

## **Profile of the North Richland Hills Police Department**

In July of 1956, three years after the incorporation of North Richland Hills, Mayor Donald F. Denney, with the support of the council, approved and installed an auxiliary police force. The force consisted entirely of volunteers appointed to assist the town marshal and existed as primary keepers of the peace until July of 1960 when a police chief and five officers were hired. From those origins, the Department has steadily grown in size and professionalism.

Currently, the North Richland Hills Police Department is organized into two separate Bureaus, the Management Services Bureau and the Operations Bureau. Led by one captain, the Management Services Bureau houses the Administrative Services Division, which is further divided into the Community Services, Mental Health, and Training Sections. Also within the Management Services Bureau is the Technical Services Division. This division is led by a civilian coordinator and includes Fleet Maintenance, Red Light Project Management, and the Records, Property, Communications and Detention sections.

On the Operations side are the Uniformed Services Division and the Criminal Investigations Division, which are each led by a captain. Uniformed Services consists of the Patrol and Traffic Sections, while Criminal Investigations consists of the Crimes against Persons, Property Crimes, Narcotics, and Crime Scene Search sections.

Personnel wise, the North Richland Hills Police Department consists of 111 full-time police officers, 2 part-time police officers, 78 full –time civilian personnel, and 20 part-time civilians. Supplementing these numbers, the North Richland Hills Police Department employs a volunteer program, the Volunteers in Police Service, or VIPS. Thirty-nine individuals are currently active in this program. While housed under the Management Services Bureau, the

department has effectively embedded these volunteers within numerous areas of the department, to include Records, Patrol and various areas within Community Services.

An endorsement of the North Richland Hill Police Department's efforts at realizing their vision of a community atmosphere in which the public feels safe and secure, the Dallas Morning News recognized the City of North Richland Hills as one of the top ten safest neighborhoods in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. More recently, Safelink also recognized North Richland Hills as one of the top safest cities in Texas.

In 2011, The North Richland Hills Police Department achieved "Recognized" Status with the Texas Police Chiefs Association Foundation's Best Practices Recognition Program. This recognition was accomplished by complying with over 164 Texas Law Enforcement Best Practices and successfully renewed in 2016. Less than 3% of police departments in the state of Texas have achieved this recognition.

## **SHIELD Program**

The idea for SHIELD took root in Chief Jimmy Perdue's desire to establish an overarching theme for the department's training. A great deal of effort was being expended to promote officer safety and Chief Perdue wanted a means by which all of these efforts could be consolidated to ensure consistency of message. Chief Perdue tasked the department's Training Section with moving this idea forward. Simultaneously, the Professional Standards Section had proposed a revision of the department's use of force policy and the employment of critical decision-making and de-escalation policies. Ultimately, these two paths converged when it became clear that each section was moving the department towards the same destination, that being practices and culture that promote comprehensive safety and wellness for all employees.

From this convergence, emerged SHIELD, the North Richland Hills Police Department comprehensive strategy for unifying and promoting all of the department's efforts to promote safety and wellness in all facets of police service, to include administratively and operationally. SHIELD represents the ethical core of the department's critical decision-making model and serves as the program's foundation.

## **Policy Components**

### *Critical Decision-making Model*

A complete understanding of the SHIELD program first requires an appreciation for the role of the department's critical decision-making model. Critical decision-making models represent a method by which law enforcement can increase the level of objectivity in discretionary decision-making, as well as emphasize the importance of decision-making as a continually evaluative process. Within a critical decision-making model (CDM), information is collected; the situation, threats, and risks are assessed; legal authority and departmental policy is considered; options are identified and a course of action determined; at which point action is taken, reviewed and assessed. If the desired outcome is not achieved, the process starts over in a method UK police refer to as spinning the model<sup>1</sup>.

This process is reminiscent of an OODA Loop or the SARA Model. The definitive difference between these is the CDM's inclusion of an ethical core. This ethical core communicates the values by which each step in the decision-making process must be grounded. These values are freely determined; the North Richland Hills Police Department selected SHIELD—Service, Honor, Integrity, Life and De-escalation. As such, SHIELD provides an

easily referenced model for consistently communicating the true values the department desires officers to base their decisions upon.

The inclusion of “service” recognizes that a law enforcement officer’s fundamental duty is to serve the community, which includes respecting the dignity of every person and meeting the needs of others with courtesy and compassion. Service does not displace the enforcement of laws, but it does require that enforcement action be administered in balance with the faith and confidence of the public.

