

Capitalizing on Virtual Training

Problem

Training for law enforcement is an ever present need, and the potential subject matter on which police need to be educated is extensive.

As a response to the ongoing economic challenges facing local governments, police departments have been forced to reduce training budgets and make difficult staffing decisions. In-person training is no longer a viable option for many officers as they are needed on patrol and their departments cannot pay overtime for their attendance at training during off-duty hours.

Training on topics related to violence against women is an important training topic for law enforcement, as responding to domestic violence calls is one of their most dangerous duties.

Training law enforcement on issues related to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence is a task that has largely fallen to victim service providers. While victim service providers have made a laudable effort to ensure that police officers in their areas are



trained on violence against women issues, law enforcement officials are more inclined to participate and absorb this material if it is provided by a peer.

Solution

The genesis of the Virtual Training Academy began with the Office of Criminal Justice System Improvements (OCJSI). The Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association (PCPA) received a grant from PCCD to look at the feasibility of using online training as a means to

educate law enforcement and to identify the technological infrastructure to make an online "virtual" training academy available for law enforcement.

PCCD's Office of Victims' Services (OVS), PCPA, the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) saw an opportunity to work together to create web-based training or "virtual training" modules on violence against women issues

specifically tailored to law enforcement. The use of web-based technology will provide the ability to offer timely and effective provision of training to law enforcement.

The training can be completed by officers anywhere and at any time; all that is needed is a personal or laptop computer and an internet connection. This eliminates the costs for travel to attend in-person trainings as well as overtime needed to pay officers who attend training during their off-duty hours. The fact that these web-based modules can be completed at any time allows for greater flexibility in trainings offered to police officers.

Collaboration among PCCD, PCPA, PCADV and PCAR assures that the content of the training modules will be presented in a manner that is relevant to law enforcement and imparts the most up-to-date, factual information on domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence. The web-based modules can be quickly and easily updated should there be changes in the law or policy.

Results

To date, work is nearing completion on a three-part module on responding to domestic violence calls which provides background information on responding to calls from 9-1-1; what to do once the officer is on the scene of a domestic violence incident and what the officer needs to do after making an arrest.

Two other modules are near completion. One is focused on how to investigate and document evidence in domestic violence cases in which the offender has used strangulation. The second module, developed with the assistance of PCAR, focuses on appropriate interviewing techniques for police to use with sexual assault victims.

Also, two additional modules will be developed. While it is not yet known what the focus of those modules will be, the following topical areas are under consideration:

- Protection From Abuse Database;
- Stalking in Domestic Violence Cases;

- Confidentiality and the Role of Domestic Violence Advocates;
- Enforcement of Protection From Abuse Orders; and
- Violence Against Women Act Requirements.

PCCD's vision is to continue to collaborate with other organizations and systems to design and deliver the virtual training modules on victim-related topics for law enforcement as well as allied professionals within the criminal and juvenile justice systems such as judges, prosecutors and victim advocates.

