

Establishing & Improving Partnerships with First Responders

2025 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
ENDING HOMELESSNESS



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First responders (including fire, emergency medical personnel, and police) often interact with people experiencing homelessness and can be the first on the scene in a crisis. Partnerships between homelessness response systems and first responders can help ensure that people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are treated with dignity and respect and are quickly connected to outreach and housing resources. Learn from communities that have worked to improve communication, coordination, and trust across systems.



Learning Objectives

- Identify key benefits of partnerships between homelessness response systems and first responders.
- Learn about specific strategies communities have undertaken such as:
 - Awareness of homeless assistance resources and who to contact
 - Connections to housing & services
 - Training
 - Open dialogue and collaboration



In Northern Kentucky, many people experiencing homelessness don't walk into shelters or service agencies on their own. They may be:

- Living in tents, vehicles, or isolated rural areas
- Unaware of available services
- Hesitant to engage with systems due to trauma, stigma, or past experiences

We meet people where they are—literally—and begin building the trust needed to bring them into shelter and housing-focused programs.

Street Outreach is the Central Access Point to Services

Street Outreach is the gateway to Welcome House's entire homeless response system. Our team engages individuals in the field and connects them directly to services and supports that help them move toward housing.





Street Outreach cannot succeed in isolation. Our success depends on the **cooperation** and **shared mission** of **diverse community stakeholders**. Every sector plays a critical role in identifying, engaging, and supporting those experiencing homelessness

Partner	Role in Outreach
Law Enforcement	Identify unsheltered individuals, support crisis response, collaborate on safety plans.
Healthcare Providers	Connect clients to physical/mental health care; participate in street medicine and mobile clinics.
Faith-Based Groups	Provide food, hygiene items, space for outreach teams, and crucial local knowledge.
Local Businesses & Libraries	Help identify individuals needing outreach; serve as engagement points.
Landlords & Housing Authorities	Open doors to housing; collaborate on housing navigation and problem-solving.
Veterans Affairs & SSA	Help enroll Veterans and disabled individuals in essential benefits and housing programs

First Responders Play a Critical, But Not Standalone, Role



First responders—including police, EMTs, and fire services—are often the default safety net for people experiencing homelessness because other systems haven't shown up consistently.



When working collaboratively with service providers, they can help connect people to housing and support. When isolated or driven by enforcement alone, they often exacerbate cycles of trauma, criminalization, and mistrust.

Coordinated Street Outreach

Welcome House Street Outreach doesn't just provide hygiene kits and snacks — we engage in intensive, housing-focused outreach:

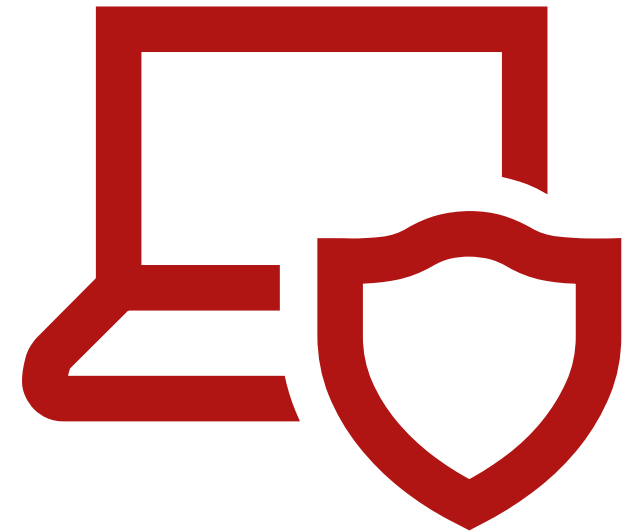
Our staff include people with lived experience, ensuring relatability, trust, and culturally competent support.

We focus on data literacy and outcome tracking, using tools like encampment mapping and performance dashboards to drive results.

We complete Coordinated Entry assessments and document readiness in the field, making real-time progress toward housing — not just offering survival support.

Our Street Outreach On Call model provides a 24/7 mobile response, offering an alternative to law enforcement for non-criminal issues.

We are highly mobile, low-barrier, trauma-informed, and visible across the community, allowing us to meet people where they are and keep them connected to the system of care.



