As Director Moore reminded us, people who experience homelessness tend to have frequent and often repeat interactions with law enforcement. Many of the people that law enforcement encounter may also be disconnected from care and have unmet behavioral needs, Police Mental Health Collaboration is a cornerstone of BJA's Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program, are well situated to intervene in these situations and help provide connections to care. They can also play a vital role in connecting people in need to safe and affordable housing options as well, providing more guidance and support to improve police and community responses to homelessness is a top BJA priority. Most law enforcement professionals recognize traditional law enforcement focused approach of arrest, citation and moving people along and this does little to solve the problem of homelessness and can even perpetuate harm.

Maria Fryer:

But as we at BJA have heard from our grantees and partners across the country, law enforcement agencies are actively looking for guidance on what to replace it with. Law enforcement and community partners need national models, tested evidence-based and proven to work, to guide their partnerships and program design as they explore new ways to respond to homelessness. The new modules in the Police Mental Health Collaboration toolkit, or PMHC toolkit for short are our first step to meet this field wide need. Let's take a closer look at it now. I'll pass things over to my colleague, Charlie Francis from the CSG Justice Center to give us a tour, charlie.

Charlie Francis:

Thank you, Maria and thanks so much for all of your support and partnership in putting this PMHC toolkit together. I also want to make sure to thank John Keller from BJA as well, for his many hours of expert design and web development. John, we really could not have done this without you, you really make us all look good for those of you who aren't familiar, the BJA Police Mental Health Collaboration toolkit, better known as the PMHC toolkit, is a web-based tool which provides law enforcement with the resources to partner with service providers, advocates and people with behavioral health needs or intellectual or developmental disabilities to ensure the safety of all, respond effectively and improve access to services and supports. Across the PMHC toolkit, you'll find several newly revamped modules featuring guidance on program design and implementation along with videos, publications, sample policies and protocols and other helpful resources for law enforcement and community partners

working at this intersection. The new responding to homelessness section of the toolkit which we're going to introduce today, features new [inaudible 00:31:14] to police and community responses to homelessness. We've divided this section into three modules to help you quickly get to the information you need and I'm going to provide an overview of each of these now.

Charlie Francis:

Here, you'll see the top of the new responding to homelessness section. We have a menu here where you can navigate to other sections of the toolkit, as well as jump to our three main topics, which I'll go through in my presentation. Like a Director Moore was saying earlier too, we really tried to design this for folks who are pressed for time to quickly get the information that you need. We have three clickable buttons here to get key background information, information for leaders developing an outreach program and information for officers and community partners on best practices and real-life community examples.

Charlie Francis:

Module one. In this module, you can learn some key background on the issues, including the factors that perpetuate the cycle of homelessness and justice involvement for people with unmet behavioral health needs and the critical role of housing and breaking that cycle. We have some key facts here in graphical format that can really help you get up to speed on the issues, and also really be able to tell the story to other people in your community. One thing that we want to note is that, at the bottom of the toolkit is a clickable link where you can get printable versions of all of these graphics.

Charlie Francis:

We've got the rest of the graphics here, and then next we have a section on the cycle of homelessness and justice involvement, which Director Moore also touched on. For each part of this cycle, we have a clickable menu that expands and gives you a little bit more information on the dynamics at play. We also in each part, we have links to additional resources, both from the Justice Center and from our partners on these issues. Then you'll see our video from Stephan Baker, which you just saw and then a short section on housing program models as well as the Housing First approach emphasizing his remarks. Again, we have some clickable menus here. Sometimes learning in and out of the housing system can seem like a whole other language, so we're hoping that this section will help you understand what to look for when scanning what's available in your community.

Charlie Francis:

We have a few more graphics here on the research evidence for housing first, and then we get to our second module. In this module, you'll find strategies for law enforcement leaders on building partnerships with community and housing partners to develop effective homeless outreach programs. This section addresses the question of who responds, including both community and law enforcement led-outreach models, as well as key considerations for program design. We have a section here on building leadership level partnerships, themes such as setting goals, data sharing, identifying resources and more. In this box here, we call out the local continuum of care and coordinate an entry system. That is one of your most important housing partners. The continuum of care, it governs access to the majority of federally funded, homeless assistance resources in a community, and is also responsible for access to these resources, so important information for you.

