Title: Support On Scene:
How one district partners with police to address trauma where it happens
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East St. Louis School District 189
Inspector Nick Manns, director of Public Safety Enforcement Group
Illinois State Police

Dusty Rhodes 0:02

Hello, we are the Illinois State Board of Education. And we love Illinois schools. I'm Dusty Rhodes in the Communications Department at ISBE. Normally, when you hear the term SOS, you think of an urgent cry for help. But in East St. Louis District 189, SOS has a slightly different meaning. It stands for Support On Scene.

Tiffany Gholson 0:28

We go on-scene for any youth 21 and under who is involved in a traumatic incident, whether it's them as a victim, a family member, a bystander, a witness, or perpetrator.

I have a team that will go out from 4 p.m. to essentially 7 a.m. seven days a week, and we provide support on scene alongside law enforcement.

Dusty Rhodes 1:00

Already this school year, District 189's SOS team has joined first responders on-scene at a house fire where five children perished, at the death of a toddler killed by a stray bullet while sleeping in her grandmother's bed, and at another shooting incident where one of the seven victims was a 3-year-old who was left with a severed spine. In this podcast, you're going to hear how this team was created and how it helps the school community. Then you will hear the perspective of a St. Louis law enforcement official. Let's get started.

Tiffany Gholson 1:36

You know, I should have you introduce yourself.

Okay, hello, my name is Tiffany Gholson and I am the director of Parent and Student Support Services in East St. Louis School District 189, as well as the director of the Wraparound Wellness Center,

Dusty Rhodes 1:53

Describe for me the Wraparound Wellness Center. What is that?

Tiffany Gholson 1:56

So the Wraparound Wellness Center is a umbrella term for really relentless outreach and engagement, support, counseling, referrals. It's a one-stop shop for youth and families within the East St. Louis School District footprint. So we have several components to providing the support and the support is what we provide in the evening, so 4 p.m. on. We don't necessarily have a building that stays open, but we do have on-call staff that can provide support in certain areas. The Wraparound Wellness Center also spends time at the St. Clair County Juvenile Detention Center to do some violence interruption work.

In the broader sense, we provide social work services to youth that are detained. We provide support to their families, so that they can be in a better place when their youth is released from the detention center. We give counseling services, referral services. We try to teach skills such as de-escalation techniques, while in there. Plus, explain restorative practices, how to repair relationships, and then actually goal-setting. We also do intense family counseling once a family is released from detention, released from the hospital, or just kind of recovering from a traumatic event. So we have counseling referrals; we help with paperwork for VOCA (Victims of Crime Act), for the Victim Compensation Program; funeral services; housing relocation; and things like that. It's kind of a whatever-it-takes program to help people get through the trauma that they've experienced. Wraparound is culturally responsive. It's strength-based, one of the things we really try to push is that we have more family and natural supports at the table than agencies, because we know at some point we won't be working with a family. And so we really teach them how to advocate and seek out services and know about services themselves. And so the motto with wraparound is to do for, do with, watch do, cheer on. And so that's really how we support our families and they kind of never really exit out of the program. We just make sure we're there to support them with what they need.

Commented [WT1]: It looks like this stands for Victims of Crime Act. Maybe say '… for the Victims of Crime Act for the Victim Compensation Program; …'

Dusty Rhodes 4:21

It sounds like don't give a man a fish, teach him how to fish.

Tiffany Gholson 4:26

Exactly. Oh, and one other part: We also partner with Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital. It's across the river in St. Louis. But in our East St. Louis area, we do not have any trauma services. So 100% of our youth that have that need to go to the emergency room for especially a trauma, a bigger one, will be taken over to St. Louis. And so now we also have a partnership with them. So we're able to serve our East St. Louis youth while they are in the hospital or supporting their families, dealing with a traumatic event, trying to reduce retaliation talk or revenge talk, also dealing with the trauma of being a gunshot victim, or stabbing, or some other assault, and just trying to support the family in what's next. What do we need to do next to make sure we're okay.

Dusty Rhodes:

Okay, how new is the Wraparound Wellness Center?

