

Coffee with a Cop in Santa Barbara, California

Voiceover

00:00

This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

Kimberly Brummett

00:08

This is Kimberly Brummett with the U.S. Department of Justice, COPS Office. With us today is Officer Kasi Beutel with the Santa Barbara Police Department. Officer Beutel is here to discuss Coffee with a Cop, particularly with officer and community relationship building. Good afternoon.

Officer Kasi Beutel

00:24

Good afternoon.

Brummett

00:26

Can you tell us a little bit about what Coffee with a Cop is, and share some of the logistics involved in creating a Coffee with a Cop program?

Beutel

00:34

Coffee with a Cop is a concept of an informal interaction between the police and the public. In the past 16 months, we have held approximately 12 Coffee with a Cop events at local coffee shops in the area and around the city. The venue is less important than the details that the event be an agenda-free event, without time limits, that allows the public to come and speak with the police in a nonthreatening and relaxed setting. The logistics involved in creating this type of program are very minimal compared to the benefits the program has.

Developing a relationship with local venues to host the events, releasing the details of the event via media and social networking sites, and also promoting the event within the agency to ensure sufficient officer involvement as well.

Brummett

01:17

Great. How does the Coffee with a Cop program help build trust within the community?

Beutel

01:54

The Coffee with a Cop program helps build trust within the community by giving our citizens an opportunity to see and interact with officers in a casual and relaxed setting. The typical or average person may only encounter the police a few times in their lifetime, in an official capacity during a minor enforcement stop or as a result of calling 911. The factors that shape many persons perception of law enforcement often comes from these few interactions as well as the media, television, or movies.

Coffee with a Cop events builds trust between citizens and police two ways: It helps humanize the police to many citizens that have limited understanding of the difficulties police face in their jobs, and it helps officers to have interaction with the public in a relaxed setting.

Often these officers' contacts are limited to either victims or suspects of crime, with limited opportunities to communicate with the public in a relaxed and casual manner.

Brummett

02:14

What changes have you seen in your police and citizen's relationship from implementing the Coffee with a Cop program?

Beutel

02:20

We implemented our Coffee with a Cop program in September 2012. The change in trust between the citizens of our communities and our police are threefold. The citizens look forward to the event and have a regular monthly or bimonthly event where they can speak to and interact with the police, the merchants look forward to partnering with us for these events—it helps bring the community in the door, and helps our local economy—and lastly, from an officer's standpoint, it serves as a reminder of the importance of community policing and brings the COPS philosophy to the forefront.

It is not uncommon for me to be contacted by both citizens and police asking when our next event will be held, and if we would hold them at certain locations. We have a regular following of people who come to our events as well as people who come with concerns or complaints, or just to thank us for the jobs that we do. It's a very interesting dynamic to have a venue in a very relaxed setting where people can come and speak with us, and sit down and talk about their lives, or ask us about ours in a very informal relaxed setting.

Brummett

03:19

What are some helpful tips for others who want to start Coffee with a Cop program in their jurisdiction?

Beutel

03:25

In the past year, we've assisted teaching the Coffee with a Cop program in a class to over 15 different agencies, and assisted some of our neighboring jurisdictions in starting their own program. For agencies starting this type of program, it's important to choose a relaxed setting that has plenty of parking and plenty of room inside. The officers that are at the event itself need to remember that citizens are often intimidated by police in uniforms, and we need to be the greeter or the person who initiates the conversation. If there are groups of officers at the venue, then the officers need to be careful to circulate with the citizens, and speak with them, and not bunch up with the other officers.

I find it quite helpful to have materials on hand for people to look at, such as neighborhood watch brochures, child ID safety kits, department newsletters, and a sign-in sheet with space where they can put their email so I can communicate when the next events are with them. And lastly, the media releases notifying the public of the event—is important as well as posting flyers prior to the event.

Brummett

04:24

Great, great. Well, thank you so much for your help. Thank you, Officer Beutel, and have a great day.

Voiceover: *The Beat Exit*

04:31

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

04:47

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