



ROA

THE REFUGEE ORGANIZING IN ACTION NETWORK



## **REFUGEE COMMUNITY – CLARKSTON POLICE MEETING:** **JUNE 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2010**

### **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **1. Date**

June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

#### **2. Venue**

Clarkston Community Center  
3701 College Avenue, Clarkston, GA 30021

#### **3. Attendees**

- Refugee community: 50 (approximate)
  - Police: 1 (Chief Tony Scipio)
  - ROA: Daniel Fikreyesus, Mersada Muikanovic, Susan Pavlin\*
  - Interns: Mari Aoyagi, Liza Carter, Courtney Coleman, Anand Saha\*
- \* Presented in alphabetical order.

#### **4. Projected Agenda**

9:00 a.m. -9:20 a.m....Welcome & Introductions  
9:20 a.m. -10:00 a.m....Refugee Leaders present  
10:00 a.m. -10:30 a.m.... Police representatives present  
10:30 a.m. -11:00 a.m....Dialogue between refugee leaders and police

#### **5. Actual Running Order**

Welcome address...Daniel Fikreyesus (ROA)  
9:40 a.m. -10:00 a.m.... Presentation by refugee community leaders (7)\*  
10:00 a.m. -10:55 a.m.... Presentation by Chief Scipio (Clarkston Police Department)  
10:55 a.m. -11:00 a.m.... Ms. India Pullin (Step Up in Georgia)  
11:00 a.m. -11:15 a.m.... Q&A session (1)  
11:15 a.m. -11:25 a.m.... Closing remarks from ROA  
\*Introduction of each community leader - Mersada Muikanovic (ROA)

### **B. CONCERNS ADDRESSED BY COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Seven refugee community leaders were given five minutes respectively to present their concerns regarding crime and safety in their community.

### **1. Iraqi Community Leader**

- When one is pulled over, she/he has a right to know its reasons. However, since many refugees cannot speak English, it is sometimes difficult for officers and the refugees to communicate.  
→*Suggestion*: Police officers should accommodate refugees who are not very fluent in English by allowing them to call a translator who is nearby for assistance.
- One of the community leader's friends, who was blind in the left eye, was pulled over. He reached over to touch the police officer and the officer immediately pulled a gun on him. He did not know it was disrespectful to touch a police officer.
- Many refugees have difficulty identifying police officers because of the lack of familiarity with their uniforms. Some do not know the difference between security guards (in shopping centers, at apartment complexes, malls) and police officers.

### **2. Bhutanese Community Leader**

- Community leader stated that there was no army in Bhutan until 1962 and no police force until 1965. According to him, "[Bhutan] was one of the most peaceful nations in the world."
- Beginning in 1990, tensions arose due to the civil rights movements, leading to clashes between the police and the public. The police began using tactics such as brute force and torture. Therefore, Bhutanese have been trained to be afraid of the police.
- Community leader spent 18 years in a refugee camp in Nepal, where he organized a community watch to protect the community members. This experience feeds into his assertion that the primary responsibility to take action lies within the community.  
→*Suggestion*: Apartment managers, community members and police need to work together to ensure protection of the community.

### **3. Bhutanese Community Leader**

- There is a lot of crime in the community, especially within the Bhutanese community.
- However, members of the refugee community are not aware of what constitutes a crime.
- The community needs tips on how to address criminal activity.  
→*Suggestion*: Education on U.S. laws.
- There is a misunderstanding regarding corporal punishment on the part of the police: It is common practice for Bhutanese parents to use corporal punishment whereas it is frowned upon in the U.S.
- The issue regarding corporal punishment is reinforced when the children report to the police upon receiving such punishment, knowing that it is customary in his/her culture but disallowed in the U.S. This causes difficulty for parents.

- There is a general fear of calling the police: It is unreliable because there is a long response time and the services may arrive too late.

#### **4. Somali Bantu Community Leader**

- “Why is there so much crime in the community? Our children are in danger.”
- Her main concern is crime and safety in the U.S.
- There was a lot of crime in Somalia with little police presence.
- Parents are not able to use corporal punishment. Children know U.S. laws better than adults and use that knowledge to their advantage.
- Community leader says crimes in her home country are of a different nature.

