



Arlington Police Department

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Theron L. Bowman, Ph.D., Police Chief

March 15, 2006

Jim Ingram
Treasurer and Corporate Manager
The Innovation Groups

Dear Mr. Ingram:

In response to an e-mail dated March 8, 2006, from Texas Regional Director Froswa' Booker-Drew, I am attaching information about the Arlington Police Department's **Youth and Family Specialist Program**.

Please consider this program for the *J. Robert Havlick Award for Innovation in Local Government*. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this award.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theron L. Bowman, Ph.D.'.

Theron L. Bowman, Ph.D.
Police Chief

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Families with troubled children/adolescents often have no idea where to go for help. Sometimes, they call the police. In 2001, the Arlington Police Department began an innovative strategy to address families' problems before they result in criminal behavior. Supported by the State Criminal Justice Planning (421) Fund, the department hired a full-time social worker assigned to the Juvenile Investigations Unit. The Youth and Family Program, led by a Youth and Family Specialist, offers assistance to all families and youth dealing with the Police Department, regardless of their status as victims or suspects. By placing the social worker within the department, families' immediate needs can be assessed and connections with community resources can be made.

Arlington is a large city, boasting a population of 365,000. When children and youth become involved with the criminal/juvenile justice system, the entire family becomes involved. Whether the child is a victim of crime, is accused of committing a crime, or is exhibiting at-risk behavior, the family experiences a crisis. Parents often turn to law enforcement for help with these family crises. The crisis can compound pre-existing stressors and can precipitate deterioration of the family's ability to cope. Investigators and officers are often faced with the frustration of families seeking to address immediate needs and of the crises when a child is involved with the criminal justice system. Although investigators and officers may do an excellent job of providing counseling and referral to families in crisis, this is not their primary responsibility or area of expertise. Prior to initiation of the Youth and Family Specialist Program, investigators spent an average of eight hours per week talking with parents about family problems that were not directly related to the investigation of a crime.

In 2004, over 2,400 parents and youth received services from the program. The Youth and Family Specialist initiates contact with the families of children and youth who are listed as victims, suspects, or runaways. The family is provided with written information about available resources to address their needs and written information about criminal justice/juvenile justice processes. The Specialist makes an initial assessment of the family's immediate needs in relation to their involvement with the criminal justice system. The Specialist then offers to meet with the family to provide a more thorough assessment of the situation and offer referrals and recommendations to help them access services available in the community. An initial action plan is developed and a follow up is provided to these families within two weeks of the initial contact. In some cases, continual support and follow up are provided as the family moves through the criminal justice process. Through follow up contact, victims and witnesses are encouraged to participate in the criminal justice process.

The Youth and Family Specialist provides officers and investigators with consultation and assistance with referrals for families who are at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. The Specialist assists parents, who are having difficulty with their children, in coming up with a realistic action plan

The Youth and Family Specialist acts as liaison between the various units within the Arlington Police Department that deal with children and youth (School Resource Officers, Domestic Crimes Investigations, and Victim Assistance) and helps facilitate the sharing of important information between these units to provide effective and efficient service. The Specialist also acts as a liaison between the department and the over 75 youth serving agencies (including schools, juvenile probation and Child Protective Services) and victim service.

Success of the project is measured by collecting data at first contact with the family and by comparison of utilization of investigator/officer time before and after the initiation of the project. Each family is contacted, and the Youth and Family Specialist determines their level of frustration/distress, and their assessment of the severity of the problem. The majority of families receiving services have reported decreases in the severity of the problem, decreases in their level of frustration, and increased awareness and utilization of community resources for families.

- 35% of families who receive case management services report improvement in the identified problem at the 2-week follow up contact as indicated by client assessment of improvement in the problem severity
- 50% of families who receive case management services report increased utilization of community resources and/or decrease in frustration with the presenting problem at the 2-week follow up.
- 72% of families who receive case management services report improvement in the identified problem at three and six month follow up contact.

Who has benefited from the innovation?

Families who receive these services report improvement in the problem and greater awareness and utilization of community resources. The Youth and Family Specialist has enabled detectives to return to duties directly associated with investigation and filing of cases, resulting in improved efficiency and effectiveness. Investigators also report a decrease in the amount of time they spend counseling families. Patrol officers report that being able to refer families to the Specialist gives them a solid referral point when they are called to homes because of delinquent or problem behavior.

School counselors, school resource officers, truant officers, and teachers have consulted with the Youth and Family Specialist when a family is involved with the criminal justice system to ensure seamless service delivery to the family and to help the family understand the juvenile justice process.

How was the innovation initiated and implemented?

The Police Department's Victim Assistance Coordinator noted the number of calls that investigators, front desk officers, patrol officers, and other youth serving agencies were forwarding to the Victim Assistance Program. Most of the calls were from parents who

were frustrated with their child or teenager and who needed help in coming up with a realistic action plan for addressing problems.

The Police Department sought permission to submit a grant through the Criminal Justice Division of the Office of the Governor to fund the project. Upon receipt of funding a full time social worker was hired. In subsequent years, the city's proportion of matching dollars increased as grant funding decreased. The Youth and Family Specialist Program also recruited student interns from the University of Texas at Arlington's School of Social Work to assist with the program.

The Youth and Family Specialist meets regularly with youth-serving agencies to coordinate services and frequently attends briefings to keep in touch with family issues that the patrol officers are observing.

What risks were associated with planning and developing the innovation?

As with any new program, there is the risk that the idea will not be well received. However, the program has been well received by officers and the community and continues to get referrals from, and make referrals to, a wide range of services and agencies in the community.

What was the environment in which the innovation was created and sustained?

The City of Arlington's Police Department has a long tradition of innovative delivery of services to its community. This tradition of service extended naturally to helping families in crisis. The Police Chief, City Manager, Mayor and Council were supportive of the idea of piloting the Youth and Family Service Program and have been satisfied with the results.

What were execution costs and savings?

The initial grant funded 100% of the Specialist's salary and benefits, part time clerical support, and initial equipment and supplies. The annual savings returned to juvenile investigator time is conservatively estimated at \$19,256. Juvenile detectives report they spend almost 50% less time on cases that are not related to discussion with youth and families and are able to return to investigative duties.

What lessons were learned that could be shared with other local governments?

Law enforcement is called upon as a first responder and is expected to deliver social services to the community. Partnering law enforcement with professional resources benefits the entire community.

Which department and/or individuals championed the innovation?

The initiation of the project by the Police Victim Assistance Coordinator was supported by the Police Chief, City Manager, Mayor and Council. Supporters of the project, after implementation, include investigators, officers, the Arlington Independent School District, Municipal Court judges, and other youth-serving agencies in the community.