

# COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PLAN

## GOAL 1.3 LISTENING SESSIONS



### **Summary: Youth Listening Session July 23, 2020**

With the help of the Boys & Girls Club of Central Sonoma County (BGCCSC), Santa Rosa Police Department (SRPD) Chief of Police Rainer “Ray” Navarro visited Sonoma County Juvenile Hall, as part of the Community Empowerment initiative. He and the BGCCSC Juvenile Hall Program Director, Alison Baker, met with four different residents, individually, over the course of approximately two hours. All residents were in the meeting voluntarily.

The following is a rough summary of some of the issues discussed during the visit. It is not a transcript.

### **Resident #1**

#### **Question (Q): What has been your overall experience with SRPD?**

The resident expressed that he has had a “fairly negative” overall experience with the SRPD. In a prewritten statement, he described how the SRPD treats some people’s everyday behavior as deviant/risky behavior. It makes the youth uncomfortable and scared in their own neighborhoods.

#### **Q: What do you expect from an officer when he/she is contacting someone?**

The resident expressed “safety and security.” He expressed how he feels like officers today want control more than wanting to help out, and that the badge makes the officers think they have a 1-up on regular citizens. He stated that the uniform doesn’t put officers above citizens; officers are supposed to help citizens. He also stated that children are scared of police, and asked, “Why is it like that?”

#### **Q: Are you fearful of the police?**

“Yes. I never call the police.”

#### **Q: What were some positive experiences you’ve had with a police officer?**

The resident described a story from a couple years ago when a Cotati police officer pulled him over for a broken taillight. The resident didn’t pull over right away because he was trying to get the vehicle to his mom’s work. The ensuing contact was a calm two-way dialogue about how his actions affected the officer’s perception of the situation. The cop was, “just trying to do her job,” and he understood and appreciated that when the contact was over.

The conversation continued, and the resident made statements along these lines: “Officers are manipulating. ‘Come talk to me and answer these questions or I’ll arrest you.’ To me, that’s not right. The child doesn’t know his rights.

Maybe you guys could host events or visit schools. I’ve never seen a police officer at school, introducing yourself. It would make us feel more comfortable.”

#### **Q: Why don’t the kids talk to the School Resource Officer (SRO)?**

The resident wasn't sure. He said he trusted teachers more than he trusted the SRO.

**Q: Do you think it's okay for officers to be on campus?**

The resident expressed how he felt like the SRO was "on campus to catch kids," or keep track of the gang kids and monitor where they go when they leave. He said the SRO isn't there to communicate or have conversations with the kids.

**Q: What does it mean to feel safe in your community? What does safety look like in your community?**

The resident expressed how safety didn't mean "over policing." He said a safe community is one where the community members can feel comfortable calling police for help instead of needing to do it themselves. He also talked about how he thought police (while on patrol) should have more conversations (with citizens).

**Q: What about things that aren't related to policing? How do we make neighborhoods safer?**

The resident expressed his thoughts that many neighborhoods/schools are underfunded. Poorer communities have poorer schools/housing/lighting/infrastructure. He drew a line connecting those poorer facilities to being less safe environments.

---

**Resident #2**

The resident entered the room and mentioned that he had known Chief Navarro "since Roseland." The resident mentioned how he wasn't interested in talking to anyone today, and then he saw Chief Navarro walk in. The resident remembered, several years ago in Roseland, meeting (then) Officer Navarro during a school visit. Because of that memory, the resident wanted to come in and talk today.

**Q: What's been your overall experience with SRPD? Your contacts with officers.**

The resident expressed that, "They've all been negative." He described how during most contacts, there is lots of name calling from the officers towards the citizens. He also described how the officers would seemingly intentionally provoke those involved, and then once the individuals were mad, they would "start to go off." For example, the officers would bring up gang involvement. To further the provocation, the officers could even bring up rival gang involvement in order to get a rise out of the individuals.

**Q: Is this how you've been treated individually or as a community?**

"Both. Even in groups, they surround us, sometimes with guns."

**Q: Do they explain why they're doing that?**

"No. The community probably gets scared when they see a large group or something."

**Q: You said there's a couple cool cops out there. What does that look like?**

The resident described, "Cops just doing their job." His description included things like:

- Officers speaking in a respectful manner.
- Officers explaining why they're there and what the call was, "before they tell us to sit on the curb."
- Officers asking if there's "anything they should know, and if they could talk to us."
- Letting me go with a warning.

**Q: If officer had to make an arrest, but they were professional, would that be okay?**

The resident explained how he had been arrested by a respectful cop and there was nothing upsetting about the situation. He knew he had got caught, and it was fine. He also explained how he felt like "rookie cops" are worse than veteran cops. This is because the rookies are known to "size you up and get in your face," and "they think that they have power over you." Also, rookie cops are "smart asses."