“Honor” reminds employees that they hold a place in one of the most honored callings known. Service is a privilege that is only made possible by continued adherence to the principles that give cause for the community to honor police. Honor is a charge for employees to be ever mindful of the public trust and pursue only those actions which are honorable.

“Integrity” represents the commitment and willingness to live by these standards in all aspects of one’s life. The inclusion of integrity is a charge for all employees to continually evaluate the integrity of their actions in both public and private and pursue only those means and ends which are consistent with the department’s stated values. “Ethics” refers specifically to the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics and charges all employees to be familiar with the obligations espoused by the Code and to weigh their actions against those standards.

“Life” symbolizes the sanctity of all human life. The primary function of policing is the preservation of human life and life represents an employee’s responsibility to consider the safety, dignity, and liberty of all persons when making decisions. Furthermore, it obligates one to always consider methods that are less injurious or reduce risk to any person while still accomplishing a necessary and lawful objective.

Finally, the inclusion of “de-escalation” recognizes that police work often involves moments of high stress and emotion which may cloud perspective and reduce the time and range of options immediately available. Through the prioritization of de-escalation, the North Richland Hills Police Department reminds employees that the immediacy, necessity and proportionality of action shall be considered in all decisions.

As established, the North Richland Hills Police Department’s CDM guides officers through a five step decision-making process that includes: collecting information; assessing the situation, threats and risks; considering police and department authority; identifying options and determining the best course of action; and then acting, reviewing and reassessing. The process is continual until resolution is achieved. Most importantly, each step of this process must be reconciled with the ethical core, that being SHIELD and the principles it represents.

### *De-escalation*

Next within the policy changes was the creation and publication of a general order on de-escalation. Law enforcement agencies across the nation are recognizing the importance of de-escalation as a means to stabilize situations and reclaim the ability to recruit additional resources and explore alternative responses that may increase the opportunity for universally successful outcomes. However, the North Richland Hills Police Department approach expounds on that approach to include the role that de-escalation may play within law enforcement’s own actions and decisions. To that point, the North Richland Hills Police Department published policy and training reflect an approach to de-escalation that includes the commonly accepted de-escalation principles of employing actions intended to stabilize a situation, but also emphasize that interpersonal de-escalation shall be utilized to combat the tendency to rationalize decisions,

actions and investments when incoming information is trending towards diminishing opportunity for successful resolution. The use of de-escalation is stressed in administrative matters as well; specifically, in any situation where the subject or circumstances encountered might otherwise have the tendency to dictate the manner of an employee's response.

### *Use of Force and the Critical Decision-making Model*

Of significant importance, the department's use of force policy was subjected to a complete review. While many of the operational parameters remained constant, the overarching philosophical approach was reshaped, beginning with the removal of a use of force continuum and "one plus" model, under which an officer could generally meet another's use of force with a response that was one step higher. In theory, the continuum and one plus model were predicated on the same standard of reasonableness that contributes to the foundation of the new policy. However, in practice, continuum and one plus models demonstrate the tendency to create an enabling or qualifying mindset that potentially limits consideration of proportionality or alternative responses.

The employment of a critical decision-making model as the foundation for response to resistance decisions aims to prioritize an officer's judgement while simultaneously requiring them to utilize that judgement rather than reliance upon formulaic responses. Simultaneously, the CDM's ethical core requires that officers making such judgements—which are ultimately value-based decisions—are relying upon the values the department desires. The department recognizes the tendency for officers to be exposed to competing values, and by prioritizing the values espoused by SHIELD, seeks to counter any undesirable influences.

To this point, one may consider the tenets of traditional policing and its emphasis on crime control. The Traditional Policing model prioritizes tactics such as rapid response to calls and heavily favors enforcement tactics and the idea that the police are the professionals who know more about what the public needs than the public themselves<sup>ii</sup>. “Don’t worry about what we’re doing; we’re doing what’s necessary to keep the community safe,” is the unspoken—or perhaps spoken—philosophy. Within this model, police officers are the thin blue line that stands between the community and all that is wrong with the world and criminals being that which is wrong with the world. From this simplified perception of crime, emerges alienating labels such as “thugs” and the concept that such persons are to be caught and punished at all costs.

Despite law enforcement’s progression towards more empirically validated approaches, the traditional policing mindset has been revitalized through events which originated with Ferguson and continue today in the form of civil unrest and widely publicized attacks on police officers. SHIELD represents the North Richland Hills Police Department’s efforts to counter these influences and remind our officers that society does have certain expectations of the police and, while those expectations include enforcing the law, they also include a wider perspective of objectivity and assurance that the ends truly justify the means.