Charlie Francis:



Then we get to the real heart of this module, implementing an effective homeless outreach approach in your community. Here is where we introduce a concept of law enforcement-led homeless outreach teams. Now a law enforcement-led HOT team can take many forms, but typically it's focused on using specialized officers to build relationships with people experiencing homelessness, check on their welfare and provide connections to housing and supportive services as its primary responsibilities. While these teams are led by law enforcement, they still require cross-system partnership with community-based organizations, such as behavioral health, as well as housing providers.

Charlie Francis:

We have another graphic here, going into a little bit more detail about what a law enforcement-led hat approach is, and strengths. For example, officers might best know the location of people experiencing homelessness, and they're likely to have built relationships and trust over time. For those of you who want to dive deeper, we have another clickable menu here that goes into the core elements of homeless outreach teams. A focus on outreach and engagement, ongoing training, evaluation and the all important direct connections to housing, which is a through line through this entire section of the toolkit. We have a brief section of the alignment of the HOT approach with the PMHC outcomes, which is a framework based on research and practice focusing on what difference that a PMHC can actually make in the community, particularly in this case with regard to connections to care and housing. Then we have another call out backs here around the issue of encampments, which is one of the most difficult and thorny issues in the field. Our focus here, while encampments can pose some real health and safety concerns in the community, what we really focus on is the need to as much as possible connect everyone in encampment with the housing and services that they need. This re requires building trust and relationships over time and patience, and strong connections, again with housing and service providers.

Charlie Francis:

Now we shift to community-led outreach approaches, and we have another graphic here. Again, going into a bit more detail about what they are and their strengths. For example, leadership of social service professionals and peers can establish trust, and it can also free up officers to deal with violence. We go into a bit more detail here about who is involved, why community-led approaches can be important in these paragraphs here. Then for both law enforcement and community-led approaches, we have another section, again a deeper dive into key considerations for designing outreach efforts. Considerations such as levels of need, are data available on key metrics such as number of people experiencing homelessness and their location. Do we know their housing and service needs, community trust and relationships, resources available to connect people to care and housing as well as the expertise to do that and more.

Charlie Francis:

Finally, we move to our third module. This module is directed towards officers and community partners and it details best practices for effective homeless outreach and care connections, along with real examples of communities with model programs. We'll be hearing from two of these communities shortly, but first let me show you a few key highlights of this section. We have a graphic here on the theme of key steps in navigating encounters with people experiencing homelessness. Establishing safety and trust, building ongoing engagement over time and again, that all-important theme of connections to housing and services.

Charlie Francis:

This graphic is also clickable and will open a printable version in a new window. Then yet another deeper dive, key care connection approaches in a homeless outreach initiative and there's a lot of them here. Assessing behavioral health needs, helping access benefits and services, incorporating case management and data-driven strategies and of course, connections to both emergency and permanent housing as you'll see here. Then finally, the last part of this module are our community examples. We have four communities featured here and again, Sarasota and Wichita will be joining us on our panel shortly. But some of these programs are led by law enforcement, and others, they serve as a key partner in community-led efforts. I want to point out in Wichita section, we have some key documents. A community resource brochure developed by their HOT team, some standard operating procedures and their policy around [inaudible 00:41:12]. We see Cambridge and Philadelphia's section here as well. This section, again closes by highlighting the approaches that these four communities have taken to implement their successful homeless outreach initiatives. We're so lucky to have two of these communities with us today, and now I'm going to hand things back to Maria to kick off the panel portion of the [inaudible 00:41:44].