Tiffany Gholson:

So the Wraparound Wellness Center was birthed during COVID. So we had a lot of trials and tribulations in the beginning. This was a state appropriation. So legislators, most specifically Rep. LaToya Greenwood, pushed for her community to receive Trauma Recovery Services. And so this was a $700,000 grant, and I was allowed to figure out where exactly I wanted the funds to go to better support trauma recovery work in our school district and community. Doing that, I decided that because I activate the district's crisis team during the day, we've lost too many youth in a short amount of time since I've been here. And actually, in 2019-20, we lost four middle schoolers back to back.

But I was realizing, as I looked at my data, that most of the time, when we had traumatic incidents or crises happen, surrounding youth, it happened in the community, on the weekends, in the evenings -- not during the school day, where I had my plethora of social workers and counselors on hand and trained to be ready. So I used the funds in several different ways. But one of the ways directly related to that was to create this SOS team, or Support On Scene. And so now I have a team that will go out from 4 p.m. to essentially 7 a.m., seven days a week, and we go on scene for any youth 21 and under who is involved in a traumatic incident, whether it's them as a victim, a family member, a bystander, a witness, or perpetrator. We provide support on-scene alongside law enforcement. So we assist them. And in some other models that you might have seen across the country, with helping with folks with mental illness, we're assisting them with families that don't understand the processes that they're doing as they complete an investigation. So we are there on the scene to provide that support to anyone that is witnessing those kinds of issues.

Dusty Rhodes:

All right, I want to go back for a minute to when you talked about the inspiration for this program, and you mentioned that you lost four middle school students. And when you say lost, do you mean...

Tiffany Gholson:

They were all gunshot victims.

Dusty Rhodes 8:01

Middle school?

Tiffany Gholson 8:02

Yes. One tragically, after his eighth-grade dance, was at a house party or graduation party, and he was just caught in the crossfire. He was a superstar football player. He got a lot of national attention for his case. The other three, I know we kind of struggled with issues before. And so that goes back into why we wanted to kind of give a different lens to youth that are detained. So we don't want past perpetrators to become victims. And we don't want victims to then become perpetrators, right? And have the cycle of violence continue in our community. And so we try to interrupt, support our youth that might be struggling or involved in activities they

shouldn't be, and try to divert them to more positive activities. So, yes, three out of the four, I would have loved to have had this program to maybe support them before their demise.

Dusty Rhodes:

Every time you describe your program and SOS, you list the people that you extend the services to, and you always include the perpetrators. Some people may not understand why that's so crucial. So can you explain what services you give to perpetrators and what that looks like and why it's so important?

Tiffany Gholson:

Well, it's kind of what I've talked about before, being able to be within the detention center. With the detention center as well as our alternative school, we have students that might have high discipline referrals or suspension rates, they may have had police contact. What we want to do is try to intervene and provide different avenues, so that maybe they can be more successful in the community, prevent violence or criminal activity, and try to better wraparound the entire family to support them so that that can happen. And so all of our work and wraparound work is very individualized. So seeing whether students need, or these youth need, conflict resolution skills, or if they had experienced their own traumas and are lashing out. So they need counseling, or being able to talk through issues they have, how to better support their families, and providing structure or allowing them to have enrichment activities.

So, you know, we just don't want youth to think that mistakes they made will... in some ways, it may stay with them for life, but there are ways that they can adjust and recalibrate their lives and kind of go down a different path. So I'll just say the social work and counseling that we've provided in the detention center already, when youth have time to really reflect, they might see their actions that they've done differently. And then if you give them the tools to then behave differently, they may take you up on it. And all of that helps to have a more peaceful community.

Dusty Rhodes 11:21

I noticed in your annual report, it looked like you had responded on-scene to eight incidents. But your team also went to social media and responded that way. And I think that's pretty crucial. How did you do that?