#### **5. Sudanese/Darfur Community Leader**

- There is a big cultural divide; many refugees do not have much awareness on “how to live legally”; coming from a farm, it is difficult to adapt to Atlanta.  
→*Suggestion*: Hold workshops and trainings to educate the police regarding how to interact with refugees.

#### **6. Burundi Community Leader**

- Interaction with the police is different from that in Burundi: While it is extremely disrespectful to look a police officer in the eye in Burundi (some women even look away), in the U.S., people are expected to make eye contact when conversing with the police
- The youth are very involved in crime nowadays.
- There is a big cultural/knowledge divide; refugee community leaders “need to be responsible for his/her own community...[many refugees] do not know what is good and bad.”

#### **7. Burmese Community Leader**

- Civil involvement in the police force is encouraged.

### **C. POLICE**

Chief Scipio from the Clarkston Police Department was given thirty minutes to present issues regarding crime and safety in Clarkston generally and that in the refugee communities.

#### **1. About Chief Scipio**

- Wants to have a personal relationship with everyone.
- Scipio is an “international brother”: Grandfather is from Trinidad and Tobago; has been to many places in Europe and Africa, such as Sudan, Uganda, Nairobi, Germany, and London.
- The Assistant Chief is Persian and speaks 7 languages.
- Scipio believes in and has experience in disciplining children – People from Trinidad and Tobago are firm believers in corporal punishment.
- Scipio has spent 33 years in law enforcement, 25 of which has been in DeKalb county. He left DeKalb county as “major,” the #3 position in command.
- Scipio was hired as first African American Police Chief September 2005.

- Upon becoming Chief, he took two-weeks “vacation” to find out how the police treated the citizens of Clarkston (without carrying on him his police ID.)
  - Questions Scipio asked to citizens
    - 1) “Should I move to Clarkston”
      - Most told him no because it is not a safe place
    - 2) “Tell me about the police”
      - Most told him that the police were very rude.
  - Example: Group of Liberians at Thriftown: Told Scipio to look away when the police came. After they all fled and he was standing there, a police officer confronted him and disrespected him. He told the officer he would see him in two weeks.
- Scipio imposed a requirement for officers to go through 20 hours of cultural awareness and diversity training.
- Terminated 1/3 of the existing police force and started recruiting new officers.
- Recruited international chaplains (ultimately hiring 18 of them who spoke all the major languages represented). Scipio believes that the chaplains can help refugees by interpreting the language and create understanding between the refugee and the police officer.
  - 3 specific incidences where the international chaplains came into play:
    - 1) 4 Liberian kids were in a fatal house fire at Indian Creek upon which the Liberian chaplain was called.
    - 2) A Sudanese child was decapitated by his deranged uncle upon which the Sudanese-speaking chaplain was called.
    - 3) A Somali kid was hit by a car on Church St. upon which the Somali chaplain was called. Thereafter, Scipio hired a public defender which led to two cash settlements for the family.
- Bigger problem is when leaders don’t come to Scipio
  - Encouraged the community to come to the safety seminars that are held three times a year and emphasized that his door is always open.
- Scipio talked about how the American experience for many refugees is not like what they see on TV.
- Scipio’s cell phone number is (404)932-9112 and he encourages people to use it.
- Scipio preaches “C-P-R” to his units→ Courtesy, professionalism, respect.
- Scipio’s officers are Persian, Asian, Bosnian, Latino, and Guyanese (Corporal); he wants to use refugee leaders to help their communities.

## 2. Jurisdictional Issues

- 9-1-1 has a console of 12 people in DeKalb county that takes calls for a wide area.
- Clarkston shares a radio with Tucker and Center precincts of DeKalb county.
- DeKalb county itself has 14 different police departments (9-1-1 takes calls for all departments.)
- Protocol upon receiving 9-1-1 calls:
  - 1) Dispatcher needs to know the location and personal info of the caller.
  - 2) Dispatcher routs the call to the appropriate department.
  - 3) Appropriate department is dispatched.
- The Sergeant is on-call 24 hours in Clarkston jurisdiction: (678)414-7077.