Maria Fryer:

Thank you, Charlie. We have a great panel lined up of practitioners from Sarasota, Florida and Wichita, Kansas, who will share their experiences using collaborative cross-system approaches to address homelessness in their communities. We are grateful to them for taking the time out of their busy schedules to provide some insight into what's possible when systems start working together and thinking creatively about how to move people off the streets and into housing. First, we'll hear from the team from Sarasota, Florida, once known as the meanest city in America for people experiencing homelessness due to its traditional law enforcement centered approach. Sarasota Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team plays a central role in reducing the city's homelessness pop population by over 50% in just the last three years. Then we'll welcome the team from Wichita, Kansas, which operated one of the first homeless outreach teams in the country. Wichita's HOT team connects over a hundred people to stable housing each year, leading significant declines in chronic homelessness.

Maria Fryer:

Finally, we'll bring all panelists together for a Q&A. Please use the hashtag justice briefing live in the Vimeo comment box at the bottom of your screen to submit your questions. Now let's welcome the team from Sarasota, Florida. First, we have Joe Polzak from the city attorney's office at the city of Sarasota. Joe serves as police legal advisor for the Sarasota Police Department and as legal counsel for several other law enforcement agencies. He formally served as a felony prosecutor for the State of Florida and received a direct commission in the army from US JAG reserve. Next, please welcome Kevin Stiff, who recently retired as coordinator of homelessness response for the city of Sarasota. Captain Stiff is his 37 year veteran law enforcement officer, having served with three different agencies, including the US Army Military Police. He retired in 2017 as captain of the Sarasota Police Department patrol division.

Maria Fryer:

Together, Joe and Kevin have been honored on the local and national stage for their work building across system homelessness response system in Sarasota, including as co-recipients of the 2019 Sarasota NAACP President's Award and the 2017 IACP Leadership and Human and Civil Rights Award. Finally, please join me in welcoming Major. Ethan Frizzell of the Salvation Army. Major Frizzell was appointed as the Nashville Area commander for the Salvation Army in June of 2017. Prior to this

appointment, Major Frizzell served as area commander in Sarasota, Florida, and was a critical partner in the early success of the program. Thanks so much for joining us today. Let's just get into it. This first question is for Kevin or Ethan. Earning the title of meanest city for people experiencing homelessness really sticks with you, why did you decide to launch a homeless outreach effort in your community and where did you start?

Kevin Stiff:

Well, Marie, thank you for asking the question. I am Kevin Stiff. You wouldn't believe it, but between 2006 and 2013, after getting the meanest city moniker, we did not solve homelessness in our community. We had numerous events that occur in our community as it relates to a law enforcement encounters with homelessness, but it was in late 2013, early 2014, our encounters or law enforcement officer encounter with homeless individuals were really more frequent than they had ever been, and we really needed a response to give the officer something else in their toolkit, other than the traditional law enforcement responses of arrest, just asking the individual to move along or emergency to improve mental health or substance abuse, we needed to give them another option. We had done some research and one of the things we had seen work at other places was homeless outreach, so we were able to convince the city to hire us a case manager and put a police officer with the case manager and go out with a simple mission.

Kevin Stiff:

In the beginning, we started a very simple mission. I told them to go out contact every homeless person they could find and offer them a path to services. But we knew we had to do more than just a homeless outreach chain. The response had to be department-wide and city-wide. We came up with an acronym, we called it 3Es, educate, Encourage before Enforcement. In that, we started with the education. The education had to be with every police officer in the agency, had to understand what services are available, how to access those services and as well, how to access the services of our homeless outreach team. Then we developed policies and procedures to make sure that everybody knew exactly where to go and the police department took a strong stance on crisis intervention training and we currently try to train every police officer that works patrol in CIT.

Kevin Stiff:

We contracted with the Salvation Army and we contracted beds that were available, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we call HOT beds, and we also work with them on emergency shelter beds. But one of my most important things that we did between 2006 and 2013, was began to have an understanding what service are available. This was as we talked about what was really important, it was my relationship with Major Ethan Frizzell, who was there in our community at that time, because I was 38 year law enforcement individual and social services really wasn't my forte either. We showed up and say, we're a law enforcement officer. If you need social services, you need to call someone else.