Tiffany Gholson 11:41

Well, let me preface this by saying the Illinois State Police have a new unit in East St. Louis called the PSEG (Public Safety Enforcement Group) unit, and they handle violent crime. And they investigate violent crimes in the community. I think they started roughly around when I started the Wraparound project. And so we partnered really early together. And so they called us out on-scene. That's how usually we would go out on scene unless local police called us out. And so that partnership is great. Sometimes they might not call us out, they might have forgotten, they might not have thought it was in our realm of possibility yet, because we were both kind of learning as we go, together. And so my street team, they were also from the community. And so sometimes they will hear things, or see things on social media before I even got a police call. And so we will actively go on-scene to assist.

For instance, we had a woman who drove into the lake. It was on Facebook Live. One of my team members saw that and alerted me. I sent a team out there. We were under the impression for a couple of hours that her

Commented [WT2]: Used the google and couldn't find the remotest hint of what this might be. Is it maybe an acronym or something?

Commented [RD3R2]: I got it.

children were in the car with her, but found out that there were no children in the car, thankfully. She did pass away. But my team was still able to provide support to her family members, her mother, uncle, and some others who were on the scene. And so those are kind of the situations where we will go on call.

I have to also say that the beauty of our program, I think, is that it is taking place within the school district and as part of the school district. Because what happens is, if you have a traumatic event, I meet you at the hospital, my team supports you on scene. We might pray with you, we might hold your hand, we might entertain a 1-year-old while the adults are breaking down. And then we say we have resources for you. And you say yes, I am going to call to get counseling and grief services after the funeral. And things kind of get back to normal, trying to figure things out, and you might put that, you know, lower on your list of things to do, to get counseling, right? It's a lot of effort to do that.

The beauty of this being part of the school district is: That kid that might have been in the house, the 7-year-old that lost her mother, she goes to our school district. So the very next day, we don't need to have transportation, we don't need an intake form, we don't need them to schedule time to do it. The 7-year-old is in our building and we literally could pull her out of PE to check in with her, to talk to the school about being aware that she just lost her mother and how can we better support her, giving her break times, etc. So she's not missing entire days of school because she's having a rough time. She has immediate people that she already knows -- the school social workers. She already knows them and so she already has someone to talk with. You don't have to then build rapport and then you're removing a lot of those barriers of transportation time, insurance, etc. And so that has been a phenomenal piece of what we're doing here.

Dusty Rhodes 15:04

It's kind of brilliant, actually.

Tiffany Gholson 15:09

To be honest, it really is. I will say too, I know you asked about our demographics here: We have a high homeless rate, we have a high violence rate, we're in a food desert. Our school district, our kids, are "school dependent," which means that we provide breakfast, we provide lunch, we provide transportation to 100% of our students that need it, not just students that live 1.5 miles or further from their school. We provide uniforms, if necessary. I oversee two of our school-based health clinics. So families and students can get immunizations on site. I supervise the nurses who are administering Binax COVID testing. And we also have SHIELD testing. In the schools, we have eye exams, dentists come in, and other services all within the school building.

What we need to make sure we do -- which is what I do within our family and community engagement center, which I also run -- is making sure the parents still stay connected. So we want to eliminate some of those barriers and make sure that our youth, our students -- this next generation -- are in this really good place learning social skills and core social competencies and having eyeglasses and being ready to learn.

But we also want to make sure the parents get it as well. And so the other piece of our center and the work we do is making sure the parents are learning the same things that we're teaching kids, understanding that they have more conflicts with work, responsibilities, etc. So as much as we can, we give this to the families as well. But we definitely give it to the youth.

Dusty Rhodes:

I mean, it sounds to me, like what you're describing boils down to -- in the classroom, teachers already know kind of what's going on with a kid, they already know to keep a special eye on this kid because this kid may be having a rough day. And that way, whatever behavior comes out of that child is not misinterpreted as being a bad kid; it's interpreted as a child in pain.

Tiffany Gholson:

Correct. So, yes, so part of my work as the director of Parent and Student Support Services is pushing and in teaching and training on being trauma-informed schools. And so we want all schools to be safe havens for our youth. Again, we talked about the violence in the community, and Inspector Nick Manns may talk more about the statistics, but it is a violent community. It can be a violent community, even for our youth. And so we want, no matter what is going on anywhere else, we want school to be a safe haven. We want to look at behaviors as a "What happened to you?" Why is this happening? And how can we better support you? We use PBIS learning, and what PBIS is is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support. And kind of one of the mantras they say is we teach a child math, we teach a child how to drive a car, but we usually punish the child for behavior. And so what we try to do is teach them different behaviors, teach them self-awareness, self-management, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, how to deal with trauma, positive coping strategies instead of negative ones, like risky driving, risky sex, violence, things like that. And so we're trying to kind of loop all of this together.