Our EOS Approach: Running Outreach Like a Business

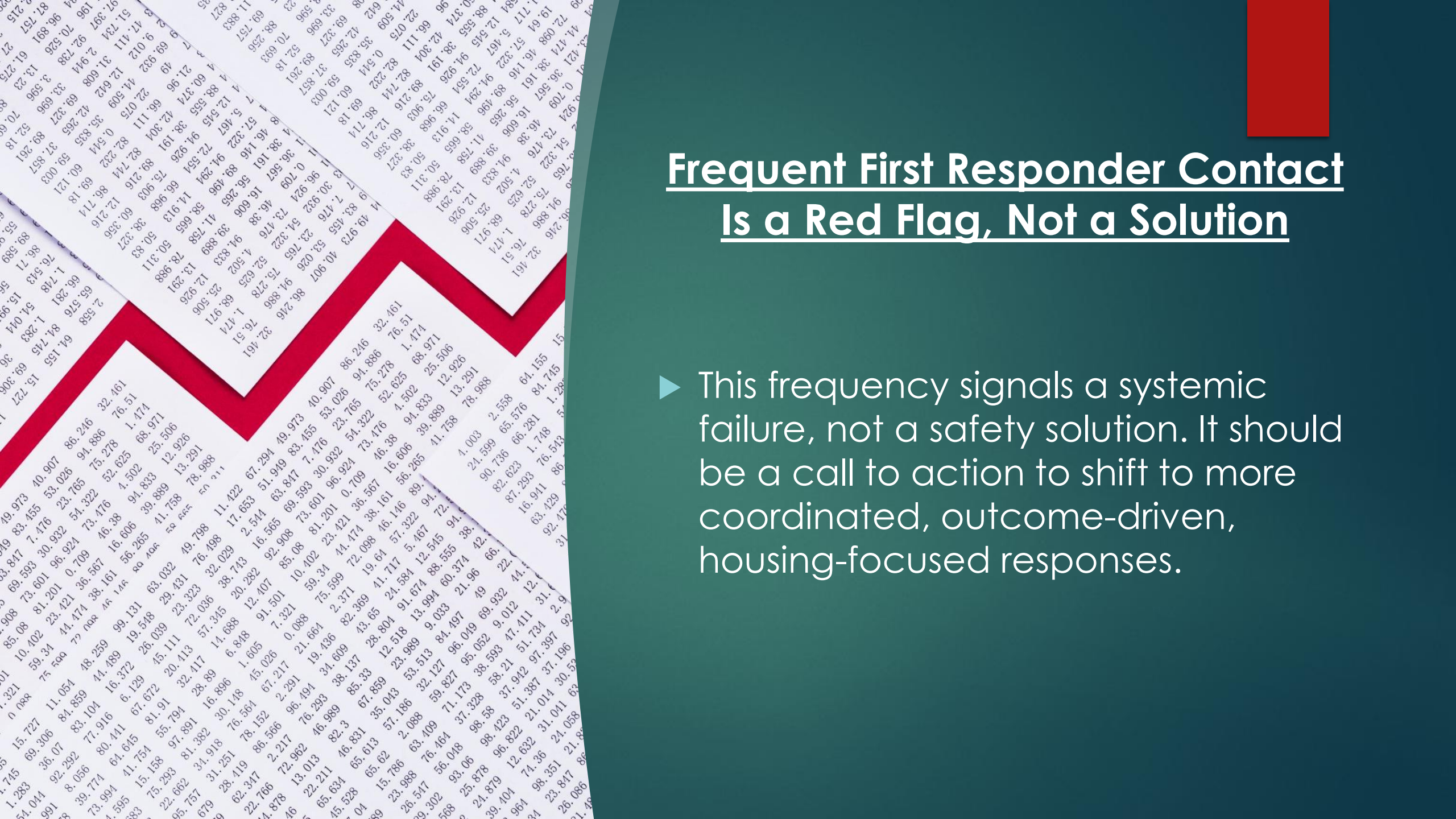
Weekly “P10”
meetings for
alignment

Measurables:
Contacts →
Engagement → CE
Entry → Housing

Issue solving &
accountability built in

Clear roles and
leadership structure

We apply EOS principles to our outreach team. That means clear goals, weekly check-ins, and accountability. We treat this work with the same seriousness as any business operation—because lives depend on it.



Frequent First Responder Contact Is a Red Flag, Not a Solution

- ▶ This frequency signals a systemic failure, not a safety solution. It should be a call to action to shift to more coordinated, outcome-driven, housing-focused responses.

