



CPD in Partnership with MIT- Bringing Ethics and Compassion to Counter Implicit Biases

FEBRUARY 25, 2021 BY CAPTAIN KEITH HOUGHTON

MIT Center for Ethics and Transformative Leadership partners with Chelsea Police Department to bring the “Transformative Citizenship,” an ethics and compassion based leadership program to police officers in Massachusetts. The Chelsea Police Department, through a previous relationship with MIT Media Lab for its groundbreaking Chelsea Hub Model, led to a unique partnership with the MIT Center for Ethics and Transformative Values led by the Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi to offer a series of modular courses for police officers from Chelsea and surrounding communities. The pair brought in Allie Hunter who runs the PAARI (Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative, helped to promote the course to police departments throughout Massachusetts. Captain David Batchelor who leads the Community Services Division of the Chelsea Police Department said, “The Chelsea Police Department is honored to be part of this initiative that walks our officers through complex scenarios with an opportunity to process and discuss among peers in a way that can help them expand their capacities.”

Confidence in policing in the U.S., both perceived and real, is putting additional stressors on the very people we depend on for our 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. Transformative Citizenship aims to address those issues in a meaningful and impactful way by exploring the thought process and emotions these events can trigger. 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,” said Allie Hunter, Executive Director of PAARI, “to take part in this course and include more than two dozen officers from several PAARI-affiliated police departments. 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.”

Venerable Tenzin stated “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 US. 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. If you are interested in learning more about Transformative Citizenship, please contact The Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values at MIT, info@thecenter.mit.edu.

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