South Kingstown Police Department
August 19, 2021

Jean Bowen, Johnnie Rodriguez and Barbara Holtzman met with Police Chief Joel Ewing-Chow, Deputy Chief Alfred Bucco and Officer Bryan Monte, Community Resource Officer.
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We prepared by reviewing concerns that developed over the year in the Anti-Racist Group, reviewing the South Kingstown Town Police Department Annual Report 2019 and developing an agenda that gave each of us time to represent personal areas of concern from Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense, mental health and policies and the turmoil in the South Kingstown School District.

We reviewed our year long weekly work in the anti-racist group, identified areas the Social Justice Team is involved with in the community and outlined our intention to develop a relationship with the police department.

The Chief reviewed their development of extensive policies required by Rhode Island that created an Accreditation for the SKPD and extensive reporting submitted to the FBI. These are included in their annual report for 2019. UFR stands for Uniform Crime Reporting in that report.

They are proud of their Community Resource Unit, with Brian as its leader and Fred Bucco and one other officer participating in it. CHIEF: “We are trying to sit down with more community groups -- the more talking we can do, the better for the community overall.”

Brian mentioned doing a three-hour “Citizens Academy” to give people an idea of the training that police officers receive. No-cost car seats and assisted installation was also mentioned.

Barbara emphasized the trauma concerns of children in domestic violence situations. They respond to the call with their in-house clinical social worker Allie Turner. They can then refer to the Domestic Violence Resource Center for additional support.

We also asked about a female officer being involved in such cases, and we were told that she is...and that there is peer counseling and crisis intervention for the families involved and the officers.

Johnnie emphasized that class issues are prominent in South Kingstown and that the racial/economic divide does exist. She asked about their training in encountering individuals who may live in or near a poor neighborhood. The Chief quickly wanted to point out that there could be a good reason to stop someone, if they’ve had a report of a disturbance/crime in the neighborhood, but he also outlined the extensive training for the police officers to use good judgment and de-escalation techniques.

Johnnie also asked about the ordinance on not turning anyone over to ICE if they are stopped for a traffic violation or whatever and the Chief assured us that they never do that.

They are pursuing the purchase of body cameras as well as the extensive policy and regulations required. The Chief mentioned time, planning, money and policy as slowing them down.

We expressed concern that police officers themselves receive support after encountering a critical event. They are debriefed with a personal counsellor and receive support as much as they need and want.

We live in a relatively peaceful community compared to the rest of the towns in RI. This proves true by reviewing their statistics. But the % of crimes solved is not satisfactory. How can we help?

We also asked how many SK offers live in SK -- I think the answer was none. Brian lives in Richmond; Fred in East Greenwich; the Chief lives in Narragansett.. There are currently 48 officers for a town of 32,000 and 60 square miles. The Chief said that there are only 5 officers on patrol at any given time and that, of course, they need more back-up when the summer tourists or the fall college kids flood into town.

We discussed mutual ways we can help each other. Officer Monte will sponsor another community event on Columbus Day weekend, “Faith in Blue” which we can co-sponsor. They are preparing a power point presentation to educate community on scams, home security issues and security awareness. Our congregation would probably benefit from this kind of program.

It was an hour long meeting, informative for them and us.

Barbara, with her focus on mental health issues, asked about officers’ training for dealing with citizens with mental illness and was pleased to hear that it is mandatory for all officers. She also expressed concern about officers’ own mental health needs, particularly the importance of learning how to calm their nervous systems during and after stressful situations (since we are all prone to being reactive when we’re in fight -or-flight and make mistakes). We learned that the department institutes peer counseling as well as following a protocol for reviewing and receiving support after stressful incidents. Barbara had given the police chief a copy of “My Grandmother’s Hands” during a neighborhood meet and greet this summer and used the opportunity to ask if he had had a chance to look through the book. (He said he had skimmed sections of it.)