**Activity is
Not the
Same as
Impact**

Traditional systems often measure quantity over quality—e.g., how many calls were cleared or how many people were contacted.

We train staff to focus on **outcomes**—like housing placements, document readiness, and reduction in system use.

Real success happens when people exit homelessness, not when they're simply moved from one location to another or stabilized temporarily.

First Responders as Allies:

When trained and integrated into housing-first systems, first responders can be champions of stability.

In communities like ours, where Welcome House Outreach is active, they collaborate instead of dominate, working side-by-side with housing teams.

This allows first responders to focus on crisis, while outreach teams handle the long-term, intensive work of ending homelessness.



Key Takeaways



Core Themes

- ▶ Outreach is a core public safety strategy, not a side effort.
- ▶ Partnerships with first responders improve outcomes.
- ▶ Frequent 911 calls signal unmet needs—outreach steps in early.



Use of Data

- ▶ Staff track goals weekly using EOS.
- ▶ Clear data builds trust and shows impact.
- ▶ Encampments mapped via GPS for targeted response by our teams.
- ▶ Frequent users flagged for focused outreach.

Key Takeaways



Emergency Response

- ▶ Outreach is on-call for emergencies.
- ▶ Trust is built by consistent, frontline presence.



Strategic Framing

- ▶ We speak first responders' language: safety, efficiency, results.



Community Value

- ▶ Outreach saves systems money by reducing ER and ambulance use.
- ▶ Data transparency builds public and funder support.

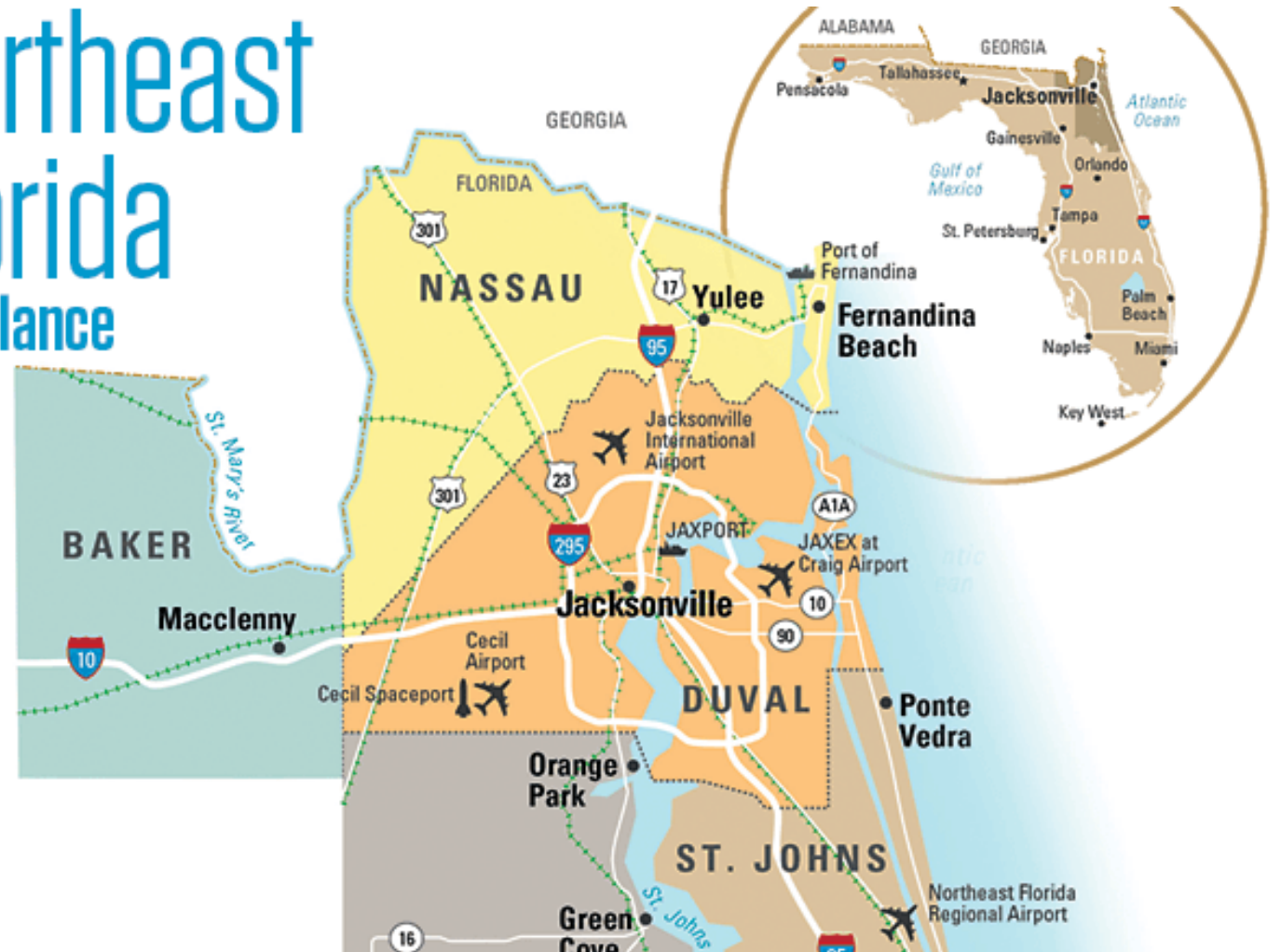
Establishing and Improving Partnerships with First Responders