Dusty Rhodes 18:59

A lot of educators know the term ACES and they think of adverse childhood experiences. I, myself, had not heard ACES used for adverse community environment. Describe briefly what that is, and how it impacts a child when they have both kinds of ACES.

Tiffany Gholson 19:23

Yes, so I'm not sure where adverse community experiences came into play either, but it is absolutely fitting to describe what is going on in East St. Louis schools and our community. ACES, the study in and of itself, is actually very limited. I mean, it asks a lot of what happens within your childhood home. It was a study asked to adults. So as we've translated it to youth, probably not best practice, but that that's another discussion on the other day. It misses a lot. It misses natural disasters that they see, the things they see on social media and on TV.

But an adverse community experience includes concentrated poverty, which we have; disproportionate toxic exposures, so we've done better with lead and asbestos. But in a lot of places, you still have really old buildings, poor transportation systems, and violent routes where kids have to walk to and from school, which is why the state deems that our whole area is a dangerous route, which is why our district is allowed to provide transportation for all of our youth. An adverse community experience would involve being a food desert, and not having many options that we're working on community gardens and things like that. But right now, you might go to more places that take SNAP benefits, but they appear to be more selling liquor and tobacco than actual fresh fruits and vegetables. Not a lot of employment opportunities here. And so our parents are to be less involved in school activities because they may have to go across the river to St. Louis or other neighboring towns for employment, things like that. So our school district, we're still under state control, we're still working to improve our academics and having more students to meet and exceed standards in the academic realm. But we also know that if our kids are focused on survival, they're not focused on education. And so that's kind of one

thing that we push here. And then lack of resources: We have some resources, but we also have to sometimes go to neighboring places to get the support we need for our youth and families.

Dusty Rhodes 21:51

Okay, talk about Peace Warriors. You train students, the Peace Warriors. How are they selected? How do you train them? And they carry grief kits? What are those?

Tiffany Gholson 22:03

So first of all, there's a nonprofit here called Join Hands. And (Executive Director Sheila Burton) learned about Dr. King's nonviolent principles and this national program, and brought it to St. Louis. We have since put our own students in this program, and they get trained. We visited North Lawndale Prep in Chicago, because they have an awesome Peace Warrior program, and everyone kind of does it differently. Our Peace Warriors have been chosen because they have experienced trauma themselves within our community. And they want to have a more peaceful school setting in a more peaceful community. And so they learned Dr. King's nonviolent principles. And then they learn how to tell their stories and what they experienced, how they positively coped with the loss of a loved one. And we have a great video that I can send to you, where some of them tell their stories. And then what will happen is during the school day, if they know of a peer who lost a sibling or parent or another close family member, they would reach out to them and just drop off a grief kit. The grief kit might include tissue, a note from the Peace Warrior, resources, numbers they can call if, say, they're suicidal or just depressed, a squeeze ball, a fidget spinner, candy, things like that. Just to tell them we're thinking about you, I've been where you are, feel free to join us or to reach out because we've been here too.

Commented [WT4]: Can we say who this is?

Commented [RD5R4]: I have emailed Dr. Gholson to ask

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Commented [WT7R4]: I would just reverse it and say Executive Director Sheila Burton. Also, I would be all in on capitalizing Peace Warrior(s).

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Dusty Rhodes 23:37

And that's also kind of genius, because kids of a certain age don't want to listen to adults about anything.

Tiffany Gholson 23:43

Correct. Oh, and they also will participate in community events and you know, peace events, you know, attend a memorial supporting youth. At some point, you know, we would have them -- not on the crime scenes, but maybe at a vigil wearing their outfits. So people see who they are and knowing like we're here to promote peace, support peace, and help you to, like, find peace. But yes, sometimes when we've lost students, and we might have a grief room set up the next day, you often see the youth consoling each other before they, you know, want to break off and talk to an adult. But yes, we think this will really help them and then help them know that they're not alone in their story and what they've experienced and then how they can do it differently.