Kevin Stiff:

But through our relationship and his coaching, we were able to understand what a continuum of care was, how it's supposed to function in our community and what we need to do as a community, as a law enforcement agency, to understand what opportunities these individuals have, officers have during these encounters. Of course our next step was encouragement. We not only encouraged our officers to make sure that we do pre-arrest diversion for individuals that in our community may be violating a law, we encourage the officers to use that before enforcement and we encourage the homeless individuals

that they encounter to take those services first. We don't want officers going to enforcement until the individual or the person decides that they are not able to take the diversion or are not willing to take the diversion, we leave that up to them. We make sure in our response in 2014, that services are first. Does that answer all of your question, Maria? Ethan I'm sure has other details.

Maria Fryer:

Yes, that was extremely helpful and I was going to... You went into such great detail about the program itself. I was going to turn to Ethan and ask him about the strategies. What types of strategies you use to connect people to housing and services.

Ethan Frezzel:

Thank you. The key to it is transformative relationships that started at the policy level as Kevin mentioned, and then goes and includes those that we are serving. By having the strong connections between the agencies, being the police department, the Salvation Army and other agencies, we removed blame in the system, which allowed confidence in the system to grow. Once confidence in the system grows, we're able to build relationships based on trust and confidence with those who are still experiencing homelessness. Once that relationship is created, then we help them choose their preference priorities between the resources and opportunities in the community, so that we're all speaking the same language. Explaining the process of our community and giving people the opportunity to participate in the quality of life of community.

Ethan Frezzel:

Very importantly, what we do is we walk with each individual, both the police department and the Salvation Army or other agencies, through the system sludge that is found in every system. Those barriers in murky mess that keep people impoverished in outside of housing, and making sure that on every priority that a person chooses, that there's a smart goal attached and that the accountability is shared between the police department and in this case, the Salvation Army and the person receiving assistance, so that all three or four or seven entities have shared values, shared vision, shared expectation, shared goals and shared accountability, all within the direction and determination of those that we are serving in order to reduce the days of homelessness experienced and increase their quality of life within community, as they have determined to achieve it.

Maria Fryer:

Thank you, Ethan. Communication sounds like it's really a very big part of this. On that piece on communication, I'd like to turn to Joe briefly. A big part of this work is educating and managing expectations in the community. Can you tell us a little bit about how you've managed to keep advancing this work when some in your community say, we need to take a hard line here.

Joe Polzak:

Thank you, Maria. I really appreciate that question. The focus for law enforcement really has to be on ensuring that a legal process is in place independent of political or other dynamics. As an attorney, I can say how critical that is, especially when we're talking about the vulnerable population and there's many aspects of US constitutional law that really apply in the space. For starters, we recognize that for our purposes, solving homelessness is not ending. It's having an effective and responsible system to respond to it in your community. This system must prioritize housing and social services over enforcement, but at the same time, provide law enforcement the tools they need to address calls for service, and also

leverage the scale of law enforcement operations to really effectively do outreach encounters with individuals experiencing homelessness, and help link them to the services that Kevin Stiff and Major Frizzell are talking about.

Joe Polzak:

But most importantly, this system really has to be bound by the ever developing law on civil rights and civil liberties, as there's many different cases that highlight the importance of that. More than that as we've focused on as Kevin and Ethan are talking about, developing the very best available practices to enable law enforcement to respond for calls for service, uphold the rule of law in our public space, protect the vulnerable populations we're talking about and who are in often in a state of crisis and need to be linked to service and housing-related outcomes rather than judicial outcomes.

