

Criminal Justice Team

2019 1st Quarter Report

Members of the Criminal Justice Team have researched, read, analyzed data and met with officials of Winnebago County and the City of Rockford over the last year. Our overall goal is to reduce racial disparities in traffic and pedestrian stops, citations, arrests, and convictions by having alternative sentencing and programs available.

The first official with whom we met is the Chair of the County Board, Frank Haney, to introduce ourselves, our group and our purpose. He was helpful in providing information, answering our questions and suggesting additional sources from which we could gather data. He extended our allotted time to be sure we were satisfied with the meeting, and offered us space in his offices for our regular meetings if or when we needed it.

Sheriff Carauna and his Chief Deputy, Mark Karner, also met with us. They know our purpose is to eliminate racism and were cooperative in answering questions and generous with time, again extending our meeting. They offered us a tour of the jail, which we accepted. Officer McCorkle guided us through the jail, showing us all the facilities, from the medical clinic to the garage and everything in between. We appreciated the County's interest in our activities and their cooperative, helpful attitude.

We had an introductory meeting with the Mayor, Tom McNamara, who also expressed interest in our purpose and our goals. Once again, a busy man extended the brief, allotted time to be sure that our questions were answered and to be sure we knew what the City is already doing to improve public services and offer alternatives to jail. He assured us that his door is always open and he is available to citizens.

Chief of Police, Dan O'Shea, his three Assistant Deputy Chiefs, Andre Brass, Kevin Ogden and Michael Dalke, and the Chief Investigator, Carla Redd, met with us in November. Again, a meeting that was informative, friendly and relaxed. We were able to e-mail our intents and purposes ahead of time to help introduce us. We have met with members of the police force three times, once with Latino Leaders. We have learned a great deal through our ongoing conversation/q&a session meetings. For example, Rockford uses the Memphis Model of dealing with citizens with mental illness, a Crisis Intervention Team approach. Officers have been trained in CIT and use it every day to de-escalate crisis situations. They are also using a Community

Policing approach, a work in progress, in which officers live in the community and work at establishing good relations with citizens. The department also has established a "Blue Team," officers who track the use of force as well as keep an eye on other officers who may be exhibiting signs of stress and need someone to talk to.

The Criminal Justice Team participated in a Symposium that was held on February 10 at Emmanuel Lutheran Church with representatives from the NAACP and NAMI to discuss the death of a mentally ill citizen on December 30 of last year. We continue to gather data and speak with officials. It is encouraging to see our police department actively working toward better police-community relations and being open to meeting with grassroots groups who are interested in supporting good policing and eliminating racism.