

NORMAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

VOICES OF NORMAN

March 27, 2017

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The Voices of Norman , a community event sponsored by the Xenia Institute for Social Justice in coordination with the Norman Human Rights Commission and the University of Oklahoma Office of University Community, provided the Norman Police Department with an opportunity to listen to our residents as they discussed their perceptions of policing. This summary provides the four questions used to guide the discussions and the general feelings provided, the causes identified, and the conclusions reached. Next steps are outlined as a guide for continued discussion.

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OVERVIEW

The Xenia Institute for Social Justice, in coordination with the Norman Human Rights Commission and the University of Oklahoma Office of University Community, sponsored the Voices of Norman: The Community and the Police in Conversation on Monday, March 27, 2017 at the Norman Public School's Administration Building. The event was the second in an ongoing series of events intended to improve community and police relationships. The venue and framework were designed to support small group, roundtable discussions regarding community member thoughts, feelings and concerns about policing. In pursuit of that goal, community members were invited to join circles of approximately 10 other people. The selection of group members was random. Each group had an assigned facilitator, a reporter (both from the Xenia Institute) and a representative from the Norman Police Department (NPD). The facilitator focused the group's discussion on four pre-selected questions. The reporter recorded the main discussion points raised by the group. The NPD representative listened and answered questions when asked. At the end of the evening, members of the Xenia Institute collected all notes for later review.

On Monday, April 3, 2017 members of the Xenia Institute met with members of the Norman Police Department to review the notes from the event. During the review, members were reminded that the event itself was designed to encourage community members to discuss how they feel about policing. The Xenia Institute is not, and has no desire to play the role of an oversight entity. While it was anticipated that questions could arise requiring further review or investigations, the questions themselves were focused on initiating a dialogue. Subsequent meetings or events could focus on specific grievances, desires, processes and mechanisms for understanding and change. To that end, this meeting must be seen as a first step in building community trust. The desire was to have each member hear each other and listen to perspectives rather than defend particular actions or refute injustices.

In support of the goal – of listening – the Norman Police Department has created a summary of the Voices of Norman discussions. In a way, we are trying to repeat what we heard so that corrections and clarification can be made. If we heard something wrong, we should try to understand it correctly. We accomplish nothing by misunderstanding what has been said. It is through a common acceptance that progress can be made. The below summary is an attempt to understand what was discussed in a way that we can hopefully identify a next step and continue this dialogue.

EVENT SUMMARY

Since each question focused on the feelings of participants, we attempted to glean these emotions from the notes taken and comments made. We then tried to list any possible causes identified by the groups. Finally, we looked at what conclusions were drawn. It's important to recognize that the feelings listed, causes identified, or conclusions drawn are not necessarily right or wrong. Therefore, we will not attempt to validate or invalidate any of the comments. Instead, we are seeking to understand clearly. We also see little benefit in trying to isolate the answers from individual groups as most of the comments tended to build on one another. While the voices heard were individual, the conversation itself was general.

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The discussion notes did not distinguish between the answers and the questions. In fact, there were very few consistencies in how the discussion was recorded by question or response. This was to be expected since the main objective of each facilitator was to inspire community engagement and strict note-taking often inhibits a free exchange of thoughts, ideas and perspectives. We also did not have the ability to link a specific feeling with a specific cause or conclusion. Since communication was the goal, rather than process, we simply accepted the information as written and did our best to organize the comments in an understandable fashion.

1. How do you feel about the interaction between police and community in our nation over the last couple of years, as reported in the news and social media?