Maria Fryer:

Thank you, Joe, Kevin and Ethan. Now let's meet the team from Wichita. First, please welcome Lieutenant David Nienstedt from the Wichita Police Department. Dave has been a police officer in the city of Wichita for 27 years and has worked in patrol in all parts of the city. He spent time as a community policing officer and was assigned to the homeless outreach team for three years. After being promoted to sergeant in 2018, Dave became the supervisor over the South Community Policing Team and homeless outreach team in 2019. He was recently promoted to lieutenant and now supervises the overnight watch in the South Bureau. Next we have Officer Matt Lowe, also of the Wichita Police Department. Officer Lowe graduated from the Wichita State University in 2001, and was hired on with the Wichita Police Department later that year. After five years on patrol, Matt joined the community policing team which he served over a decade, including as a member of their motel interdiction team. He has served as a key member of the homeless outreach team for the past five years. Finally, please join me in welcoming Brandy Niblett, senior housing specialist with the city of Wichita's Housing and Community Services Department. Brandy oversees homeless service programs, including emergency housing vouchers, the Homeless Preference Program, the Foster Youth Initiative Program, and Project Hope, a collaboration with the Wichita Police Department and their homeless outreach team.

Maria Fryer:

Okay, let's get to the first question. The first question is for Dave. Wichita is known for being one of the first law enforcement homeless outreach teams in the country, so in that department, tell us a little bit about your program and how it came to be Dave.

David Nienstedt:

Sure, thanks for having me. Our program started really back in 2012. We realized that you can't enforce your way out of homelessness, nor should you try. Of course, we're law enforcement officers so I mean those are the tools we kind of have at our disposal. We realize that's just not an efficient model. If you arrest somebody and they get released again, I mean that's not solving anything. We have to look for root causes of what some of these issues are and that's where you have to attack it from. Back then we looked around and there was a model at Colorado Springs Police Department, the demographics really matched closely for ours, so an officer went out there, looked at the program, brought it back here. The department agreed to give it a try as a pilot and it actually operated as a pilot for about a year and a half or closer to two years actually.

David Nienstedt:

We got started around February of 2013, and started out with three officers, and now we're up to four officers with two, two officer teams that operate citywide. That's kind of why we came to be. We just realized we had to come up with a different model, a different plan and we liked that model that was being used in Colorado Springs, it fit our city well. Like I said, similar demographics for the size of the city, as well as the issue at hand. Getting started with that, that's kind of the why and how we operate now, like I said we have two officer teams and really our main focus it's on outreach.

David Nienstedt:

We're out in the field, we're trying to contact people that literally are out in the field, that are out on the streets to see where we can help them and that's important because we're one of the few groups in this city that is actually on the ground. We also get a lot of 911 calls as I'm sure most departments do relate it to the issue, and we try to answer as many of those calls as we can, and also have our own phone line. Of course, that rings just for our team and we've been operating now like I said, for about nine years so we [inaudible 00:58:04] on that, but that's our focus. Is to really just get out and make as much contact as possible with as many people as possible, just out in the field that are experiencing homelessness.

David Nienstedt:

We look at the root causes and we've developed a lot of partnerships over these past nine years, and so we look for the root causes. Is it mental health issues, are there drug addiction issues or a combination, which is many times the case? When we initially make contact with folks, those [inaudible 00:58:32] have to find out those root causes so that we can then guide them to resources they need to start working on that issue. Then of course working, trying to get them into housing programs and so now this partnership we've developed with our city housing department has really flourished and made the program even stronger over the last couple of years. That's just kind of a little bit about how we got started, why we got started and just kind of how we operate.

Maria Fryer:

Wow. Well, that's a great example of a very successful program, but it was a lot of work and I'm sure it took a while. You said nine years, so that took a little while and so persistence and the expertise is definitely there. Project Hope is making a big difference it sounds like. So a little bit on Project Hope, I'd like to turn to Brandy. Brandy, can you tell me a little bit more about Project Hope? How did you decide to start working with the Wichita Homeless Outreach Team?

Brandy Niblett:

Sure. Project Hope is a criminal justice grant for crime reduction... Sorry, community-based crime reduction grant. We're actually still in the process of getting that all up and running here in our community, and getting that going. But once that's going, we're going to add on two full-time case-workers that will work alongside the HOT team. We're looking at hiring on two part-time peer support workers, so two individuals who were formerly homeless. They can come on and help guide services as needed while we're doing that. We're hopeful to have that up and going in the next couple of months. But before we got that going, we had social work intern program back in February of last year. We started that, we hired on. I think February, we had three part-time social work students that came onto our department.

