

# Advisory Board Spotlight

## Andrés González



**Tell us about CMHA, the CMHA Police Department, and your work as Chief of Police.**

The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) is the 7th largest housing authority in the United States serving 55,000 residents throughout Cuyahoga County. CMHA contributes over \$200 million to the local economy by managing affordable housing and administering rent subsidy programs to eligible low-income persons. CMHA also provides other services that include: homeownership opportunities for qualified families; employment training opportunities, and other special training and employment programs for residents; and support programs for the elderly.

The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Police Department is a state-certified law enforcement agency and is nationally accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).

Sworn police officers of the CMHA Police Department are certified by the Ohio Peace Officers Training Commission and have full police arrest powers. The Department has concurrent jurisdiction with the City of Cleveland Division of Police to enforce all city, state, and federal laws, as well as agency policies and procedures. The CMHA Police Department provides quality law enforcement service to residents, employees, and visitors of CMHA properties located throughout Cuyahoga County.

As Chief of Police, I am responsible for providing effective leadership that ensures public safety for all residents and visitors at CMHA properties. I am responsible for providing oversight and management of all law enforcement initiatives and assignments of members of the department. I am also responsible for collaborating and coordinating services with Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies and organizations in our region.

### **Share with us an interesting project or accomplishment of the CMHA Police Department?**

Perhaps one of our greatest accomplishments is the effective implementation of the Police Assisted Referral (PAR) Initiative. PAR is a collaborative effort aligning the CMHAPD, FrontLine Services, Beech Brook, The Partnership for a Safer Cleveland, and The Begun Center at Case Western Reserve University in creating a conduit for police officers to connect families and youth exposed to violence to social services. Professional support is provided for education, screening, crisis services, treatment, and additional referrals.

PAR is anchored in three principles:

1. Police are often first responders for a variety of human service issues.
2. Police officers have nothing on a standard duty belt to facilitate interaction with the public in social-related crisis or non-arrest situations.
3. If properly trained and equipped, police are ready, willing, and able to assist citizens in finding help for their problems.

One of the primary goals of PAR is for citizens to view police in the role of first social responders in addition to that of law enforcement. CMHA police officers are equipped with a referral card that is offered at the scene of any incident for which the officer believes a referral would be of benefit the adult resident(s) or the children. The referral card establishes accountability and enhances a relationship between the resident and the referring officer. One of our social service partners responds and provides assistance to the resident typically within 48 hours of the incident.

PAR has strengthened trust between police and residents. The U.S. Department of Justice designated PAR a Successful Practice and Strategy. A recent study conducted by the CWRU Begun Center indicated that most residents that were assisted through PAR developed favorable perceptions with CMHA Police Officers as “first social responders”. Sixty-two percent (62%) of those surveyed expressed a strong satisfaction with PAR services rendered by the CMHAPD. Many law enforcement agencies throughout the country have sought information to replicate PAR in their communities.

## **What's something you want people to know about public safety and policing?**

Three things that I want people to know:

### **1. Violence is a public health issue**

Violence, especially violence in our families and to our children, is a public health issue. Law enforcement has to change its approach in addressing violence strictly as a police matter. At CMHA, we respond to violence as a public health issue. There is a need to properly triage, perform a diagnosis and initiate effective treatment. Police departments are the only 24/7 agency that is available to immediately respond to a call for help. As a result, it is important to train officers on understanding the underlying causes and effects of violence.

Many people believe that officers spend most of their time making arrests or in negative interactions with citizens. The truth is that 80% of the officer's time is spent on non-arrest or non-enforcement issues. We spend a considerable amount of time handling social related issues. Modern policing requires a proper alignment of services in relation to the needs of the family and the community.

At CMHA, our members are true community policing officers. They are empowered to employ the Scanning, Analyzing, Responding and Assessing (SARA) problem solving model to identify and implement solutions when responding to a call for service. We recognize the importance of shifting away from a conventional warrior policing model towards a guardian mindset with a focus of improving the quality of life in the neighborhoods we serve.

### **2. Police cannot arrest our way out of the cycle of violence.**

We have learned the hard way that nothing positive happens when we incarcerate people. Lives are ruined. Families are broken up. Children lose the benefit of having mom or dad around. Public dollars that could be spent on improving the lives of our children or to create economic opportunities for our families are diverted to building and maintaining prisons and jails.

We know that it takes 30 days to form a habit. We know that those habits – good or bad – over time become customs. We also know that those customs (or ways of doing things), left unchecked, becomes part of a culture. Police must collaborate with partners to make a dent on the culture of violence. We have to train our officers on how to recognize the negative psychological impact that violence has to a child and the family.

### **3. Children are our future**

Policing today requires us to reach out to children and teach them that violence is not normal. What they see on TV, movies or on video games are not real. Policing today requires a collaborative and holistic approach to fill the void created by broken families. Many children are hurt by violence in the home and in the community. Policing requires us to understand that “hurt people – hurt people”. No matter what profession we are in, we must find a way to break the cycle of violence. Never give up hope of our children growing up one day in an environment that does not focus on guns, child exploitation, human trafficking, or bullying.

**What do you like to do when you're not working?**

I love to spend time on Lake Erie. There is something calming about looking at a large body of water and watching the waves. I also enjoy reading, playing guitar and listening to music. Problem solving games are awesome. When I have time, I enjoy watching sports, especially if my teams are winning.

**If you were given \$1,000 and had to spend it on something fun for yourself, what would you buy?**

I would buy a high quality record player system capable of converting my collection of vinyl albums to digital format. That way, I could listen to my entire album collection over and over and over...again without worrying about scratching the surface of the record. It's fun to play music loud!