

# Safety Planning for Town Offices, Libraries, & Other Municipal Workplaces

Franklin Regional Council of Governments  
January 9, 2020 • 12 Olive Street, Greenfield • 6-8pm

## Agenda

### **Introductions & Welcome (6pm)**

FRCOG Staff: Bob Dean, Liz Jacobson-Carroll, Amanda Doster

### **Presentation & Conversation (6:15-7:30pm): Trauma Informed Customer Service**

Clinical & Support Options Staff: Sandi Walters (Associate VP of Community Programs),  
Kelly Broadway (Center for Community Resilience after Trauma Program Manager)

### **Presentation & Conversation (7:30-7:55pm): Simple Workplace Security Enhancements**

Town of Deerfield Police Department: Chief John Paciorek, Jr.

## Further Resources

- **24-hour crisis hotline** – 413-774-5411 (Mental health crisis/suicide support)
- **Center for Community Resilience after Trauma** – 413-773-5090 (Supporting individual & groups in the aftermath of violence and crime. Local & free.)
- **Clinical & Support Options, Inc.** – 413-774-1000 (Out-patient behavioral health, wellness programming, peer support, individual & group support)
- **HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response** – <https://www.hopeaacr.org/>
- **Officer Donut the Saint Bernard** (Greenfield Police) – Lt. Gordon  
[william.gordon@greenfield-ma.gov](mailto:william.gordon@greenfield-ma.gov)  
<https://www.facebook.com/DonutSaintBernard/>
- **Upcoming webinar** by SkillPath on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 2pm EST: “The Essentials of Front Desk Safety & Security”

*Note this is **not** a free webinar.*

<https://skillpath.com/webinar/the-essentials-of-front-desk-safety-security>

**Safety Planning for Town Offices, Libraries, & Other Municipal Workplaces  
General Notes from the Workshop & Discussion 1/9/2020**

**Concerns/Questions/Themes Discussed**

- Substance use: consumption in bathrooms, installing sharps containers, public intoxication & associated behaviors
- Uncertainty about how to respond to mental health issues
- When to call 911?
- When working alone: what are the backup options besides a security company or the police?
- Conflict of interest when relying on patrons as backup in isolated situations
- Lack of training for librarians in the daily conflict resolution skills needed – active shooter trainings feel extreme and not as relevant
- Safety in family spaces in libraries – balancing needs of families with other patrons
- How to manage staff anxiety: staff who are on high alert & feel unsafe even in situations that may be benign
- Environmental/hygiene concerns – interactions between patrons
- Mental health / burnout for staff

**Logistical strategies to consider**

- Keep notes (in computer system for patrons who have library card) for other staff to reference and to document ongoing challenges
  - These notes can also be used to contact local police and service orgs/mental health providers for wellness checks
  - Remember that chances are high that the police already know the individual of concern, may have additional information, and often work in conjunction with CSO/Crisis Services; don't hesitate to call them.
  - Remember that chances are high that CSO/Crisis Services already know the individual of concern, and that they are available 24/7/365 to speak by phone and/or come to the location to counsel their client; don't hesitate to call them
  - After an incident, if they're not already involved, call the police to report what happened; this will help them get a fuller picture for subsequent incidents – perhaps even later the same day. Further, they may determine that a wellness check is warranted and/or be in touch with CSO.
- Establish relationships with other mental health providers in area (where available)
- Panic button options:
  - Program phones so a single button calls 911
  - Fax machines can make 911 calls

- Carry cell phone on person at all times (if there is reception at your facility)
- When calling 911, leave hard line open if possible so dispatch can hear what is happening & give more details to police
- Computer apps available to call from a computer instead of a button or phone
- Traditional buttons under a desk or at knee-level (can be operated by your leg so your hands remain visible to patron)
- => **the most effective option is the one the individual using it feels comfortable with!!**
- => **some sort of panic button system is NECESSARY any place there is just one or two staff on duty**
- Cameras:
  - They are a deterrent when they are openly posted and visible to the public
  - Worthy investment if funds are available
- Familiarize yourself with the state sex offender registry in your town & neighboring towns

