Magic City Mindfulness Club: Understanding Each Other by Understanding Ourselves

A Violence Reduction Effort

Submitted to

UAB Grand Challenge

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Violence in the state of Alabama is among the worst in the country. Our state had the unfortunate distinction of being third place in the top three highest homicide rates in 2016. In other cities, police shootings of citizens have enraged residents; just over 362 lives lost in 2018, alone. Police officers and citizens eye each other with suspicion, fear, and doubt. Both sides stressed, tired, and at tremendous risk of losing their lives-either in the line of duty, or perhaps, just by being misinterpreted. What if there was a way to bring communities and police officers together with the common goals of self and community improvement, engagement, and violence reduction? This Grand Challenge Idea is called: **Magic City Mindfulness Club: Understanding Each Other by Understanding Ourselves**

Many residents in Birmingham neighborhoods are from vulnerable populations who experience chronic stress, poverty, crime, and violence. These experiences may also be associated with fatigue, depression, sleep disturbances, and a decreased sense of quality of life. Sadly, these stressors are not easily mitigated.

It is well established that police officers experience intense and chronic stress, sleep disruption from shift work, long shifts, and moonlighting. Depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, fatigue, and suicidality are highly prevalent among this group of workers. At the same time, police officers in critical driving or shoot-no-shoot situations are known to develop "tunnel vision". During these times, they might misinterpret visual information taken in by their brains at a glance. For police officers, there is no way to remove stress from their jobs or shift work-it is simply part of the nature of police work. However, the Magic City Mindfulness Club could provide tools for both the officers and citizens to assist with these challenges.

The Mindfulness Club will bring together resources from the UAB Schools of Public Health, Health Professions, Psychology, the CCTS, the University of Louisville, and the State University of New York to form an interprofessional team to help forge partnerships between Birmingham neighborhoods and police officers that will form the Mindfulness Club. The primary objective of the club is to decrease fatigue and stress, and improve the sleep of both citizens and officers through joint citizen-officer mindfulness training. During these trainings, we will foster engagement, community, and relationship-building through the training and other social activities.

We will also muster the expertise of our colleagues at SUNY and the Department of Psychology to provide the police officers with cognitive training to mitigate the tunnel vision they experience under extreme stress. This is not only critically important to the officers themselves, as this training is known to improve driving safety; but may give them additional milliseconds to interpret visual stimuli and make better decisions before they use lethal force. This is also extremely critical as use of lethal force is identified as the most stressful operational experience of police officers' work lives.

The combined effects of these efforts will lead to greater occupational and public health, better communities, and foster more trust between our citizens and police officers. All of the proposed interventions are relatively inexpensive and easily translatable to other communities, states, and nations. Ultimately, we believe we can reduce violence by improvement of mindfulness of officers and citizens, cognitive training of officers, and community engagement. Forging strong bonds is part of Birmingham's heritage-this project will be another great example as we strengthen police officers, citizens, communities, and the bonds between them.

Potential Team Members:

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Randall Woodfin, Mayor, City of Birmingham

TBD Chief of Police, City of Birmingham

David Vance, PhD UAB School of Nursing

Patrick McNeese, UAB School of Health Professions

John Violanti, PhD, State University of New York

William S. Smock, M.D., University of Louisville, Police Surgeon, Louisville Metro Police Department