

CASE STUDY

Character: This story is not about technology, but compassion. Compassion at the personal level is inherent in Character Towns. Social sustainability depends on individuals and the systems used by organizations to govern for a public purpose.



From a traffic stop to a new car seat, KCPD social services program showing success

Posted: 1:40 PM, Feb 18, 2019, Updated: 1:50 PM, Feb 20, 2019

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — In December 2016, the Kansas City Police Department launched a pilot program to embed a social worker with a group of officers. Today, that program is a fixture of the department, with social workers housed in each of the city's six division stations.

[LISTEN: The 41 Files Kansas City Podcast talks with KCPD about groundbreaking program](#)

In November 2018, one of those social workers, Tori Cawman, worked on a special case that serves as an example of the work they're doing every day.

Cawman is stationed at KCPD's central patrol. She got a note one day at her desk, after a pair of officers stopped a woman for speeding in a school zone.

"When they pulled the mother over, they found that her daughter was not restrained properly," Cawman said.

The woman was very upset, and police learned that her car seat had recently been destroyed in a house fire. Cawman made some calls, and was able to find a replacement.

"When I told the officers that I'd found a car seat, and that I coordinated with this mom, immediately their response was, 'We want to go take it to her,'" Cawman said.

The officer involved with that stop, who didn't want to be identified for this story, told 41 Action News what the reaction was like when they took the car seat to the woman's home.

"She lit up like a Christmas tree, and that made me feel good about the whole situation," the officer said.

That officer said this case is just one of many examples he could mention, and described how the job has changed with a social worker in the building.

“It's been phenomenal,” the officer said. “Whatever we put on their doorstep, they're able to give us reference and resources, that before, we didn't have.”

Cawman said everything she does starts with an officer who sees a need, which leads to some wild phone calls, emails and post-it notes. The same goes for the other social workers partnering with KCPD.

“We meet every other week, and we will have this moment where we all lay our cards on the table,” Cawman said. “Here are the ridiculous things I've seen this week, and here are the amazing ones.” One of our social services down in Metro helped get a gentleman a dog, because his had died.”

From physical items that improve everyday life, to more conceptual items, the officer said he's seen a wide range of gifts come out of the program.

“The social services program has given people furniture, given them time,” the officer told us. “You name it, whatever you need in life, they've pretty much been there to step up.”

Cawman gets questions about her job from people outside the department, specifically about how dangerous it is. She said it's provided answers for her in her career choice.

“I had no idea that so many officers every day were already doing this, but without the resources, without the knowledge that I have,” Cawman said. “It has become the type of job where I can't imagine doing anything but this.”

The KCPD social services program started with Chief Rick Smith, when he was a major, and commander of central patrol. The program expanded with the help of a grant from The Hall Foundation, and funds from the city.

The program's coordinator said she doesn't know of any other large police department using social services this way.

LINK: <https://www.kshb.com/news/safe-kc/from-a-traffic-stop-to-a-new-car-seat-kcpd-social-services-program-showing-success>