

BURLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

PRESS RELEASE

January 8TH, 2016

BPD DISPATCHERS TRAINED IN FAIR AND IMPARTIAL DISPATCHING

On January 7TH, 2016, ten dispatchers for the Burlington Police Department received a daylong session of training in Fair and Impartial Dispatching, a course taught by T.J. Anderson, the Training & Curriculum Coordinator of the Vermont Police Academy. The course explores the idea of implicit bias, a phenomenon present in all persons, and explains how it can creep into police and fire dispatch situations. It then uses dispatcher-based scenarios for discussion and to develop an awareness of how dispatchers can detect their biases and prevent them from influencing their work.

Vermont's police were first to be introduced to the concept of Fair and Impartial Policing at the beginning of 2012. Later in that same year, the training became a requirement for all new Vermont police officers. It is based on understanding the science of bias, that it is imperative that police officers be made aware of how "implicit" (unconscious) bias can affect one's perceptions and thus possibly one's behaviors. Vermont police agencies are recognizing that dispatchers, given the nature and importance of their job, should also receive this training. Due to demand, the Vermont Police Academy developed Fair and Impartial Dispatching and began to teach it, when invited, in 2013. To date, 94 dispatchers have attended FID training.

The training follows on the heels of community concerns about a Burlington dispatcher's October, 2015 response to the parent of a young woman who received a Ku Klux Klan recruitment flier on her door and who was told by the dispatcher that there was little the police could do about it. Burlington Police detectives subsequently investigated the case and arrested the alleged distributor of the fliers. An internal investigation into the actions of the dispatcher will conclude shortly.

"Dispatchers, though they don't operate out in public, are a vital link in the relationship between citizens and the police," said Chief of Police Brandon del Pozo. "Good dispatching elicits a person's trust, gathers accurate information, and leaves callers reassured that the police are taking their concerns seriously. These feelings are a matter of perspective, however, and bias in dispatching, even inadvertent bias, can create an unnecessary divide. This training aims to bridge this gap. We strive to leave citizens reassured after every call, confident that they will receive good police service."

"Our phones are staffed every minute of every day, both for receiving 911 calls from the Vermont State Police and for calls to our main number," said Deputy Chief of Administration Jan Wright, herself a trained dispatcher. "We have the highest call volume of any police department in the state, and sometimes our dispatchers have only seconds to

determine the course of a call and route the appropriate resources. It's not a time for implicit biases to be at work. We have excellent dispatchers, and this training will serve to make them even better."

"Dispatchers who practice FID are more effective at their jobs, respond better to complaints, promote trust within the community that their agency serves, and keep responding emergency personnel safer," Said T. J. Anderson. "It is important for dispatchers to recognize, like all humans, that their perceptions and thus behaviors can be affected by unconscious bias. A dispatcher must recognize the presence of possible biases and learn to reduce them or override them with non-biased behavior/responses that more closely match the values that they consciously have and those that align with their Agency's, and police in general, values and mission."

For further comment, please contact Deputy Chief Jan Wright at JWright@bpdvt.org.