**Q: What do you think we can do to make SRPD better?**

The resident focused mainly on how large groups attract a lot of police attention, and how he didn't like that. He said, "A large group doesn't always mean there's gonna be something happening. Cops don't have to be parked down the street watching us. Do they look at large crowds as a threat or something? Why do you think they do that?" He did acknowledge that there may be gang attire attracting attention. But wanted to stress that they are just having a good time, and "the cops shouldn't be getting on us," especially if there isn't any alcohol involved.

**Q: What do you think a police officer's job should be?**

Responding to calls that are important. Don't respond to calls about a guy in baggy pants.

**Q: How do you think the person calling us feels?**

Scared.

**Q: What about things that aren't related to policing? How do we make neighborhoods safer?**

The resident didn't think that things could change. His answer brought him back to discussing how in certain parks, people couldn't hang out without "cop after cop after cop after sheriff stopping and bothering us. Even if it's just a couple people."

**Q: How can we make the community safer for your sisters/family? Do you think it's safe for them to walk from school?**

The resident explained that, "They don't have anything to worry about." He also recognized that there were gangs around, and it wasn't totally safe.

**Q: What about ways to stop people from joining gangs?**

The resident said there wasn't much for programming in Santa Rosa, and he didn't want his sisters getting into the gang life. He thought doing stuff at schools was a good idea. When asked about what age he thought would be the best to reach out to, he quickly answered, "Middle school." He also expressed that he was in the California Youth Outreach program for a while, and "it was good."

**Q: What do you think about School Resource Officers?**

The resident described how he felt like SROs should only be at schools known to have “big trouble or lots of fights,” and not at schools that are generally good. He thought that police should be around the school, but not on the school. He described how the SRO at his school “goes chasing people all the time,” brings back people who are cutting class, and “talks smack” to the kids. The resident said, “It makes everything harder.”

**Q: Does he (the SRO) ever just chat (with the students)?**

“Most people don’t talk to cops.”

**Q: Why did you come talk to me (Chief)?**

“I’d rather be here than in my room. Plus, I knew you from Roseland.”

**Q: Does that past relationship make it easier for you to talk to me?**

“Yeah.”

---

### **Resident #3**

The resident began the conversation by telling the rest of the room that his mom had been shot by a cop, in Richmond. As the conversation continued, the resident also described how he had been drawn on (a gun) by a police officer recently. This happened while he and a buddy were contacted by police. The buddy ran off, and the resident stayed there. When the resident reached down to lift the waist of his pants, the officers drew (a gun) on him. He stated that he was afraid of cops. When asked what brought out the fear, the primary reason was the gun, and also that they “don’t treat me with respect.”

**Q: Have you had any good experiences with the police?**

The resident expressed several times during the conversation that he thought Santa Rosa cops “are the better ones out of all the cops.” Throughout the conversation, whenever the resident was asked questions about the SRPD or ways to improve the SRPD, he would consistently remark something to the effect of, “You guys are good.”

At one point, he described a specific positive interaction with a police officer. He was walking himself home from Rohnert Park to Santa Rosa because all the busses were closed. A Rohnert Park Police officer saw him and gave him a ride home. “He Uber’ed me home!”

**Q: How do you see the community right now?**

The resident described how he had been there for “the protests.” He agreed that there was a lot of anger right now, and it was a difficult time. He also agreed that you “gotta treat people with respect.”

**Q: What do you think could be done to make your community safer?**

The resident wasn’t sure. He thought a fundraiser for the community could be helpful. He thought the money could be well spent on things related to COVID-19, and to help the

homeless.

**Q: What would make you feel safer/better in the community?**

“I need help in school.”

**Q: What kind of help? Anything specific? More aids?**

“Any help.”

---

#### **Resident #4**

**Q: What’s been your overall experience with SRPD?**

The resident said that his experience with the SRPD has been “pretty good.” He hasn’t been negative to the police or treated them “like shit.” This makes him feel like he hasn’t been subjected to anything negative himself.

**Q: When you think of a police officer, what are the negative things we shouldn’t be doing?**

The resident started listed off some ideas. They were, in no particular order:

- Don’t abuse your power.
- Don’t go around treating people like crap.
- I hear other races get treated differently. Everyone should be treated equal.
- They shouldn’t be beating people, but that doesn’t happen in Santa Rosa.
- “The biggest stigma is that everyone hates the police until they need them.”

**Q: You said there are good and bad cops. What makes a good cop?**

The resident against threw out some ideas. They included things like:

- Someone trying to make the community better.
- Not stereotyping people.
- Getting involved in the community.

**Q: Have you had any other positive experiences with officers?**

“Not really. I don’t go out much, and this is my first offense.”

**Q: What do you think would make Roseland and/or Santa Rosa safer?**

The resident wasn’t sure. He commented that he hears one of the biggest problems is the gang activity. He suggested that there should be more opportunities for the kids out here other than “slinging drugs,” noting that “life is expensive around here,” and that it was a struggle for people to support themselves. When asked if he felt like people needed support to sustain themselves, he answered, “yeah.”