Dusty Rhodes 24:33

So why is your project funded for only one year? I know that you got a legislative grant. And can the federal ESSER funds not be applied to this?

Tiffany Gholson 24:47

So... we don't need to worry about any of that. We did get re-funded. We were rewritten into the state budget. And I had about $750,000 the first year even though with COVID, and just figuring this out, I only had about six months of actual programming implementation, I have now gotten a re-fund for $1.4 million.

Dusty Rhodes 25:11

Well, congratulations. So finally, now that we've talked about a lot of bad things, what do you wish people knew about your school district and your students and their community?

Tiffany Gholson 25:25

Well, obviously, I'm an outsider. But I will be a helper wherever I go. And I have grown to love this community. As a social worker, anything that you wanted to do or work on, is here. And so so so many ways to give and to give back and to support. So I love the work that I'm doing here. This is the City of Champions. So beyond our athletic programs, including our Special Olympics athletes, we're a small community, but rich on history. So there's, there's some amazing students here, adults who are pouring into those students and youth, with their hearts and souls. There are former alumni and residents that talk about the good old days. And my hope is that we reduce the negatives, reduce the violence, put more positives in the community, heal the traumas, and then, like, remain hopeful that it can be all that everyone talks about, that I can see and I hear about that we can be that and more again.

Dusty Rhodes 26:37

All right. Thank you for all you do, and thanks for taking time to talk to me.

Tiffany Gholson 26:42

You're welcome. You're welcome.

Dusty Rhodes 26:48

What makes Dr. Gholson's program even more effective is the mutual cooperation between SOS and police. I spoke with Nick Manns, Illinois State Police inspector in charge of the Public Safety Enforcement Group. He says SOS is saving lives.

How long have you been in law enforcement?

Nick Manns 27:09

Over 30 years.

Dusty Rhodes 27:11

I don't know whether to say congratulations or bless your heart?

Nick Manns 27:14

Or “What's wrong with you?”

Dusty Rhodes 27:23

Has all that time been with Illinois State Police?

Nick Manns 27:26

No. No, I started in the United States Marshals Service. I was a deputy U.S. Marshal for five years. And then I went to the FBI, and I retired from the FBI after 26 years as a federal agent. And then when I retired from there, I became a detective at my home county, Jersey County, Illinois, and I was there for three years. And then I came to the State Police about a year and a half ago to start and run this unit in East St. Louis that we call the Public Safety Enforcement Group, which investigates all violent crime in the city of East St. Louis with East St. Louis city detectives.

Dusty Rhodes 28:06

Okay, so considering your 30 years of wearing a badge, did you have any initial skepticism about having civilians respond to incidents with you?

Nick Manns 28:19

I'll tell you the story, because I think it's, it kind of shows we got lucky in this case. So I have a friend who's retired East St. Louis police officer, and he was helping this SOS team, so to get off the ground, and he asked me if I would come to one of their trainings to talk about what we do when we get onto a crime scene. And I sat down with Dr. Gholson and this team, and this was like one of their training elements one night after work. And as I started to listen to what they did, I'm like, wow, like, that's the real deal. Like, that's something that would help us immensely. It's something in my 30 years that's been missing, something I would be looking for. So I personally, because I've had 30 years on and I've worked violent crime almost that entire time, I didn't have any skepticism about it. When I heard the concept, I'm like, this is an answer for us. This is a way to help, particularly the children that are witnessing this.

Commented [RD9]: @WOLF THEODORE overriding your edit bc this is how badgers talk. they're "on" the dept, not "in"

Dusty Rhodes 29:16

What was it about it that you said this is the real deal? What was it that caught your ear?