#### **Interpersonal / De-escalation strategies to consider**

- **=>TRUST YOUR GUT; everything is situational; not everything works all the time; you're already skilled and experienced and are likely doing the right things**
- When responding to challenging behavior:
  - Create power and choice for the person
  - Clear and simple directives/language
  - Active listening/empathy
  - "What I'm hearing you say is..."
  - "I'm sorry I'm not going to be able to help you today / we are not going to be able to meet your expectations today ..."
  - "So sorry I physically can't hear you when you're this loud..."
  - "I understand how angry you are... I can feel that you are upset..."
  - Give people an out – a way to exit the situation voluntarily such as "You can choose to follow our behavioral guidelines (written here on this card) now, or come back later today or tomorrow..."
  - Don't say "calm down"
- Keep a list of behavior guidelines handy to refer to when necessary
- Develop relationships with patrons, learn their baselines
- Moderate the speed, tone and volume of your own voice; convey calm through relaxed body language
- Be firm in your own boundaries
- Validate the individuals' feelings, listen, mirror, don't attempt rational discussion when individual is highly agitated

- “Grey Rock” method: don’t feed attention-seeking behaviors (google this one – it’s effective for dealing with narcissists in interpersonal relationships generally...)
- Distractions:
  - offer a glass of water
  - claim busy-ness and go do another task where possible
- Code/Buddy system when there are multiple staff (or friends/patrons) around
  - E.g. phone call to one another “do you need to be rescued?”
  - Call or move toward colleagues (or patrons) in other parts of the building, if possible, the mere presence of another person may prompt de-escalation
- Get help if you recognize that the individual’s behavior is significantly divergent from what you know to be his or her normal demeanor

#### **In extremely escalated situations:**

- Trust your gut about calling the police; don’t second-guess yourself; you get to set your own personal definition of safety; for the most part you know your patrons and when something is “off”
- Prioritize your \*own safety first\*, then patrons’ safety (similar to putting on your own oxygen mask first in airplane emergencies)
- Know your building and surroundings
- As part of your situational awareness, consider the length of time it will take for help/police to arrive at your location; if it will take more than a few minutes, you may want to call before you are sure it is necessary, then implement stalling/diversion strategies while waiting
- Create distance & evaluate the situation:
  - Stay calm; be aware of own fight or flight response
  - Don’t back yourself into a corner – what can you put between yourself and the situation?
- Consider that heightened situations most often blow over: stay safe and distract the individual if possible & wait it out until it passes (water, etc.)
- Up to you whether to let person know you’ve contacted the police: sometimes it helps to give people an out such as a choice to leave before the police arrive
- Close the library and exit if needed. Or just leave.
- Chief P reports that deploying a fire extinguisher can be a highly effective method of self-defense if necessary.

### **Areas for further exploration**

- New sources of funding for security technology – existing grants not sufficient for cameras, etc.
- Develop policies around responding to crisis situations (including building evacuation and shelter in place plans)
  - Consider accessibility
  - Look to schools for policy examples
- Purple Hearts for staff when they've handled a difficult situation well!
- Workplace practices to address strain on staff mental health – constantly being in the position of taking responsibility for people's challenges
- State police has data on all police calls – could run a search by site and nature of calls if anyone is interested in a long-term data picture at their location.

# Make the LEAP

- Listen – focus on understanding their concern/complaint/perceived problem
- Empathize – imagine yourself as the consumer in your interaction with them
- Acknowledge – convey that you understand
- Problem Solve – do everything within your control to make it right

# The Basics of De-escalation = Trauma Informed Customer Service

- Create calm – Display calm with tone & body language. (LEA)
  - Validate and appreciate their concern & take responsibility in the moment.
  - Examples:
    - “I’m sorry this has been so frustrating.” or “I can appreciate why you are so upset.”
- Take control of the situation (if needed)
  - If there is behavior or language that is inappropriate, point out that it is getting in the way of you helping. Ex. “I want to be helpful right now, and that [language or behavior] is making it so I can’t.
- Move the interaction forward (P)
  - What can you do right now/as soon as possible? Let them know this.
  - Examples: “What I can do for you right now is...” or (give them choice) “Would it be more helpful if I did ..... or .....?”