Brandy Niblett:

They learned our housing department, and then they went out in the field and rode alongside the HOT officers and kind of learned from them and worked on providing services for individuals out in the community, finding areas that we can assist the hot officers and kind of take some things off of their plates so that they can do more outreach that they need to be doing. We started that, we've been doing really good with that. This last school year, we had four, we had started out with four, ended up with three interns. But they have come a long way in working with that. They are able to go out in the field with the officers or without the officers sometimes, and they are connecting our individuals who are homeless, who may not be willing to partner with other service providers or go to shelters and they're working with them to get them into housing programs that best fit their needs. That's been a big benefit to the HOT team and a resource that we've been able to provide to them.

Maria Fryer:

Wow. It's a true collaboration, isn't it? It takes both and many community service workers and lots of support and wraparound services as well, that's really great, sounds like a great program. Last but not least, I am turning this next question over to Matt. Matt, I know you got this. What are the most successful strategies you use to engage and build trust with people experiencing homelessness?

Matthew Lowe:

The most difficult time we had with building trust was in the very beginning, and I think the trust was both getting the providers to trust that we weren't here with a hammer to solve the problem, as lieutenant said, we had to look at other options. The tool we had was law enforcement, and that's what we knew. We had to start looking at the providers, what they had to offer, the information they had and really get into as the Lieutenant said, why are they homeless and get out of that cycle. Nothing else was helping with that cycle and so we decided that we needed to be a part of that solution. Building the trust with the providers first was paramount, because then they can share that information with the people that experience homelessness and say, "No this is the homeless outreach team. They're actually here to help you. They're not going to arrest you. They're not going to [inaudible 01:03:08]. They're not going to search your pockets. You can trust these guys and these ladies."

Matthew Lowe:

Building the trust with the providers was paramount, we had to do that initially. Since then nine years later, we have people that come up to our trucks and we're in marked police vehicles. I think that says a lot for what we've done in this community in the past almost decade to build that trust, that they can just walk up to our trucks and there's no fear there. Some of them won't come up if they have drugs on them or if they have warrants, they kind of steer clear of us. But for the most part, they'll come up to us and start asking us questions about provider information. "Hey, I can't go into this shelter. What else is there available?" I think we've made huge leaps in building that trust and I don't see an anti-trust kind of situation.

Maria Fryer:

That's great, that's really good to hear and it just sounds like you're seen in the community as a link to additional services and treatment and care, so that's really remarkable. You've built the trust for sure. Well, thank you to both communities for your thoughtful responses and insights into what makes cross-system homeless outreach response successful. Now I'd like to invite the Sarasota team to join us back on the virtual stage.

Maria Fryer:

We've saved about 10 minutes to take questions from those of you tuning in across the country. As a reminder, there are ways to submit a question to our panelists on social media, using the hashtag justice briefing live, or in the Vimeo comment box at the bottom of your screen. Reading these questions, I've got one that is a common question related to challenges and I know Sarasota can answer this for sure. What barriers do you still face today as you take on different aspects of this work?

Kevin Stiff:

Thank you, Marie. Excellent question. Barriers, they've been there since the beginning. Is expectations is one of those. City leaders, citizens say, "We spend all this money, we haven't solved homelessness yet. We still see homeless people." You've got to remind them it wasn't about solving homelessness, it was about providing opportunities for individuals to find housing or services. It's not a... Joe said earlier that solving homelessness in your community is not ending it, it's providing a path and opportunity for individuals to get in contact with services. The other difficult thing is when we started, system goals and case management. A lot of case managers weren't used to dealing with long-term and chronically homeless individuals and it takes experienced case managers to continue to work with those, and it takes trained case managers and police officers to understand the challenges chronically homeless individuals have, compared to individuals that are short term homeless and have other opportunities. I'm sure Ethan has other information on that as well, Ethan.