SHIELD also recognizes that those who enter law enforcement subscribe to a higher calling; one which sees them place others before self. Policies which require officers to consider reasonableness and risk are susceptible to compromise by that very sense of duty and willingness to place oneself in harm’s way. SHIELD acknowledges this potentially compromised sense of risk and reinforces the need to consider the sanctity of *all* human life as well as such factors as proportionality and the opportunity to simply slow down or wait for another day when a response is not immediately necessary or wise.

It is this central component of SHIELD that seeks to increase the safety of police officers as well as the public they serve—by empowering employees to make operational decisions based on standards that promote the safety of not just our employees, but the sanctity of the lives of all with whom officers may interact with. These standards are predicated on a commitment to ensuring department actions are proportional and necessary and designed to reduce the need for force and subsequent opportunity for injury.

## **Program Implementation**

The SHIELD concept is introduced to employees through a three day training block. Day one of the training provides an overview of SHIELD, including a one hour introduction presented by Chief Perdue, in which he describes the goals of SHIELD and communicates the department's commitment to the overall health and wellness of each and every employee. This is followed by instruction and discussion on each of the policy components, those being the Critical Decision-making Model, De-escalation and Response to Resistance and Aggression policies. The day completes with an introduction to crisis recognition and response using tactical communication.

Day two focuses on practical application of the skills learned during day one. Department instructors guide employees through a host of dynamic scenarios, the outcomes of which are determined by the officer's tactics, and each of which may be successfully resolved through the practical employment of de-escalation tactics and communication skills. The day concludes with officers receiving training and certification in oleoresin capsicum (O.C.) deployment, including an O.C. exposure. While North Richland Hills Police Department officers have long been equipped with a range of intermediary weapons, to include conductive electrical weapons, batons

and less-lethal impact munitions, O.C. has now been issued to all sworn personnel to provide another option less lethal option for officers that provides the ability to gain control and/or compliance without resorting to greater means of force and while remaining outside of contact range.

Day three is focused on employee wellness. Unique to the SHIELD approach is the acknowledgement that finances play a role in employee wellness concerns and performance problems. Perhaps in response to the stress they are exposed to or the perceived promise of additional income through off-duty work, it is not uncommon for police officers to experience financial problems as a result of poor spending habits or bad planning. This can lead to significant work distractions, an inappropriate or unhealthy reliance upon off-duty employment, or, in severe cases, susceptibility to corruption. Employees are provided a full three hour block of instruction by a certified Dave Ramsey Master Financial Coach who guides employees through such topics as creating a budget, retirement planning and the completion of a will.

The afternoon sessions include instruction from a registered dietician, an opportunity that was made possible through the creation of a partnership with a local hospital, Medical City North Hills. Day three concludes with a presentation on mental wellness, including a discussion on officer suicide and available resources such as the department's Employee Assistance Program, Critical Incident Stress Management Team and Chaplaincy Program.

## **Supplemental Activities**

### *Physical Fitness Program*

The procedural components of SHIELD are supplemented by several operational programs, one of which is the department's physical fitness program. Within this program, every

employee is provided education and access to topics such as nutrition and meal planning, exercise needs, and the importance of routine medical check-ups. The North Richland Hills Public Safety Center includes an expansive fitness center that is available 24 hours a day to every employee. The fitness center is equipped with an expansive array of cardio equipment, machine and free weights, and mobility aids such as floor mats, exercise and stretching bands and foam rollers. The department boasts a seven-member fitness staff consisting of employees who have been certified as Law Enforcement Fitness Specialists by the Cooper Institute. These staff members are available to every employee to assist with nutritional needs, workout plans, and basic exercise instruction.

The Fitness Specialists also conduct the department's annual fitness assessment. Participation in this event is available as an option for all civilian employees but is mandatory for peace officers. The evaluation consists of a timed 2000 meter row on an industry-standard Concept 2 row machine. An empirically validated scale is used to categorize results in one of six categories ranging from "very poor" to "superior." Those officers earning a rating of fair or above are awarded a minimum of two hours of time-off, with a maximum of eight hours time-off reserved for those who earn a rating of superior. The non-punitive, incentive-based nature of this program has been very well received by all employees and has contributed significantly to the over-all health of department employees and their attention to physical fitness.

During the past two years, two different employees were alerted to significant heart problems during department sanctioned physical fitness activities. Each of these events led to the employee receiving critically necessary medical procedures which led to a full recovery and return to duty. Left unattended or undiscovered, these conditions could have led to dire consequences.