Nick Manns 29:21

Well, first, the people. So the leader of this group is Dr. Tiffany Gholson. I mean, she is a mover and a shaker, right? And in our profession, when you see people that just get the job done, you know those people right away. Second, she had brought to the table some, you know, highly trained and motivated social workers. And in conjunction with the social workers, she had community members who had faced trauma themselves that were

acting sort of as a group that will go out and actually talk and say, “Hey, I know what you saw and what you're feeling because I went through it.” And that combination, from a law enforcement perspective, to me, was the key to kind of breaking down this wall for young kids that witness some of this trauma, because a policeman, you're still, you know, you're only going to talk to the police about so much.

And so what I knew from years, is that I would go to a homicide investigator for instance, and I'm focused on solving that case. And, and oftentimes, when I get on the scene, I'd see kids standing around. And I knew that they had seen what occurred here, but policeman a lot of times shy away from young kids, particularly because it takes a forensic interviewer. And eventually, those kids kind of just melt away. And so over the course of my 30 years, I'm like, you know, no one ever talked to those kids and said, "What you saw was bad or wrong," or "Are you having problems? Are you having nightmares?" or the myriad of other things. But as a policeman, just wasn't really in my wheelhouse.

So when I sat in this training, I was like, wow, this is a group that can handle that, that can come right to the scene that can talk to the kids, that can deal with the kids, that can get their minds right. So that as they grow up from childhood into adulthood, they realize, you know, they have the help that they need.

And if you don't mind, I'll give you an example. When I, as a policeman, if I'm involved in a traumatic event, let's say I'm involved in a shooting or a bad accident, or I see something extraordinary, terrible, whatever. We typically have a debriefing after that, and we have resources that our department provides us to help us with dealing with that trauma so we don't develop PTSD and the myriad of other things you can develop from seeing trauma on a frequent basis. These kids had none of that, in this community. And this SOS team, they're designed solely to provide that, wow, that's … we need it. That's, that's a great partnership for us, the police, because we can plug them in, because we're going on every crime. And we can notify them and say, by the way, we just had a homicide. And they respond right to the scene, and they deal with the kids and the family.

Dusty Rhodes 31:58

Okay. And now that you've seen it in action for a few months, what do you think?

Nick Manns 32:05

It's incredible. And really, I'm a guy who's done it for 30 years. And the FBI had a similar type thing that we call victim specialists who would engage the family. But the victim specialists wouldn't always respond right to the scene with us. Now, this group, this SOS, they are on call. And if we need them at the scene, they'll come right there. And if we don't need them at the scene, then we'll refer the case to them the next morning, and they'll immediately go out and engage the families and engage those who witnessed the trauma and they provide them whatever they need. In a city like East St. Louis, something as simple as giving them a ride somewhere. Let's say their car was shot up during the shooting, and we have to take that car as evidence. And we have to keep it for X amount of time to process it. They'll help try to hook them up with transportation. Down to the more serious level, it's bringing kids in who are students of District 189 in this case, and knowing that they're probably going to have behavioral problems because they witnessed a murder last night. And by bringing those kids in and knowing and having teachers know what to expect, you know, I'm not an expert in this field, but to me, that's just common sense, providing that service. So, big fans.

Dusty Rhodes 33:27

And it's not just the victim's family; it can be a broader circle than that.

Nick Manns 33:32

Correct, it can be, you know, if we have suspects in the case, we see now in this day and age young 13-, 14-, 15-year-old kids carrying rifles, and you know, they're engaged in these ongoing disputes with other youngsters. Now, as a police officer, you can have a limited effect, obviously, if they shoot someone or what have you, we can deal with that and get them into criminal justice system. But sometimes it's just a back and forth between two small groups, and the SOS team can actually engage them and de-escalate some of those situations. And they have been doing that. And if they can't provide the service, they are finding someone who can. And so it's kind of a holistic approach to, to the youth of the city. You know, East St. Louis is a small city in comparison. But it's, you know, it's a violent city.

Dusty Rhodes 34:27

I know that they've even watched on social media, which can be tricky. If you don't know, like, everybody's got a nickname. And the platform du jour changes constantly. So if you've got people who can just monitor that, it's gotta help.