Ethan Frezzel:

Yes. I think part of it is from the social sector, is the idea of working together closely with police departments and legal teams, and the idea that somehow we're helping criminalize homelessness. What we recognize is that there are times for enforcement that are necessary and designing those necessary responses collectively is much better than arguing them in newspapers or editorials or even in the judicial system. There is a barrier of the idea that we're not supposed to work together, but that the reality of working together saves the system a lot of money and saves the individuals we serve a lot of pain.

Maria Fryer:

Sounds like you united responses the way you want to go. Thank you both for those responses. We've got another one and this could be helpful I'm sure to a lot of communities beginning a homeless outreach team. What advice would you give to other communities who are looking to launch or grow their homeless outreach efforts? What did you wish you knew sooner? So the experience speaks part, I think they want to know what you've learned.

Joe Polzak:

Hi Maria. Many things I wish we knew sooner, I'll address that first. Really how incredibly law and the best practices are in this space and how much it really requires using an evidence-based policing approach, where you're gathering and utilizing data, you're continuously upgrading your law and policy research, and then bringing that together just with constant analysis to really compliment the experience and the professional judgment you do have in your agency. I think that leads to the advice here that it really does require the involvement and the support of your command staff to take a leadership role in building a homeless response system in your community with your continuum of care, to really as we did in Sarasota, build out that bridge to services. Because law enforcement can help take individuals experiencing homelessness to that bridge, but that bridge has to lead somewhere that's



effective, that can get these individuals housed, get them into productive services and case management. As part of that, the importance of looking at models and maybe reaching out for coaching and that's where we just really appreciate the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Council of State Governments here today, in taking that leadership role and passing that on to other local governments.

Maria Fryer:

Thank you very much, Sarasota for such a thoughtful and comprehensive response. That's incredibly helpful. I'd like to pose these questions that just came into Wichita as well. In terms of challenges, [inaudible 01:09:31] barriers do you face as you take on different aspects of this work?

David Nienstedt:

Yeah, I would echo a lot if not everything that Sarasota talked about. We experienced a lot of those same things, expectations from, from politicians and from the public and those are fine. We have the way that we need to operate that we think is most efficient, but we face the barriers with case management. It's wonderful if you have... We have a lot of providers and a lot of services here in our city and in our county and it's great to have those. But if you have a barrier that you have a housing program, but you're having problems getting people into those programs, such as case management is usually required for all of those housing programs.

David Nienstedt:

If you don't have that, which that's one thing that we ran into is not having that and there are case managers here, there are. But we didn't have anything readily accessible to us, so then you have to search for that, and now you're doing things after the fact. Those are just some of the barriers that you come across and you have to find ways to get over those and we have, and now with our partnership with the housing department as Brandy mentioned previously, that we're going to have now case managers on staff with them that we can go to. That helps because all case managers in every area are over worked, they have high case loads and so when you call them and you want them taking on your clients, of course that's difficult. That was a huge barrier for us, but yeah we face all those same type of barriers around here, and you just got to have to partner and find those ways around those issues that you can.

Maria Fryer:

Thank you, David. If I could turn to Matt or Brandy about, what do you know now that you didn't know then? When you pose the question to you, experience speaks and what advice would you give to others who are trying to begin a homeless outreach team, and what do you know now that you didn't know then?

Matthew Lowe:

I thought I was going to make a bigger difference talking with people and knowing all the resources that we have, I thought they would come by the droves. Oh, you've got free housing, yes sign me up. The reality of it is a lot of people just do not or are not ready for that help. We just try and convey to them that, "Look, I've never been in your shoes. I don't know what you're going through, but I know people that do. Locally, we do have a organization so I can share with them. Look, I know someone that has actually been in your shoes. Now they're out and they're successful and they can talk to you about homelessness and drug addiction and all of that and they can tell you, I understand what you're going through. I was there."