- \* The caller needs to call if there is a fear of retaliation.
- Kristopher Woods, Brocket Rd., Indian Creek, The Lakes, Brannan Hills are all part of unincorporated Clarkston (within Clarkston's city limits but not within the Clarkston Police's jurisdiction).
  - When calling the direct line, the caller needs to verify where they are.
- \* It was unclear whether the direct line to the Sergeant was only for Clarkston residents.

### **3. Concerns Regarding the Refugee Community**

- Encouraged all community members to take his card and set up meetings with him.
- Encouraged community members to get on the e-mail list.
- He would like to help people in acquiring legal immigration status; language is the biggest barrier.
- Issues regarding the judicial system: Many people are in jail (3,134 inmates in DeKalb county right now) who do not know why they are in jail or whether they are allowed access to a public defender.
  - Example: Scipio asked an officer how long the prisoner had been in jail and why – Officer replied that the prisoner had been there for 2 weeks but did not know why. Scipio took the prisoner out and talked to him via an interpreter and found out he was really innocent but did not have any idea of the process to represent and absolve himself.
- Scipio's 2 anecdotes about interactions with foreign police:
  - 1) In Nairobi, Kenya, Scipio was on his way to meet with the police chief when he waved to the police and the police pulled a gun at him. He proceeded to steal the gun but was later explained that it was extremely rude to wave at police.
  - 2) In Juba, Sudan, Scipio gestured for the police to come to him, which was considered very rude and he got in trouble for that.
  - Culture plays an important role in determining how a police officer will react to an individual or his/her actions.
  - These anecdotes feed into the "put yourself into the shoes of a refugee" perception.

### **4. Safety Tips from Chief Scipio**

- Understand the transportation system
- Know the geography and address to which you want to go
- Be conscious of how much money you carry; keep it on you and not in your wallet.
- Know how to defend yourself (e.g., utilize cell phone features such as video, picture, and recording).
- Know that a lot of times criminals work in twos (multiples); do not stop walking even when approached.
- Never go anywhere alone.
- Walk against the traffic to be safe.

- Never assume that cars are going to stop for you.
- Utilize seminars to protect yourself from fire hazards.
- Do not leave anything in your car
- Always have escape routes in the home; practice within the home how to deal with certain situations.
- Do not be a hero ; do not confront the “bad guys” – material can be replaced but life cannot be replaced.
- Utilize ride-along programs.
- The refugee community must come to the police to be educated about the internal police system, the judicial system and the jurisdiction (city limits).  
\* The refugee community must utilize newsletters distributed through e-mail lists and conferences.

#### **D. Q&A**

One participant addressed a specific incident at Southern Place for which advice and assistance was needed.

- A male was physically assaulted at Southern Place. His I-94, cell phone, cash were taken. He is having trouble paying the medical bill.  
→*Suggestion*: (1) More security guards are needed; (2) consult DeKalb County Victim Witness Program (by District Attorney); (3) Need witnesses to come to the police.

#### **E. CLOSING AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD**

The following recommendations were made by ROA’s Mersada Muikanovic upon closing of the meeting.

##### **1. Bi-monthly Community Safety Meetings between Community Leaders and Police**

This bi-monthly meeting will serve as an opportunity to address trainings and special crime projects that are necessary to create a safer community for refugees in Clarkston.

- Suggested training topics*
  - Culture and diversity
  - Community-Police relationship building
  - Policing traffic laws
  - Prevention of violent crime
  - Home security
  - Gang prevention for youth and parents
  - Crime reporting
  - Rights and responsibilities
- Suggested special projects*
  - Thriftown corridor & armed robbery prevention
  - Apartment patrols at complexes within jurisdiction

**2. Problem Solving for Special Crime Projects**

Create a team of refugee leaders and a police liaison to address specific crime issues such as those identified above.

**3. Community Education Presentations by Police**

Police will educate the refugee community on crime prevention and safety through presentations at various community events. The police and the refugee community will also collaborate to host an annual Community Safety fair. Refugee leaders will identify opportunities to host the police and coordinate schedules.

**4. Police & Refugee Ride-along Program**

Encourage refugee community leaders and members to join the police in the ride-along program to (1) learn about the internal police system and its work in general; and (2) teach the police officers about the various refugee communities and their cultures.

**5. Recruitment of Community Members to Police**

Recruit qualified members (age: 20 – 65) from the refugee community to apply for and serve on the police force.

