

## **Restoring Trust with the Bainbridge Island Police Department Program**

### **Problem Assessment:**

The Bainbridge Island Police Department (BIPD) has emerged from a period of extreme transition that created both excitement and opportunity. Over the past 10 years, the agency has experienced three different police Chiefs, all with different styles and strengths, and a general lack of administrative oversight. Responsibilities seemed to have been randomly assigned, rearranged, and revoked, leaving numerous areas of responsibility untended. This ultimately created confusion, cynicism, apathy and inconsistency within the agency. Internal strife was rampant, employee turnover rate was high, and this discord was arguably palpable in the community.

### **Chief's Statement:**

In 2010, BIPD experienced a controversial officer involved shooting that led to civil litigation and community uproar. The incident was followed by problematic media releases that may have been inaccurate and created tension and a lack of trust between the agency and its citizenry. As the City navigated a contentious trial and ultimately a large settlement in the shooting case, the Chief came under fire and eventually left the department.

Chief Matthew Hamner was selected as the BIPD's new Chief and joined the agency in June, 2013 and has worked tirelessly since that time to restore trust among members of the department, and to bring together the agency and the constituents it serves.

The Bainbridge Island Police Dept. had fired its chief and the commander in 2012 and had hired an interim chief. About a year later I was hired as police chief. In my first few months I realized the relationship with the community was very poor. I also realized internally relationships were fractured and there was bickering and some passive aggressive personalities wreaking havoc with peoples psyche.

The first challenge was to figure out where the problems were. It was obvious no one had trust in the supervisors of the department. We immediately began a program of meeting with each individual officer on a regular basis one on one. This helped paint a clear picture of what was needed. The officers made it clear that they wanted the supervisors held to the same level of accountability as everyone else. As opportunities presented themselves, accountability was implemented with everyone. Armory evaluation. Lexipol evaluation. We soon discovered talents of the employees. We were able to see clearly that most of the officers were good hardworking individuals who wanted to do the right things. I began communicating this to the media by holding press conferences on good police work. Officers were being recognized for good work and were jumping at opportunities to show what kind of officers they were. Bike patrols began. Walking in the community became more common. Engaging the community in events like the police youth advisory group. We designated an officer to be our community relations officer. We eventually made that a permanent position.

As officers began to have a vision with civility training and seeing that everyone was being held accountable boosted morale. We saw some officers retire which allowed new blood in as supervisors. Everyone was held to a higher standard. Officers began working harder and

showing good results. We had our first awards ceremony and we recognized officers for good work done in years past.

We put together a reorganization chart and we were able to show the members of the department a vision for the future. We purchased equipment to update the department which was long overdue.

We worked on a new complaint process so that every complaint is recorded including the minor ones. We sent a disposition letter to every single complainant. They were made aware of the findings.

We reached out to our harshest critics and addressed issues that they felt were not being addressed. We agreed with an oversight group which was surprising to some. One of the most ardent criticisms was that of our mental health training. We are more highly trained than any other police department in the state. We are now organizing CIT training for the county.

We also reached out to the family of the subject that was killed by this police department and supported the CIT initiative for the state. We were present at the signing of the bill with the parents of the deceased. A picture appeared showing officers with the BIPD standing with the family and governor.

We have also held forums for traits of the officers we need to hire, open forums for the community to come and talk about what we can do better. We meet with the schools on a regular basis to share any concerns. We have citizen roundtable that brings general suggestions and is updated on what we are currently doing.