Matthew Lowe:

I think that helps them realize, "Oh, there's light at the end of the tunnel." And just the repetition you have to keep telling them, "Hey, are you ready yet? I don't want this for you. I don't want you to have to live out on the street. I don't want you to live under a bridge. I don't want you to keep getting attacked. I want you to be successful. I want you in a home. I want you safe." That goes back to that trust that we've built. Like, "I want, I want better for you, but you've got to want it for yourself too." I thought the program or the fact that we have this program, that was all we needed to be successful and it's not. It's that repetition and it's recontacting them and keeping up those contacts and still saying, "Hey, we're still here for you. Yes, we're officers and we still have to do some enforcement because that's what we're paid to do. We have to do that. There's an expectation from the public that we do law enforcement. But there's good news, bad news. Bad news is, we have to hold you accountable. Good news is I can help you. I can get you connected to those things."

Matthew Lowe:

That was eye-opening for me and then the other expectations is that I thought a lot of the providers were going to step up on their end in a lot of ways and we see gaps all the time where they've changed their rules or they change the way they do business and then we get inundated with, "Well, right now, how do we fix that problem?"

Matthew Lowe:

As Sarasota mentioned, we tackle problems. We're officers, we are presented a problem and we look for options to solve it, so we're presented with new problems all the time when providers change their rules. I will say that the team that Brandy leads, these interns, it's developed over time and it has actually become... I mean, it's incredible and I think Sarasota has or had already had case managers set up. We're getting there. These interns have been instrumental in taking a lot off of our plates so that we can address some of these other things and they have been fantastic of seeing the needs that we need to give to... Also new needs that we didn't know we could fill, so they have been instrumental on how the homeless outreach team in Wichita is going to progress from here forward and they've just been great and my kudos to Brandy for leading that team.

Maria Fryer:

I'm sure and thank you Matt for that. A lot of the things that you just spoke about, we heard from Stephan Baker and the video earlier, and you're absolutely right and he talked about it as well and thank you for all your comments. Brandy, can we turn to you tell us about your experience and how your experience speaks and what do you know now that you didn't know then?

Brandy Niblett:

Oh, I think when you talk about embedding social workers with police, that can be a... We know that's a hot topic within our nation right now. When we first started our internship program, I will say that some of our officers may not have been too thrilled with the idea of having a social worker riding in their vehicles with them. But then just changing that mindset and working together has definitely changed things and we've definitely expanded both how we approached our individuals on the street from the case management side, social work side and I think it's been a great benefit to our community to be able to have that. Then expanding us in other options and other possibilities within our police department. We're definitely discussing it. Expanding and putting more social workers within our police department outside of our homeless outreach team, so it's been super beneficial having this.

Maria Fryer:

Thank you, Brandy. Thank you once again, to this great group of expert panelists for taking the time today to share what you've learned about how law enforcement and community partners can work together to more effectively respond to homelessness. For those of you who want to keep the conversation going after today in tandem with our new Police Mental Health Collaboration toolkit modules, we are also launching a companion virtual forum on law enforcement and homelessness, posted by the National Policing Institute, in partnership with the Council of State Governments Justice Center with support from BJA. The forum is a virtual learning community where law enforcement, community partners and others doing this work can find a wealth of resources as well as connect and share strategies and promising practices on responses to homelessness with both peers and subject matter experts from across the country. A link to join the online community will be shared with you by email, if you registered for the event.

Maria Fryer:

Thank you again to our incredible presenters and panelists today for a fascinating and insightful conversation on such a critical topic and thank you to all of you who tuned in. If you could please take a minute to tell us what you thought about this event, a survey link is available now on social media in the Vimeo chat. This will also be delivered to you by email if you register for the event. We value your feedback and it will help us to improve our events going forward. If you preregistered for today's event, we will send an email with a recording of today's discussion. If you did not preregister, you can access this recording on the CSG Justice Center's website. With that, thank you for joining us today. It has been a pleasure to be with you all have a wonderful-