

## **Illustration of how related evidence- based holistic therapies have helped with police work.**

I wanted to share a story about mindfulness in police work. It's long, but trust me it's worth it. 1 in 4 women will experience sexual assault in their lifetime in Colorado. It is estimated that fewer than 10% of sexual assaults are actually reported to police.

Easter Sunday 2016 Officer Kananen and I, were called to a family disturbance. Throughout our contact, the mother yelled and cursed and wanted nothing to do with the police. She told me to "f@\*& off" a number of times and to get out of her house because the police have never done anything for them.

In the middle of the mother yelling, she said that her daughter was raped by a guy they were staying with at a local motel years ago. She said she had repeatedly reported it to the police and no one has ever done anything. She also told me she reported it to DHS and they reportedly told her that since it happened years ago no one would do anything and there was no proof.

After we determined there was no crime committed from the disturbance, Officer Kananen and I took time to explain our actions and then I told the mother that I would like to do something for her. She responded by saying, "what the f@\*& are you going to do for me?" I told her that we were going to sit there and LISTEN to her without any interruptions and would try to figure out what happened with her daughter's case.

She then told us her story, which involved lots of yelling and cussing, but we never interrupted. I told her to give us some time and after a little research we determined that a case has never been taken. We did find that that the cops were called to the house over 14 times in the last year and other than a domestic disturbance, no case reports were ever completed.

I told the mother about our findings, which did not go over well. When she finally took a breath from yelling, I told her that my partner and I would open an investigation and make sure her daughter's case was investigated. I apologized, but told her I would do everything in my power to make it right. I asked for permission to interview her daughter, which she granted.

I sat down with the daughter, (16 at that time, 14 at the time of the sexual assault) and interviewed her. It was a challenging interview for her and I. She had only talked about it one other time to her mother over the course of two years. Over our time together, she was crying and becoming lost in her emotions and even pulling her hair out. I could see that this was painful for her, so I stopped the interview for a few moments and I taught her a few mindfulness breathing techniques. We sat there together and did a few guided breathing techniques, which allowed her to calm down and tell me her story. I told her that she had been carrying this burden for way too long and asked her to give it to me, so I can carry it and she can start to heal.

After a long, graphic and very emotional interview, Officer Kananen and I got together and discovered that we had a really solid case. We even found old Facebook messages from the suspect's wife, confessing she found out what her husband did. The suspect also tried to kill his

wife when she found out. He was arrested for domestic violence, but the wife never reported the real reason to the police. After a few more weeks of investigation, an arrest warrant was issued for the male suspect for sexual assault.

After several court hearings and delays, the case finally went to trial this past week. Sadly, the wife of the suspect failed to show and went into hiding, so we could not use that confession. Oddly enough, two other witnesses died over the last month, which caused us to lose more key evidence. The trial was long and exhausting, the mother and daughter were emotional and unpredictable all week. The defense did everything they could to make this poor girl seem like a horrible person. I even got a little emotional when I was testifying.

The family is a mess, the poor girl who was 17 at the time of the trial struggles with mental illness, her mother also struggles with substance abuse and mental illness. It's hard to sit down and talk with them and have a normal conversation, without the mother or daughter's anger getting in the way and them losing it. That's probably the biggest obstacle that we faced and most likely the reason no one ever listened, believed or took a case report.

The case went to the jury at lunch and at lunch time on a Friday they were deadlocked. They continued to deliberate and late on a Friday afternoon came back with a guilty verdict. I am proud of my team, who all took time listen without judgment. I am also proud of the mother, who gave my partner and me a chance. I am most proud of the victim, a once terrified young girl, who trusted me enough to share her story. She was so strong and shared her story in court, which I cannot even begin to know how hard that was. Thanks to her strength, the suspect will not be able to do this to any other girls. Now after almost four years, this young girl can once again breathe and start her survivor's journey.

I know this was a long story, but it is a good reminder to slow down and listen, you never know whose life may be affected by simply listening without judgement.

We talk about this story in the class and show officers how mindfulness can be woven into their work and personal lives seamlessly and how it will make you a better cop, dispatcher, husband, wife, partner, person...etc.

**Another quick story** - Officer Puga and I, were dispatched to a check the welfare call involving a lady with severe mental illness. She was hearing voices, feeling that her feet were burning, and seeing people being killed all around her. It was a challenge to interact with her, so we decided to take a walk with her and talk. We discovered that she likes to color and play with her stuffed animals for fun. I taught her a few simple breathing techniques and I just listened to her. We may have not been able to solve her problems, but we took the time to just listen and show her that someone cares.

I have seen how using the skills I have learned from my mindfulness studies have helped me better pay attention to



each event and truly be present in the moment, within my body and mind, with a non-judgmental, non-reactive and accepting attitude. These cases are a key examples of mindfulness not only has helped me in my own life, but how is has changed me as a police officer and has allowed me to better serve my community.

**Conclusion:**

If we take another look at this type of training and think about how many situations may have turned out differently if officers were trained to take a step back and truly listen without judgment, like mindfulness teaches us. I believe that when officers head out on the streets with this approach we can mitigate many issues and help build a bridge between the community and police, especially the minority, under represented and marginalized community members.

One day, I hope that we see how important this is to our officer's mental and physical health and it becomes standard for all departments to provide their officers with mindfulness training. My goal is to break down the stigma around mental health and know that once that occurs our officers will be happier and healthier as they are out there protecting their communities.