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JACKSONVILLE, FL

Northeast Florida Continuum of Care FL- 510

Northeast Florida at a glance



Capable Allies: Partnering with Fire & Rescue in Response to Homelessness



...le who are homeless are not socially
...ate. They are people without homes."
Sheila McKechnie



Partnership is not a posture but a process-a continuous process that grows stronger each year as we devote ourselves to common tasks.

John F. Kennedy

@autismancj

We view ourselves as a living document one that is steadily improving as we progress through the pros and cons of outreach while working with those who are unsheltered.



Things of note with this new partnership:



1) It is new - starting October 2024



2) Main charge of Jacksonville Fire Rescue Team (JFRD) is encouraging/moving/transporting unsheltered folks in the downtown core to available shelter when they are willing and beds are open



3) Not fully connected to HMIS so difficult to determine outcomes vs. outputs



4) Significant reduction in visible unsheltered homelessness in urban core with a corresponding 48% decrease in unsheltered homelessness in our 2025 PIT.



Our Other Partners

- City of Jacksonville
- I.M. Sulzbacher Center
- City Rescue Mission
- The Salvation Army of Jacksonville
- Trinity Rescue Mission

P.A.T.H Team

- Jacksonville's PATH team – short for “**P**roviding **A**ssistance to the **H**omeless was started due in part to a Florida law that bans people without homes from sleeping outdoors overnight in public places (**HB 1365**). The seven-person team, made up of Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department (JFRD) members, works one-on-one with unhoused individuals to connect them with resources and shelter.



The Role of First Responders in Community Outreach

Building Trust and Strengthening Community Relationship

How it Helps:

- Building trust is essential for effective outreach, it allows 1st responders to interact with participants in a non-emergency setting, where genuine connections and rapport can develop.
- **Fosters Mutual Respect:** Positive interactions outside of crisis situations show that first responders are committed to those who are unhoused, not just enforcement or emergency intervention.
- **Strengthens Resilience:** Encourages providers to come together and support each other, creating a more resilient environment that can handle homelessness more effectively.

Promoting Mental Health and Resilience

How it Helps:

- The relationship between mental health and homelessness is complex and interrelated whereas an estimated 20 to 25 percent of the homeless population suffers from mental illness.
- **Reducing Stigma:** By openly discussing mental health, first responders help normalize seeking support, which is essential for communities.
- **Providing Resources:** First responders can serve as a link between participants and available support systems
- **Encouraging Resilience:** Teaching coping skills, emotional first aid, and stress management can improve resilience, helping those who are unhoused face future challenges and strengths

Supporting Vulnerable Populations

- *It is widely understood that people experiencing homelessness have poorer health outcomes than the general population. The 1st responders team often come into contact with individuals who are elderly, dealing with chronic health conditions and/or mental health issues.*

How It Helps:

- **Elderly Safety Check:** First responders can conduct wellness checks on those who are unsheltered.
- **Health Screening:** can be done at encampment sites to gain trust and prevent breakouts
- **Transportation Assistance:** 1ST responders provide transportation to shelters and access to mainstream resources for those who are non-ambulatory.
- **Homeless Outreach:** First responders connect with local shelters and support services, building trust and providing information on available resources for housing, healthcare and food.