Nick Manns 34:49

It does. It helps us as law enforcement because in this case, Dr. Gholson and her group are embedded in the school district. And so they know a lot of these kids. You know, I can watch social media and I may or may not know individuals, but they can say, oh, that's that kid, right? There's, you know, a freshman at East St. Louis High School or what have you. And so they know a lot of the kids, especially the kids that are in need. And then we know, because we're working the crimes at night, what happens, a lot of the crimes that the school district wouldn't always hear about. So maybe it's a domestic where, you know, a mother in front of her children was beat severely. The school may or may not know about that, but this relationship they have with us, and our ability to hit their app, which is on our phones, and call them and advise them of this is allowing them to know and know that, hey, you might have a kid who's in a bad way today. And they're probably going to be in the classroom. So I think it's a mutually beneficial partnership.

Dusty Rhodes 35:55

Okay, and so if, if another district with similar issues, wants to try the same type of program, and their local law enforcement agency calls you and says, really? Do I really want to do this? What do you say?

Nick Manns 36:15

Yeah, yeah. So I say 100%. And, you know, I know, I know that at least the police culture, I've been at 30 years, right? And so there was a time, there was a day and age, where I think we were skeptical of the of the softer approach of the need for counselors and all that. But listen, if you're a police officer in 2021, we're past that, in my view. We know the value. And we know the value a lot of times from our own personal experience. Going back to the days before we had the resources, you know, and before we knew how to deal with trauma, and before we knew how to deal with the experiences that we experienced every day. And so I think most policemen in this day and age understand the value. And this unit is unique in that they're saying, hey, we'll come right out there right now.

And Dusty, they don't get, they don't come out there and try to interject themselves. They never get in the way. Most of the time, I know they're there, but I don't ever see them because they're working behind the scenes. Give you an example. We had a homicide out here, in the middle of the day, in East St. Louis, here a couple months ago. There was probably 150 people around the crime scene tape watching us dealing with the scene and dealing with a couple of the witnesses there that were literally splattered by blood from this homicide. And the SOS team came out there, they walked among the crowd. A lot of them are residents of this city. They knew a lot of the family members and people that were in the crowd, and they were able to literally bring things to a calmer situation. Because you know, when you're out there, your loved one's dead, and the police are trying to do their job, you want to get up there and be with that loved one. You're upset, you're grieving. All of that stuff happens at these scenes, and to have a team that can come in there and literally engage those who are grieving and those who are angry and those who are upset and bring that pulse down means that I don't need 20 police officers to handle this. I can do it with five or 10.

Commented [WT10]: Perhaps something lost in the translation here. Can we say 'with'?

Commented [RD11R10]: yup!

And I would tell any sheriff and any chief of police that that alone is a huge value. Because instead of your men and women concentrating on keeping the crowd at bay and keeping them calm, you can concentrate on how do we solve this case and find witnesses that will talk to us -- big value in my view. Again, I'm a 30-year officer. So if I would have had skepticism at the beginning, like if I'd have been a younger officer and been skeptical, it would have easily dissipated by now because they've proven themselves to at least to me and to my guys and gals over and over again. Really, the way I see it as a 30-year policeman is by doing these services, we're probably going to prevent some of these kids growing up to be offenders, right? Because they're going to realize this isn't the way. Violence isn't the way. What I saw is bad and all that. And before, by ignoring that, I think we were seeing generation after generation of young kids that were traumatized by violence, and then they became violent.

Dusty Rhodes 39:22

You're probably preventing some things that might happen the next weekend.

Nick Manns 39:26

Agree, agree! But in the bigger picture, if you get in the ear of a 9-,10-, 11-year-old who just saw somebody shot in the face, and you put them through the counseling they're going to need and you help them through the nightmares, very likely you're preventing post-traumatic stress disorder. By doing that alone, you're going to prevent all kinds of dysfunction when they become an adult. Moreover, you can prevent that propensity to become violent.

Commented [WT12]: Many different ways to do this. This is how AP does it.

Commented [RD13R12]: fine with me

We know this from our military and we know this from our police guys and gals that were exposed to violence, and who have been involved in violence for years. If you were in a war, prior to Vietnam, you came back, some of them became violent. Some of them became abusers. And I mean, this is just common sense.