**6. Joint grant programs to fund community-police partnerships**

**7. Apartment Complex strategy**

**8. Translation Services**

The refugee community and the police will collaborate to create written translations of some police materials.

**F. OTHERS**

Additional information was presented briefly.

**1. Step Up in Georgia – Ms. India Pullin**

- A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization
- Offers childcare, job referral and financial literacy program (must place application around April).
- International Day: Oct. 27, 2010.

**2. Angel Flight of Georgia**

- Chief Scipio volunteers for Angel Flight of Georgia
- Offers free ambulatory flights to persons whose ages range from 6 months to 99 years old.

**G. SUMMARY**

**1. Issue Identification**

a. *Cultural Differences between the refugees' home country and the U.S.: Refugees bring with them their culture, custom and tradition to the U.S., which, when seen by the police, causes misunderstanding/miscommunication.*

- i. Body Language: Body languages and gestures used in certain communities, when expressed or lack thereof, are oftentimes not meant to threaten or aggravate the police (e.g., touching, not looking directly in the eyes)
- ii. Reporting: Some refugees are not used to reporting an incident to the police. Some also fear reporting for reasons such as (1) lack of police force in their home country; or (2) fear that comes from past experience with authorities.
- iii. Past experience: An individual refugee's past experience with the police/authority may cause a refugee to react negatively towards the police when approached.
- iv. Types of Crime: The types of crime experienced in the U.S. are different from those the refugees experience in their home country; many do not know how to prevent them or how to deal with them. This in turn makes it very difficult for the members of the community to focus on adjusting to their lives in the U.S.
- v. Corporal Punishment: Refugees' customs and perceptions regarding corporal punishment differ from that in the U.S. This gap creates a misunderstanding between the police and the communities.  
\* The use of the word "beat" to describe "discipline" may be one of causes of misunderstanding.

b. *Structural Differences between the refugees' home country and the U.S.: The policing system in the U.S. is different from that in the refugees' home countries, thus causing difficulty in utilizing and trusting the service.*

- i. Rules: The rules people must follow in the U.S. when encountering the police is different from that in the refugee's home country; many do not know what is expected of them and how they must respond (e.g., what to do when being pulled over).
- ii. Judicial System: The U.S. judicial system may be very different from that in the refugee's home country. This factor, coupled with an individual's low English proficiency level, may put or keep that individual in prison for reasons she/he does not understand. Furthermore, he/she may be put in prison unjustly. In such cases, the

individual may face a difficult time figuring out how to receive assistance from sources such as public defenders.

- iii. Security v. Police: It is difficult for the refugee community to tell the difference between security and police and their roles; it is difficult for the refugees to anticipate the type of treatment they will receive.
- iv. Existence of Police force: Some countries do not have a policing force. Similarly, some refugee communities are not used to working hand-in-hand with the police. Thus, such members of the community have a negative image of or are scared of the police.
- v. Timing: Often times the communities are frustrated because the time lag between dialing 911 and the police's arrival is big.

c. *There is a lack of cultural awareness within the police system*

- i. There are only a limited number of police officers who understand the culture and the system (described above in G(1)(a) and (b)), which the refugees are used to. Additionally there are a limited number of officers who speak the language of the respective refugee communities.

## **2. Possible Future Actions**

- a. *Community's wish*: Leaders and many members of the community feel responsible for protecting the community as a whole and are willing to work together with the police for a safer community.
- b. *Tips for the refugee community in approaching the police and vice versa*: The community and the police will be able to develop a better relationship and understanding if (1) the community is given specific tips on how to approach the police and (2) the police officers in the field are given specific tips on how to approach the refugee community members.
- c. *Communication between community and police*: Refugee community leaders are starting to realize how the police can help, especially with problems prevalent in the youth community. The communities would like for the police to come and talk to them. The communities are also encouraged to visit the police.
- d. *Develop liaisons and utilize interpreters from each refugee community*: There is a need for persons who can help the police in understanding the culture and language upon its encounter with a member of a certain community.

- e. *Increase the number of officers from the refugee community:* There is a need for police officers (ages between 20 and 65) who are familiar with the culture and the language of the refugee community.