



# Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Police

Cleveland, Ohio

<http://www.cmha.net>

## Community policing element

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Community partnerships

## Problem/issue

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Domestic violence

## Problem description

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Research has repeatedly demonstrated that any type of violence can interfere with a child’s ability to think, learn, and develop. But early intervention by skilled practitioners can lessen this distress. Police assisted referral (PAR) is designed to ensure that youths, families, and adult victims of domestic violence have the access they need to an array of clinical and non-clinical family based interventions to ameliorate the effects of violence exposure.

## Community policing strategies implemented

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services predicts that between 3.3 and 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence yearly in the United States. Broadly termed, “domestic violence” incidents not only reflect instances of intimate partner violence but also include a significant number of conflicts between parents and their children or among siblings. A review of Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Police Department (CMHAPD) records indicates that conflicts arise from disagreements over curfews, cell phones, and other everyday disputes.

In 2013, CMHAPD recorded 2,543 crimes (UCR Part I & II) and responded to 33,702 calls for service. Seventeen percent of the recorded crimes were classified as domestic violence, with an additional 7 percent classified as felonious assault. While calls for services decreased slightly (approximately 6 percent) from 2012 to 2013, domestic violence crimes increased 7 percent. Further, an analysis of PAR data indicates that 60 percent of referred youth witnessed (heard or saw) the violent event that resulted in the referral.



Police assisted referral creates a conduit for police officers to connect violence-exposed youths and families to case management, violence-prevention education and interventions, and mental health screening services. Spearheaded by the CMHAPD and the Partnership for a Safer Cleveland, the collaborative effort includes two local human service providers (Beech Brook and FrontLine) specializing in trauma-informed social work practices as well as an active research and evaluation partner, the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education at Case Western Reserve University (Begun Center).

Already considered an emerging practice, PAR is founded on three principles: first, police are first social responders, working with traumatized individuals before other helping professionals; second, police lack the tools to respond to social crises—nothing on the duty belt addresses these issues—and third, police are ready, willing, and able to help. Studies demonstrate that 80–90 percent of police time is spent interacting with citizens in non-arrest situations.

Here’s how PAR works: Each year, all police officers receive training, based on state of the science research, to hone the skills needed to interact with families and identify and refer those in crisis. In the field, police refer families in the course of their normal duties—they provide a referral card and reassure the family that the agency contacting them is trustworthy. The officer then telephones a 24/7 hotline to relay information about the family and the crisis. Within 72 hours, a trained social worker contacts the family, performs a crisis assessment (often in the home), and then works with the family to develop an ongoing service plan. Closing the loop, the service partner agency sends the officer (and chief) a confirmation letter letting him or her know that the family has been contacted.

PAR extends policing beyond typical “arrest or walk away” strategies and provides a path for officers to form productive relationships with the residents they serve. PAR is based on core competencies of the community oriented policing model and includes an in-depth evaluation and partnership with residents to solicit feedback to help shape and evolve the program.

### Change and/or impact as a result of these community policing efforts

PAR is more than a program; at CMHAPD, it is standard operating procedure. Any of the 78 active duty police officers may (and do!) refer families to PAR when responding to calls for service. Since 2010, more than 7,000 individuals have been referred to PAR for assessment and service.

Beyond the primary service of PAR, the program has been demonstrated to improve interactions between residents and police. In two recent studies (combined n=270), more than 40 percent of respondents indicated their impressions of police had improved based on the interactions during the referral. Ninety-five percent of respondents felt police were respectful during the PAR interaction and more than 90 percent wanted the program to continue.



When evaluating confidence, willingness to obey, and respect for police, which are key factors of legitimacy, more than 80 percent of respondents rated CMHA highly. More than 60 percent were very satisfied with the services provided by CMHAPD.

Moreover, in focus group sessions, officers have indicated that the program gives them piece of mind, knowing that they have linked the family with helping professionals.

The impact of PAR is most powerfully demonstrated through the voices of CMHA residents and police. Here is a sample of the responses to the question of whether the program should continue:

- “It gives the police and citizens more chances to connect.” CITIZEN
- “They were there when I needed it most.” CITIZEN
- “It makes my situation more personal to the officer.” CITIZEN
- “It’s good for single moms who need help.” CITIZEN
- “Yes, because it shows how the community and police can work together.” CITIZEN
- “The positive responses are not from actually being called back to the residence, it’s just from passing by and seeing people, they’ll just stop me and say how nice it was.” OFFICER
- “When I’ve explained it to [residents]... they were very interested. They were actually looking for help, but didn’t know where to look.” OFFICER

The first study evaluating the PAR program was recently reported in *Law Enforcement Executive Forum*, a journal focused on law enforcement training and practices. For more information, please see J.M.B. Bartholomew, M.I. Singer, A. Gonzalez, and M. Walker, “Police Assisted Referrals: Empowering Law Enforcement to be First Social Responders,” *Law Enforcement Executive Forum* 13, no. 4 (2013), 38–49.

### Lessons learned through program implementation

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Initial evaluation and research related to the PAR program offer some promising results:

- Police **ARE** effective social responders.
- Citizens **WILL** accept help when it is made available to them for these social crises.
- Providing police the ability to fully realize their role as social responders **STRENGTHENS** police-citizen interactions.
- Cross-sector partnership (community service providers, police, and researchers) **WORK** to improve police responses and provide citizens.



In addition, it should be noted that PAR’s success is tethered to the strong support provided by the program and funding partners—from regular cross-sector executive and service meetings, to the commitment of CMHAPD staff in tracking referrals and communicating with partners, to the service providers who have tailored their responses to meet the needs of residents in the housing authority and funders who have allowed the program some freedom to experiment with services being offered, some of which have been reshaped or not continued as the program grew. PAR is a result of all these individual efforts that, when driven by a common vision, collaborate in a manner where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

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