

Subject: FW: Regarding the ongoing implementation of VicPD officers with Assertive Community Treatment, 713 and SAMI

From: Lacey Mesley

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To: <mayorandcounsel@victoria.ca>, <mayor@victoria.ca>

Subject: Regarding the ongoing implementation of VicPD officers with Assertive Community Treatment, 713 and SAMI

To whom it may concern,

My name is Lacey Alexandra Mesley. I am a Clinician with our community's Assertive Community Treatment teams and student with the University of Victoria's Public Health and Social Policy Graduate Program. I write to you today regarding the implementation and integration of the Victoria Police Department personnel with our communities Assertive Mental Health and Substance Use Teams. Particularly I wish to discuss the ongoing support of two full-time Police Officers, with the ACT, 713 and SAMI Teams.

It has come to my attention that a trial period for the employment of two Police Officers with our teams is nearing its end, and Victoria's City Council will be debating its ongoing use and function for the future. Without evidence and testimony such debate begs the question of objectivity and informed decision making. I hope this email provides for you a small window into our world on the frontline, as well as one (albeit anecdotal) experience working alongside Constables Sue Hamilton and Todd Mason.

However, I feel obligated to first inform you of my initial hesitation and concerns regarding the 'policing' of mental illness and addictions. Indeed, our community like those across Canada spend a great deal of tax payer dollars to criminalize and incarcerate marginalized populations, much like those individuals I work with daily. Detailed within the Mayors Task Force and identified by concerned citizens, the City of Victoria acknowledges the costs of poverty, homelessness, mental illness and addictions; particularly those costs associated with policing, emergency response, Emergency Room presentations and incarceration. However, my personal fears regarding the policing of mental illness and addictions stem beyond the costs imposed upon a community, but reflect those limitations the 'war on drugs' and similar criminalization initiatives place on the prospect of rehabilitation and equity for marginalized populations. In fact, my Graduate and work research include issues such as: safe consumption sites as a social justice policy, the effects of systemic and service provider intolerance on rates of homelessness, as well as the increased incarceration of mentally ill citizens, due to a lack of community based mental health and addiction programming or adequate housing. Further exploring the increased use of force, restraints and solitary confinement as a strategy employed to manage these individuals. It may be fair to say that I was in fact much more than a skeptic when initially beginning my career alongside some of the community's police personnel. However, despite new experiences my values remain the same, it is the means through which I hope to better my community that have evolved.

It is my opinion and experience that the implementation of Police Personnel as members of our Mental Health and Substance use teams recaptures the essence of community policing, in a manner almost forgotten amidst the push towards tactical policing and criminalization of our most dependent and marginalized populations. While it is not the only means by which we should continue to effect change for those who exist on the fringes of the social fabric of society; community policing may have a true association with reduced recidivism rates. In fact, the daily grind for Police personnel such as Constables Hamilton and Mason may be quite contrary to those images assumed in your minds. The day often begins much earlier than yours or mine and typically ends much later; beginning first on the streets of our community, meeting with client's as they awake from a cold night on the street, bringing breakfast, a hot coffee and always a warm smile. Police files are read and teams are updated on the whereabouts and

well-being of all clients well before 9am, and then quite quickly the day begins. Constables Sue Hamilton and Todd Mason attend homes, assist in cleaning and upkeep for clients who's hoarding, mental illness and traumas pose serious threats to the security of affordable housing, attend appointments, take unwell and dangerously psychotic client's to the hospital, provide protection and assistance to staff members attending dangerous housing complexes, search for ill clients, go for long walks, initiate the conversation and processes towards attending addiction treatment, help to secure housing, provide harm reduction services and build important therapeutic and trusting relationships with forgotten, criminalized and demonized persons. I have personally witnessed the most breathtaking negotiations and nonviolent deescalations, been in awe of the caring relationships built, witnessed clients seek out and request the support of these persons, and have over time acknowledged the reduction of recidivism, as Constables Hamilton and Mason work closely with Integrated Court proceedings to engage in equitable and truly beneficial means of serving a challenging population.

Indeed, Constables Sue Hamilton and Todd Mason are much more than Police Officers, they are listeners, helpers and caring citizens; serving to reduce the fragmented pieces of our community and providing equitable access to healthcare and housing services. These positions connect a community policing presence with a population often criminalized for their traumas, and too often mistreated via judicial proceedings. The association of trust and respect between Police Personnel and the community they serve may in fact be invaluable. Absolutely, these positions are too valuable and too essential to be lost, or have the work load carried by one. As each team is requested to take on more and more client's, the importance of good and effective work has never been more important.

In short, as we re-think and negotiate evidence-based strategies toward ending homelessness, working with addiction and treating mental illness we should also consider those pieces of community which have the opportunity to effect positive change, serve public health and connect marginalized populations with services. The positions and work of Constables Sue Hamilton and Todd Mason may be the first step, of many toward Community Policing and Public Health.

Sincerely,

Lacey Alexandra Mesley