Tips for First Responders to Maximize Impact in Community Outreach



If you're looking to get involved in or improve community outreach, here are some practical tips to make the most of your efforts:

- **Be Consistent:** Regular involvement, rather than one-time events, builds familiarity and trust over time.
- **Listen and Learn:** Approach community members with curiosity and respect. Take the time to listen to their concerns and ideas.
- **Collaborate with Local Organizations:** Partnering with community organizations, schools, and businesses can expand the reach of your efforts and make programs more effective.
- **Use Social Media:** Highlighting outreach events and safety tips on social media helps reach a wider audience and reinforces your presence in the community.
- **Follow Up:** After outreach events, follow up with participants when possible. Showing ongoing interest helps maintain relationships and demonstrates your commitment to their well-being.



Conclusion

- Community outreach programs allow first responders to make a positive impact beyond emergency response. Through trust-building, education, support for vulnerable populations, and community preparedness, first responders play a crucial role in shaping safer and healthier communities.
- Engaging with the community proactively can reduce the frequency and severity of emergencies, enhance public trust, and create lasting relationships that benefit both residents and first responders alike. By investing in community outreach, you're not only improving public safety but also enriching your own role, helping make a difference in the lives of those you serve.
- For more ideas, resources, and support for community outreach, you can email me at WEvans@changinghomelessness.org Together, we can build stronger, more resilient communities that stand ready for whatever challenges lie ahead.



Jacksonville sees 40% drop in homelessness due to new program

NORTHEAST FLORIDA

- JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Jacksonville City Council Finance Committee Chair Ron Salem announced a significant 40% reduction in the number of homeless individuals in Duval County, attributing the decrease to a new, city council-funded program implemented over the past year.
- The reduction is attributed to collaboration between the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, along with targeted funding.
- According to the announcement, the significant decrease follows a year of strategic funding and programmatic support approved by the Jacksonville City Council, which focused on addressing homelessness through outreach, prevention, housing assistance and coordinated care.

2024 Point in Time

FIGURE 1
Sheltered, Unsheltered and Totals, 2024



2025 Point in Time

FIGURE 1: 2025 TOTALS







METRO PRECINCT

22 FRANKLIN ST. NEWARK, NJ 07102

OBJECTIVES

- Introduction
- Overview of the City
- Overview of my Responsibilities
- Partnerships
- Training
- Best Practices
- How the Practices are used with different interactions
- Our Response Team
- Our Path/Arrive/Hope One
- Summary of Potential Outcomes



Commanding Officer
Captain Christopher Segarra

segarrac@ci.newark.nj.us



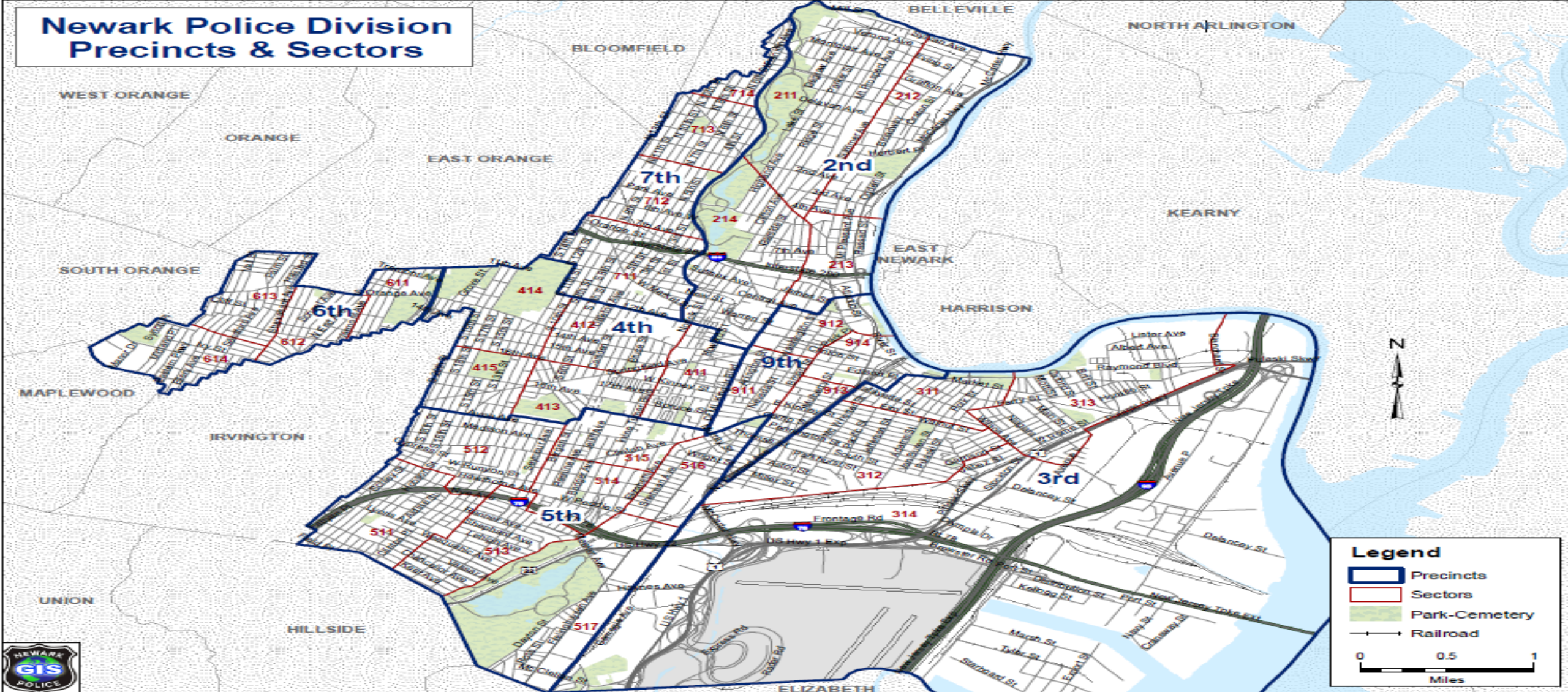
Executive Officer
Lieutenant Terrence Best

