



NEWS

Police Pioneer Training Program

by [Seth Daniel](#) • April 22, 2021 • [0 Comments](#)



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The Chelsea

Police Department and the MIT Center for Ethics and Transformative Leadership collaborated this past spring on a unique police training program looking to build empathy and compassion into implicit bias training programs.

Acting on an existing relationship with the MIT Center that was used to form the innovative Chelsea HUB model, both organizations brought the program to the Chelsea Police and three other departments for six weeks of training in how to add new tools to keep situations from escalating on the street – and to take police departments into more of a direction of community service and safeguarding.

The Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi, of MIT, ran the program – known as Transformative Citizenship – and said it focuses on understanding how officers view their community, how the community views them and the pressures that mount on officers due to the dangers inherent in the job – and often times incorrect public perceptions of them.

The most recent cohort in Chelsea was the first to take place in the United States, and could potentially next go to Seattle. There were 33 officers from Chelsea and three other departments, and they had in-person and online meetings for two hours at a time.

“This is the first time we are trying to create a model or pilot for a U.S. Police Force and maybe others too,” said Tenzin. “I do believe this is something that could help all of them. This is one of the most important set of tools they will have. It will prevent even simple things, when they escalate, they will have these tools and will be able to recall them to de-escalate situations very quickly. These are the things that play a role in the way officers discharge their duties every day.

“In the end, these are very dedicated individuals that are trying to shift the culture so communities have better experience with what the police do and police forces do more than just policing,” he continued.

Chief Brian Kyes said he was happy to lead the effort with MIT, and found it a valuable forum for peers to share their experiences.

“This unique partnership provides our Officers with valuable insight and a forum for shared experiences with peers from neighboring communities,” he said. “It also helps to expand their resource toolkit, something that is important especially when presented with complex situations. We are happy to be leading with MIT in this effort.”

Tenzin said confidence in policing in the U.S., both perceived and real, is putting additional stressors on the very people that are depended on for public safety. Often, police officers internalize the public criticism that erupts whenever there is an event where use of force is exercised, whether warranted or not. Many times, men and women who have made a pledge to protect fellow residents feel that the world is against them regardless of the outcome. This presents a real danger both in regards to mental health and also with any future interactions these officers may face in the future.

“The important aspect is many are drawn to policing by their desire to serve the community,” he said. “There’s a lot of frustration because...you’re only judged by the worst in your department. It only takes one or two bad instances for the community to pass judgment on those good officers in the department at the same time. They are only interested in doing good for the community and they’re frustrated because of internal environments and external perceptions.”

The program also touches on how officers internalize anxiety – the idea that they may not come home at the end of the day – and it also focuses on how officers view their community. A key aspect of the program is to help develop an emotional resiliency so they can have compassion and empathy on those they encounter – even in the most challenging circumstances.

“One thing they look at is the perception officers have of the community they are serving,” he said. “The second thing with that is a focus on emotional resiliency. It is a high-pressure job at any given time. We give them another tool to help address situations with compassion and empathy.”

Transformative Citizenship aims to address these issues in a meaningful and impactful way by exploring the thought process and emotions these events can trigger. The focus of the program is to work through implicit biases in decision-making and to promote emotional resilience and trust both within the department and in the communities they work.

“I am extremely grateful to the Chelsea Police Department and the MIT Center for Ethics and Transformative Values for the opportunity to take part in this course and include more than two dozen officers from several PAARI-affiliated police departments,” said Allie Hunter, Executive Director of PAARI. “This program provided a unique and meaningful opportunity to enhance officers’ leadership skills, especially as they engage in public health and social service oriented community policing programs that support individuals with substance use and mental health disorders, as well as those experiencing homelessness.”

Tenzin added, “The work of police department is perhaps one of the most challenging and demanding for professionals. Our goal with this course is to further build and strengthen trust in communities where it may have eroded. That is critical to the safety and well-being of everyone.”

The next step is to create ongoing sessions for more police departments locally and throughout the U.S., using what was learned in Chelsea. In a period where the public is asking for the “re-imagining of police” this course offers opportunities for difficult conversations that can lead to solutions and not just volatile rhetoric, he said.

Anyone interested in learning more about Transformative Citizenship can contact Tenzin via e-mail at The Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values at MIT, info@thecenter.mit.edu.

Chief Kyes, Police Chiefs Association Agree With Verdict on Chauvin

Chief Brian Kyes, president of the Massachusetts Major City Police Chiefs Association, hasn’t always been totally in step with every police reform that has come down over the last year, but this week Kyes said he believed the jury got it right when it came to the murder convictions against former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin.

Chauvin was convicted on Tuesday afternoon by a jury in Minnesota of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter when he killed George Floyd while in the course of his duties as a police officer.

“The jury in the murder trial of former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin reached its verdict, finding him guilty of all three charges,” said the Chief in a statement. “As members of the Mass Major City Police Chiefs Association we strongly believe that not only was the defendant afforded due process as is required by our Constitution and in conformance with our system of justice, but that the honorable and informed jury absolutely got it right and that justice was served. We hope that the family of George Floyd finds some solace in this historic verdict.”