

## **A Message from Chief McGill: Novato PD is Committed to Preserving Life**

One of the promises doctors must make within the Hippocratic Oath is “first, do no harm.” Peace officers take a similar oath based in the form of committing to protecting and preserving all rights within the United States and California Constitutions. The Novato Police Department and the policing profession is committed to preserving lives.

Many of society’s most difficult issues have been delegated to the police. Issues such as drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, and homelessness now consume most of our officers’ time. Societal matters such as poverty and race relations confront our officers daily. Officers have become defacto armed social service workers and our jails are defacto psychiatric centers. In 2017 alone, our officers took 256 people into protective custody for mental health concerns. This does not include the numerous daily interactions with many others suffering from mental illness but not deemed a danger to themselves or others. Those suffering from drug addiction consume even more of our officers’ time. The addicted are largely responsible for most quality of life and theft related crimes.

In Novato in 2017, our officers were involved in over 46,000 events, interacted with hundreds of thousands of people, made more than 2,600 arrests, and issued more than 5,000 citations. In all of those encounters our officers only used force 18 times. In all the enforcement encounters and other interactions already noted, the NPD only received 8 personnel complaints, mostly for minor issues such as perceived rudeness. This data speaks to the professional team and high-quality training in our organization coupled with the strong level of trust we enjoy with our community.

At the NPD, we’re reinvigorating our culture emphasizing “first, do no harm.” Nearly all (100% by June 30, 2018) of our officers have received advanced training in crisis communications, de-escalation techniques, critical incident response, procedural justice, implicit bias, and have been provided less lethal weapons. Our training emphasizes all these tools including judgement by using scenario-based exercises that requires officers to practice all those skills and be able to apply them in crisis situations.

Recently, this training and culture proved its value as Novato officers successfully disarmed a 67-year-old woman threatening to kill herself with a large kitchen knife, who then advanced on the officers with the knife raised toward them. The officers had the legal right to use deadly force to defend themselves and the firefighters there to help her. The woman called out for the officers to shoot her, in what is known as “suicide by cop.” Instead, our officers showed tremendous restraint, utilized their training, and used a Taser device to disarm her. The woman was taken into protective custody, so she could receive mental health treatment. In this case, a life was preserved. This is just one example of an outcome that happens often and is never known to the public

It’s important to note that every case is different, involving different participants and not every outcome can be assured to have no tragedies. One minor change in circumstance could have altered this outcome. We’re doing all we can to prevent such tragedies in Novato but cannot ever fully ensure they won’t happen here. Our intervention tactics are effective on some people, sometimes. Mental illness coupled with methamphetamine or other substances greatly diminishes the effectiveness even further.

Your Novato peace officers are committed to preserving life whenever possible. Whether it be in situations involving the mentally ill or administering opioid counteractive drugs. Novato peace officers are highly trained and committed to 21st Century policing that protects our community to the best of their ability.