bestt@ci.newark.nj.us

INTRODUCTION

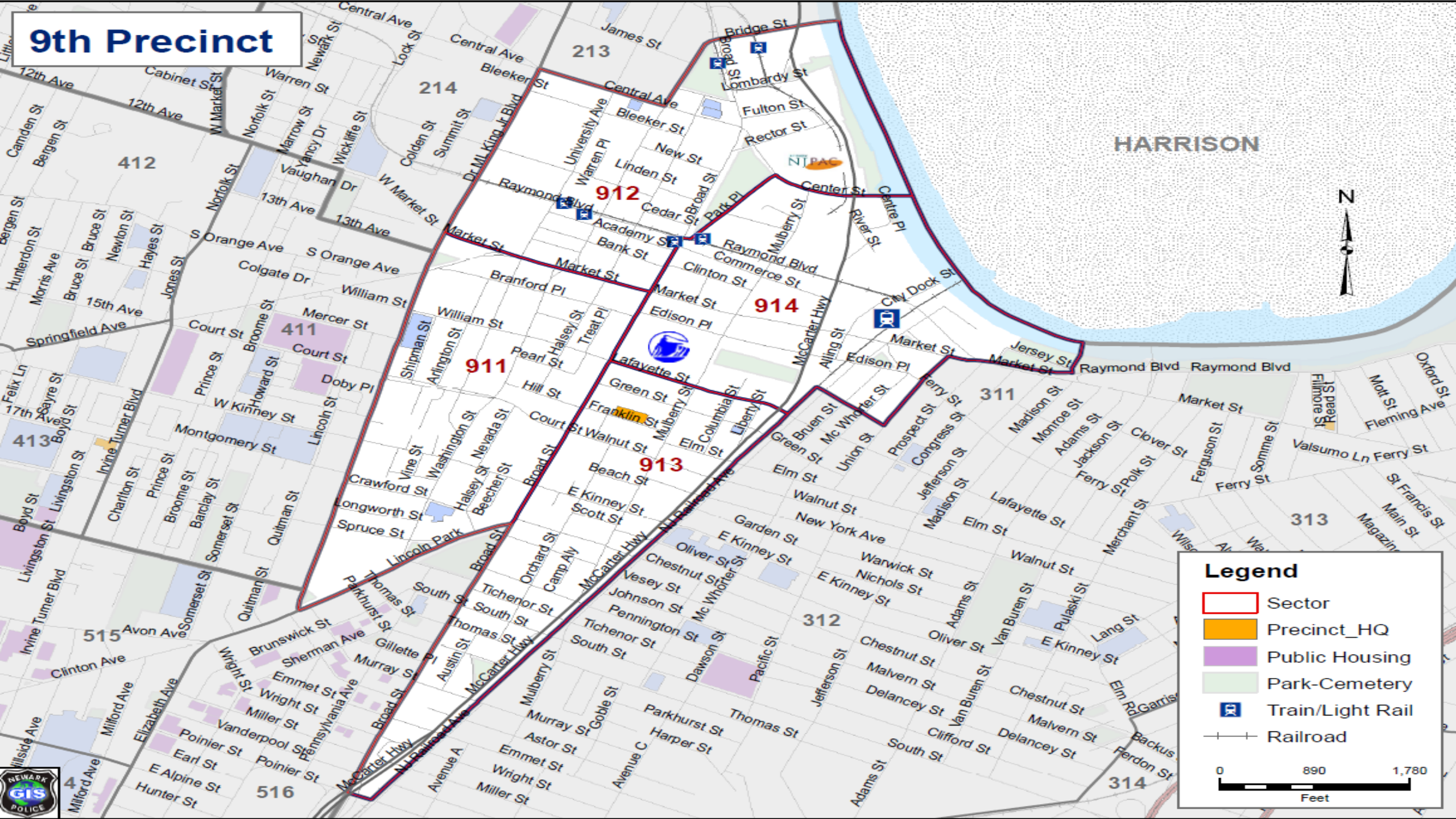
- 20-year veteran in law enforcement
- Currently completing my bachelors degree – seton hall and fairleigh dickerson
- Commander of the newest precinct in the city – est 2024
- I oversee the three main venues in the city which are the prudential arena, nj performing arts center, and symphony hall
- Attended numerous trainings, including major crimes investigations, community policing, leadership courses, crisis intervention, major incident training, and recently a fbi leeda trilogy recipient
- previous commander of the community focus division, major crimes division, 3rd precinct, 7th precinct and traffic division
- Currently an adjunct instructor at the newark training division where I teach community policing, use of force, stop search & arrest, bias free policing, and criminal investigations

