

July 2020

Dear City/Town Council Members-

*When we know better, we do better.*

I have lived in Greenfield for the past 17 years. Over ten of those years has been in direct support services for fellow community members. I have witnessed the treatment that poor people and BIPOC receive at the hands of the local and state police.

It's a very different world view from the inside of low-income housing. Police regularly sit at entrances waiting for people to go to the grocery store or work and pull them over for vehicle violations and suspicions. They put on the mirrored glasses and slowly cruise through the housing complexes intimidating residents. I have personally witnessed them using aggression and scare tactics and bad individual judgement like threatening a single mom who was at work but the police behaved like she was an escaped criminal. Or detaining teenaged boys, after their mom passed suddenly of a heart issue while they took pictures of a potential "crime scene" and kept the shocked boys standing in the rain without so much as offering breakfast while grieving their mother. Not surprising to me, these are interactions with black families.

We know from where the police originated in this country. A simple google search will let you know if you don't know this yet. We have learned so much in the last 40 years since computer technology allowed us to measure and study brains. Neuroscience and epigenetics are common facts in social work yet seem like a foreign language in the criminal justice field, with the exception of some specific programs. I attend conferences, online and in person training regularly to learn more about what's being uncovered in neuroscience and understanding why we behave the ways we do as a species. I take trainings about working with perpetrators and survivors, volatile, reactive folks of all ages, and how to have cultural humility while working with people. It's curious that someone like me has to have so many hours of training each year for a job without a weapon and for half (or less!) of the salary. Why are my funders more stringent about training and certification than those of someone who arrives on a scene with a loaded weapon?? There is longitudinal data and police must simply not be interested in learning about the impact of intergenerational poverty, systemic racism and mental health and health outcomes or the best, most effective ways to work with folks in crisis or misusing substances or their training would reflect that.

When you know better, do better. We know better. We know that imprisoning people is not an effective strategy for restorative justice. We know that there are many complex factors, most urgently the impact of racism within communities of the global majority that aggression and force will not fix. We know that substance misuse is not a measurement of morality and we know that mental health related behaviors land folks in jail rather than leading to impactful treatments. "We" know this as social workers, why are police held to other standards but are the first responders in a crisis?

Defunding police as the first response and shifting our community response to support rather than punish will be in alignment with what social workers already know. Having folks that know resources and can walk beside people in crises rather than locking them up is a way to shore up our community. Social workers have known for a long time that resourced folk do better. Empowering and helping

people work way better to producing good citizens than yelling, beating and hurting or punishing. There is no program allowed that uses these tactics because they are ineffective! The old way keeps people locked up for lifetimes and stuck in cycles of poverty and oppression. Social service providers know that aggression and authoritative style are not effective and have training that clarifies why anger and punishment are not an appropriate way to interact with someone in crisis.

We can move forward with armed with intelligence, scientific data and knowing better. We can work to create a better, stronger community that's trauma-informed and healing-focused. We can change and adapt to new models and ways that actually work. Why not reduce the middle part which causes so much family trauma? Why not connect folks in crisis directly to support workers? There are already many other models that work way better than billy-clubs and guns. Will we do better, Greenfield??

Thank you-

Bekki Craig

Davis Street

Greenfield MA 01301