Implementing the 21st Century Policing Task Force Recommendations in Phoenix

**Recommendation 1.9 – Law enforcement agencies should build relationships based on trust with immigrant communities. This is central to overall public safety.**

The City of Phoenix has long been committed to the principles of community policing outlined in the 21st Century Policing Report, and the Phoenix Police Department (PPD) continues to advance efforts to further strengthen trust with the community. One of the characteristics the city boasts is a diverse population, with some of the diversity attributed to the resettlement of refugees. In recent years, Arizona has been one of the top 10 states in the country for refugee resettlement, and about 80 percent of the state’s refugee population is resettled in Maricopa County, where Phoenix stands as the largest city.

With a sizeable and increasingly diverse refugee population in the Phoenix area, the PPD has increased efforts in recent years to further develop relationships with the refugee communities and with agencies involved in refugee resettlement. These partnerships serve to benefit both the refugee communities and the city as a whole. The resettlement agencies assist the PPD by providing continuous resettlement trends; advising on cultural considerations and language needs of the new refugee populations; training law enforcement personnel on matters concerning legal status, language needs, and cultural issues; and introducing PPD representatives to leaders in specific ethnic communities – leaders who could be engaged in dialogues when crimes or difficult situations involve that community. Likewise, the PPD provides training to newly arrived refugees and ethnic communities, to educate them on the role of police, the laws, and how to access help in emergency situations. The goal is for these new residents to feel comfortable contacting the PPD. This training has helped to reduce language barriers, resolve cultural misperceptions, and better prepare the refugee population for a successful transition to their new environment.

A serious crime committed in the refugee community several years ago served as a catalyst for the PPD to bolster outreach efforts with the city’s refugees. Through relationships that had already been established between many refugee groups and PPD personnel, leaders from the community involved were invited to attend organized sessions of the PPD’s Citizen Police Academy (CPA). The CPA was developed to provide business and community leaders an inside look at law enforcement operations. The training was well received by the community members and the level of participation was high. This collaboration served to increase the education provided on cultural differences that are critical during police and resident encounters.

The PPD’s ongoing commitment to further advance outreach efforts with our refugee community has resulted in the development of educational materials and in an increased level of communication with immigrant and refugee populations in Phoenix. Through a collaborative partnership with a resettlement organization, a PPD brochure, entitled “What to do when stopped by the Police,” was created in multiple languages – including Somali, Swahili, Arabic, Burmese, and Spanish – which coincide with the languages spoken by large numbers of our refugees. It provides information on what to expect from initiating police officers and explains the various reasons police officers conduct traffic
The brochure also includes 14 pointers on what is required by the person being contacted by the police officer, and the names, addresses and phone numbers of each neighborhood precinct location in the city. The Mission Statement of the PPD is also included, along with comments from our Police Chief. A “Refugee Resource Card” for police officers was also developed through this collaboration. This card contains information on the various statuses of refugees along with important telephone numbers – a quick and easy reference for officers if assistance is needed during contacts with refugees. It also provides information to help police officers develop mutually effective cross-cultural communication with the refugees contacted.

The PPD maintains a healthy working relationship with a number of refugee resettlement organizations in Arizona. At least once each month, a PPD officer conducts basic public safety classes for new refugee arrivals at four different relocation centers, and assists with the refugees’ integration process. The classes introduce information that is essential for refugee transition. The curriculum is structured to increase knowledge and understanding of United States, State of Arizona, and City of Phoenix laws; crime prevention techniques; and safety strategies. Both structured educational workshops and outreach activities are included in this effort.

Recently, the ongoing partnership with the city’s refugee community culminated in the establishment of a new Citizen Advisory Board representing the refugee population in Phoenix. It is one of 12 Citizen Advisory Boards managed by the PPD that allow for regular interactions with police representatives on current issues within their respective communities, as well as on specific neighborhood concerns.

The PPD will continue to develop and advance effective outreach efforts that build trusting relationships with our immigrant and refugee communities, to ensure their safety and the overall safety of our city.

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