Newark Police Division Precincts & Sectors



**CITY OF NEWARK WITH OVER 315,000 RESIDENTS.
PUBLIC SAFETY DIVIDES THE CITY INTO 7 PRECINCTS**

9th Precinct



Partnerships





CIT-NJ

CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM

C E N T E R O F E X C E L L E N C E



Integrating
Communications,
Assessment,
and Tactics™

ABLE TRAINING



TRAINING





Bias-free policing: law enforcement practices that are free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, or other personal characteristics.

Fair Treatment: Officers treat all individuals with dignity and respect, ensuring impartial enforcement of the law.

Community Trust: Bias-free policing is essential for building and maintaining public trust in law enforcement.

Training & Awareness: Officers receive training on implicit bias, cultural competency, and de-escalation techniques to reduce biased behavior.

Community policing is a strategy that promotes organizational strategies to support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques.

Partnerships: Builds strong relationships between police and the community, including local organizations, schools, businesses, and residents.

Proactive Approach: Focuses on preventing crime before it happens, rather than just responding to incidents.

Problem-Solving: Uses collaborative efforts to identify and address the root causes of crime and social disorder.





Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) is a specialized program designed to help law enforcement officers respond effectively to individuals experiencing mental health crises.

Goal: Enhance safety for officers, individuals in crisis, and the community while improving outcomes for people with mental illness or behavioral health issues.

De-escalation Skills: Teaches officers techniques to calm potentially volatile situations without the use of force.



Mental Health Awareness: Increases understanding of mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and developmental disabilities.

Collaboration: Promotes strong partnerships between law enforcement, mental health providers, advocacy groups, and families..

Improved Outcomes: CIT programs have been shown to reduce injuries, use of force incidents, and repeat encounters with law enforcement.

ICAT

Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics

- **Purpose:** Focuses on safely resolving incidents involving individuals who are unarmed or armed with non-firearm weapons.
- **De-escalation Emphasis:** Teaches officers how to defuse potentially dangerous situations using time, distance, and communication.
- **Decision-Making:** Enhances critical thinking and threat assessment under stress.
- **Scenario-Based:** Uses real-life scenarios to practice tactical communication and safe approaches.
- **Reduces Use of Force:** Aims to minimize harm to both officers and the public by emphasizing alternatives to deadly force.
- **Nationally Recognized:** Developed by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and supported by agencies nationwide.