Feelings	Causes	Conclusions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uncomfortable - Disheartened - Fearful - Anxious - Confused - Lack of Trust - Offended - Hard to be Positive - Angry - Frustrated - Aggression - Distance - Polarized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media Bias - Social Media Bias - Racial Profiling - Loss of Lives - Serious Mistakes (by Police) - Shooting of Unarmed Men (by Police) - Militarization - Not Admitting Mistakes (by Police) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Symptom of Larger Issue - Should Expect Bias in News / Social Media - Perception is Reality - We all have Biases

2. How do you feel about the interaction between community and police in Norman?

Feelings	Causes	Conclusions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive - Confused (don't know how to contact beat officer, does the PD's diversity mirror the community, what is the PD's interaction with ICE) - Integrity at Norman PD - Great Experiences - Norman is Special - Count on the Police - Positive - Quick Response - Safe Landing...but not shared by everyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chief Humphrey - Local Cooperation - Community Outreach - Disconnection with Mental Health Community - Community Policing - East vs. West Division in the City - Bullying in Schools - Immigration Stops - Lack of "Campaign Zero" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unaware of How to Access [how to be heard by] the Police - PD needs to Recognize Mental Health Issues - PD need to learn to De-Escalate - PD should consider Walking Beats - Lack of training, funding, resources for Mental Health Issues

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3. How do you feel about the interaction between community and police in your part of town, as well as your personal experiences?

Feelings	Causes	Conclusions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Respectful (Officers are)- Familiar (With Officers)- Helpful- Fearful- Police are Neighbors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nextdoor.com- Police Have to Think the way They Do- Citizen’s Police Academy- Walking Beats- Riding Bikes- Parking Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- More Community Policing- More Respect- Increase Communication- Personal Responsibility

4. Are there other concerns you would want to raise for awareness and consideration?

**There were no specific answers for this question. Any comments made regarding this question were incorporated in the previous three responses.

NEXT STEPS

The Norman Police Department would recommend at least three ideals for future events. One of our primary takeaways from the event was that we only saw a part of the picture. While the members present appeared to be engaged and involved within the groups, we cannot ignore that only a small cross-section of our community was present. The group, we must accept, consisted of those community members who feel comfortable participating in this process. If a person, or group, feels marginalized in the community, then it is doubtful that these feelings can be resolved through a single public meeting. This does not mean we are incapable of moving forward. It simply means that we do not have a complete picture and ongoing discussion is needed. Relationships, both functional and toxic, are built over time.

First: While both the City of Norman and the Xenia Institute have requested that we allow them to review and comment on any response that our agency has to the discussion prior to a public response, we feel a strong need to publish our understanding of the conversation to elicit clarification and further conversation. As of now, there has been no feedback to community members about the meeting. Silence breeds distrust. Unfortunately, the very instrument that we would like to use to build understanding is becoming yet another example of an opportunity lost. And, the police department, not the Xenia Institute or the City of Norman in general, will be seen as the cause. One of the official entities involved, therefore, must release some type of feedback to the community sooner rather than later. It is our firm conviction that the community deserves, at the very least, an acknowledgement of the meeting. We intend to release a general statement of progress within the next few days. We do not have the luxury of waiting for weeks.

Second: We ask that the Xenia Institute, the Norman Human Rights Commission and the University Of Oklahoma Office Of University Community continue to assist us with building community dialogue. Police departments traditionally have done a poor job of communicating. While we feel that we have had some success, we also think that it would be foolish to not reach out to our neighbors and partners

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in an effort to increase understanding. Community partnerships are one of the three basic elements of community policing. We would like for our partners to help us develop an on-going process for open dialogue with all members of our community.

Third: *The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (May, 2015) identified six main topics (or "pillars") which identify on-going processes for shared communications:

- Building Trust and Legitimacy
- Policy and Oversight
- Technology and Social Media
- Community Policing and Crime Reduction
- Officer Training and Education
- Officer Safety and Wellness

Each pillar comes with more specific recommendations and action items some of which apply to police agencies, other to community-based initiatives. While the report is general and, of course, cannot take into account the specific issues within our community, we see a direct correlation between these pillars and the feelings, causes and conclusions discussed almost universally during the Voices of Norman event. We are inclined, therefore, to explore further how the task force's report can help the department to structure long-term goals and objectives that support, "...the stability of our communit[y], the integrity of our criminal justice system, and the safe and effective delivery of policing services."