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/](https://www.hopeaacr.org/)
- **Officer Donut the Saint Bernard** (Greenfield Police) – Lt. Gordon
  - [william.gordon@greenfield-ma.gov](mailto:william.gordon@greenfield-ma.gov)
- **Upcoming webinar** by SkillPath on February 7th, 2020 at 2pm EST: “The Essentials of Front Desk Safety & Security”
  - *Note this is not a free webinar.*
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, 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.
  - 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)
al 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:
  o offer a glass of water
  o claim busy-ness and go do another task where possible

• Code/Buddy system when there are multiple staff (or friends/patrons) around
  o E.g. phone call to one another “do you need to be rescued?”
  o 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:
  o Stay calm; be aware of own fight or flight response
  o 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.
control to make it right

Problem solve – do everything within your

Acknowledge – convey that you understand your interaction with them

Empathize – imagine yourself as the consumer in concern/complaint/perceived problem

Listen – focus on understanding their

Make the LEAP
The Basics of De-escalation = Trauma Informed Customer Service

Examples: „What I can do for you right now is...“ or (give them choice) „Would it be more helpful if I did...?“...

What can you do right now/as soon as possible? Let them know this.

Move the interaction forward (p)

so I can’t.

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 hard for me to help you.“

Take control of the situation (if needed)

„I’m sorry this has been so frustrating“ or „I can appreciate why you are so upset.“

Examples:

Validate and appreciate their concern & take responsibility in the moment.

Create Calm – Display calm with tone & body language (LEA)