ABLE

Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement

- Purpose:** Trains officers to intervene when they see a colleague engaging in or about to engage in misconduct or errors in judgment.
- Peer Intervention:** Encourages a culture where officers protect each other and the public by speaking up.
- Ethical Policing:** Reinforces a commitment to doing the right thing, even under pressure.
- Prevention Focused:** Helps prevent misconduct, reduce mistakes, and protect officer and public safety.
- Accountability Culture:** Promotes a supportive and transparent work environment within law enforcement.
- Backed by Research:** Developed by Georgetown University Law Center and based on principles of social science and real-world policing.

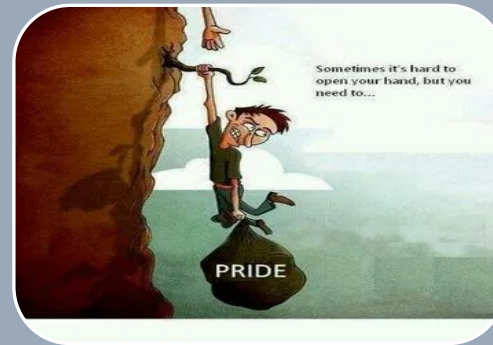
Our View of Interactions



Mental Health



Substance
Abuse



Pride & EGO



Trauma

Response to calls vary.
Outreach is daily.
Overnight/weekends through call service.



1st Response



1st/2nd
Response



Final
Response



PART OF THE RESPONSE TEAM

Police – law enforcement

Homeless services – city employee & housing consulting

Mental health screener – rutgers university

Nurse – rutgers/university hospital

Holistic doctor – treats the whole person not the symptoms of disease

Substance abuse counselor- rutgers university

Trauma counselor – city office of violence prevention & trauma recovery

BEST PRACTICES

- GUARDIAN MENTALITY
- WARRIOR MENTALITY



BEST PRACTICES

Communication is key – listen more and talk less

Appearance – dress the part. Shy away from tactical clothing and go with a polo or a civilian attire

Pay attention to mannerisms, characteristics, and mental health signs

Use the training to make better decisions – assess the situation as a whole

Try to understand and set biases to the side

Find a solution with partners and community members

And learn when to step back and allow our partners to take the lead

The Path Home: Collaborating Across Our Community

It will take all of us, as a community,
to end Chronic Homelessness in Newark.
We hope you'll join in our efforts! If you
would like to partner, collaborate, or share
ideas and strategies, please email us at:
endhomelessness@ci.newark.nj.us

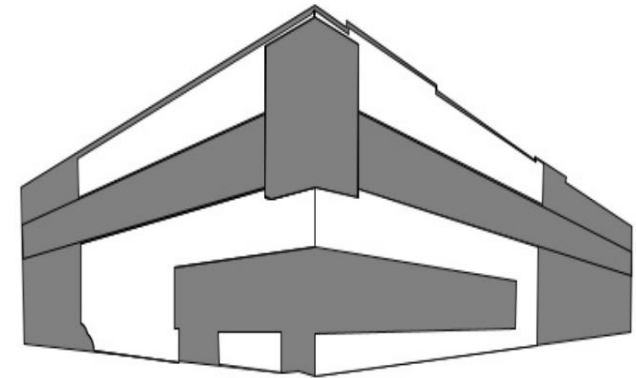
A STRATEGIC PLAN
TO END CHRONIC
HOMELESSNESS IN
NEWARK



LOCATION: 1136 RAYMOND BLVD. NEWARK, NJ 07102



AREA OF FOCUS: MURAL FOOTPRINT IN WHITE



ARRIVE
TOGETHER



CLOSING STATEMENT

"When addressing the complex challenges of homelessness, law enforcement must lead with empathy, fairness, and professionalism. Bias-free policing ensures that individuals experiencing homelessness are treated with dignity and without judgment. Community policing fosters collaboration with local service providers, advocacy groups, and residents to develop compassionate, long-term solutions. Crisis Intervention Training equips officers to safely and effectively respond to mental health and substance use crises, which often intersect with homelessness. Through ICAT and ABLE, officers are trained to de-escalate tense situations and support one another in doing the right thing. Together, these approaches reflect a modern, humane, and partnership-driven model of policing—one that prioritizes safety, respect, and real solutions for those most in need."



THANK YOU

Discussion

What is your advice for individual **providers** who would like to build bridges with first responders?

...for **CoCs** looking to build system-wide partnerships?

...for **first responders** wanting to build bridges with the homelessness response system?

How have you worked to build **trust** across systems?



Q&A