## *Driver Safety*

Safe driving, to include standard patrol driving and pursuit operation, is also a critical component of the SHIELD program. Recurrent driver training is provided to every police officer biennially. This training is provided in conjunction with the department's participation in a multi-agency driver training consortium, which utilizes the National Academy for Professional Driving (NAPD) curriculum to provide both classroom and track-based "low speed/high stress" training to increase driving skills, hazard awareness and decision-making.

Between NAPD sessions, the department maintains a focus on safe driving by participating in Vincible, a Texas Police Chief's Association initiative that promotes safe driving and comprehensive officer safety through adherence to five pillars: wear your vest (ballistic vest and reflective traffic vest), buckle up (seatbelt), slow down (both vehicle speed and thought processes), stay fit, and "540", which is a reference to being proactive about mental health. Vincible provided roll call trainings are conducted twice monthly and include topics which relate to the aforementioned five pillars as well as such subjects as ambush avoidance, traffic stop positioning, implicit bias, off-duty encounters, and tactical considerations such as push versus hold. Scenarios are included that provide the opportunity for supervisor led table top discussions. Also, the department utilizes AppSpace, a software solution which provides for the rotating and ongoing display of Vincible safety reminders and officer safety bulletins on monitors located at strategic points such as the centrally located report writing area and the main employee entrance.

### *Tactical Safety Equipment and Training*

When it comes to equipping officers, the North Richland Hills Police Department has rolled out several new strategies under the SHIELD banner. In addition to standard ballistic vests, each officer has now been issued rifle grade armor, a ballistic helmet, a trauma kit which includes such life-saving equipment as tourniquets and hemostatic gauze, and a tactical bag to ensure all equipment can be conveniently carried and maintained at the ready. These trauma kits have also been strategically placed within the entirety of the city's municipal complex should they be immediately necessary in response to a routine injury or more significant situation such as an active shooter event. Self-aid/buddy aid training is provided to all officers, which includes general techniques and instruction specific to the equipment supplied within the issued trauma packs. Training on these measures and equipment is conducted biennially.

Additionally, training and certification on less lethal impact shotguns has been extended from police supervisors to all sworn personnel. With the expansive deployment of patrol rifles through a department buy-back program, the department's existing shotgun inventory has been converted to dedicated less-lethal platforms to provide assignment for each patrol vehicle, thereby allowing immediate access for all field personnel. These less lethal shotguns accompany the aforementioned introduction of O.C. as a required-carry intermediary weapon that provides medium to long range less lethal options which provide the opportunity to safely gain control or compliance of combative subjects, and in certain situations, reduce the need for the use of deadly force techniques.

## Summary

While SHIELD is still within its first year of deployment, the results are promising and officer feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The positive employee reception can be credited to many factors, but a well-planned introduction and strategic roll-out were significant factors. Department administrators recognized that the introduction of new policies and the revision of the department's use of force policy represented the first opportunity for employee resistance. Change is often hard fought by police officers, but changes to use of force procedures are sharply susceptible to skepticism. Employee buy-in was developed through the use of a structured policy development process that saw the critical decision-making, de-escalation and revised use of force policies go through five stages of review, which ultimately included all police supervisors and representatives of the various employee personnel groups. Feedback was solicited and acted upon at each level.

During the policy training, instructional time was focused on the differences between the new and old policies so that employees could recognize and understand what had changed as opposed to simply being forced to absorb the new material and ferret out the differences on their own. Most importantly, ample time was allotted to ensure adequate time for questions and discussions. No questioning glances were overlooked, but rather instructors specifically burrowed into points that had been pre-identified as creating the possibility for concern, confusion or resistance.

Ultimately, ensuring employees had a firm understanding of the implications of the policies and the expectations that were being established were significant in overcoming any anticipated resistance. Through the implementation process, employees were able to recognize that the new policies did not actually restrict employee response but rather increased their range

of options and emphasized their authority and administration's trust in them to make appropriate and proportional situationally dependent decisions so long as their actions adhered to the values represented by SHIELD. These values and the actual mechanics of the critical decision-making model were further reinforced by branding strategies that included the placement of the CDM on items such as pens and mouse pads that were placed throughout the department.

The North Richland Hills Police Department seeks to build on these successes by extending the range of the program, specifically to broaden the use of the critical decision-making model as a foundation for other policies to include police pursuits and other operational activities that present a safety risk to both employees and the public alike, all with the intent of increasing employee awareness of the proportionality and necessity of their actions.

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<sup>i</sup>Police Executive Research Forum. (2016). *Guiding Principles on Use of Force*. Washington, D.C.: Police Executive Research Forum.

<sup>ii</sup>Cordner, G. W., & Scarbrorough, K. E. (2010). *Police Administration*. New Providence, NJ: Matthew Bender & Company, Inc.