



Citizens Want to Know

COMMUNITY POLICING

In 1829, Robert Peel established the London Metropolitan Police Force. Sir Robert Peel outlined nine basic principles of policing that continue to influence community policing today.

Some of his principles include the idea that the basic reason for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder. Police should maintain a relationship with the public and understand that the police are the public and the public are the police. Police are the only members of the public who are charged to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence. Another one of his core ideas was to prevent crime instead of just catching criminals.



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According to Sir Robert Peel, if the police stop crime before it happens, we can prevent the victimization of our citizens and reduce the burden placed on society and the criminal justice system. An effective police department should consider its trust within the community, and according to Sir Robert Peel, “The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it.” The key to preventing crime is earning public support.

The ideas are not new, but they are still up to date. The American Fork Police Department strives to use these same principles in serving the community members.

“It has to do with building relationships and getting the community involved with public safety,” Police Chief Darren Falslev said. “We want to address their needs and their concerns and that should be an active part of the process. This is actually the way law enforcement was originally designed.”

As the police serve the public, the public also serve the police. The key to effective policing is the police and the public working together towards a common goal.

“We can’t be everywhere,” Falslev said. “We need the eyes and ears of the public to let us know what is going on. We hope they don’t just assume that we know something. We don’t always know what they are seeing, whether it be a drug house or other suspicious activity. I would rather have them reach out and have the same information six times than not at all.”

The department’s efforts have garnered recognition and honors. Although that is not the goal, it reflects on the success of the police and the service they have rendered. Some honors include Falslev being named Police Chief of the Year for mid-sized Utah cities and Officer Diego Garcia receiving a High Five award from KSL News for his work with kids at school. The American Fork Police Department has also been honored to have Officer Garcia and Officer Reyna Pedro recognized by the NAACP for their outstanding work as police officers.

The officers of the American Fork Police Department are trained to see people as unique individuals rather than suspects, as outlined by the Arbinger Institute’s Outward Mindset Curriculum. Chief Falslev has been trained to teach the Outward Mindset curriculum, and its principles are part of the hiring and promotional process in American Fork.

“We try to get them to see that every person has hopes, dreams, needs, and challenges,” Falslev said. “It doesn’t mean we’re soft on people, just that we have empathy. We still do the job. We take the time to talk to them. That can actually result in a reduction of incidents involving the use of force. It creates better relationships. It is just a win-win on all fronts.”

American Fork’s Police Department, which also serves Cedar Hills, has implemented numerous programs to help create and maintain those relationships with the public. They include the Citizens Academy, Talk Shop with a Cop, Night Out Against Crime, NOVA, Neighborhood Watch, Communities That Care, a

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bike patrol, and using social media to engage with the public.

Austin Lunt, the department’s Community Policing Sergeant, said COVID-19 has affected the programs.

“We are trying to do interactive things with the community through social media,” he said. “It is a good thing. People still receive information from us. People still realize we are here to help. We have been able to increase our efforts with the use of Facebook Live and other social media outlets.

“We can go to people and talk to them about problems within the community and learn from them. They know their community better than anyone. Whether it is drugs or vehicle burglary, they are the ones who are seeing these things. We understand they are trying to help.”

“We could write a whole paper on the Citizens Academy,” he said. “It has been going about 10 years or more. I put it out on social media and we filled up a whole entire class. They want to learn what we do and why. It has been awesome. I hope we never get rid of this program. Other agencies have called me and asked how we do ours.” The department has expanded the number of classes due to demand.

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The Citizens Academy is a six-week course in which the participants learn about various aspects of policing and try some of the programs themselves in mock situations. The department also offers a CSI Academy for youth so that they can learn how officers process crime scenes.

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Although many of the programs have been going on for years, there has not been a single officer in charge of community policing until about four years ago, Lunt said. “It makes the community safer,” he said.

The department put out a video on Halloween safety. “As far as I know, there weren’t any children hit by cars on Halloween,” Lunt said. “Maybe our video did something to prevent that.”

The American Fork Police Department partnered with Utah Valley University to produce videos on domestic violence that people can watch on their own, if they are reluctant to make an official visit with an officer. In these videos they learn about help that is available to them.

The NOVA program reaches out to elementary school students. “We go and talk to those kids when they are young,” Lunt said. “They are like sponges. We show them opportunities for being good people.”

The Shop with a Cop program pairs kids in need with officers who help them buy Christmas items. “So far it is still a go for this year,” he said. “I think more and more kids probably need it. We are going out and having fun with kids. It shows them that we really are people.” Many of the officers donate not only their time to Shop with a Cop, but contribute financially as well.

A relatively new program uses the ring app as a sort of virtual neighborhood watch. Lunt reported there has been some success with the program already.

There are opportunities for citizens to not only learn about programs, but to participate with the police.

The police department has implemented a Volunteers in Policing or “VIPS” Program. “Anybody who has a skillset and desire to serve, we can find a place for them to help,” Falslev said. Volunteers help with traffic control, business checks, and vehicle lockouts. Volunteers can help in the office doing data entry or work with other volunteer programs. This helps citizens take an active role in their community and helps reduce the demand on city resources.

The department has also joined the nationally successful Communities That Care program to proactively prevent people from getting into unfavorable conditions that lead to crime, Falslev said. Those who want help to set up a neighborhood watch may call the department at (801) 763-3020.



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