

Conversations With Police Task Force of the MLK Action Team

After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the Nauset Interfaith MLK Action Team established a Conversation with Police Chiefs from Chatham, Orleans and Brewster. These Chiefs reached out to the MLK Action Team to see if they could collaborate to promote stronger community ties among all residents and visitors on the Cape and their public safety officers. The Harwich Police Chief later joined the group. The objective of this task force has been to establish listening sessions and dialogue to improve the relationship between the police and the communities they serve. Collectively the task force members have focused on initiatives to address issues of concern from people of color and improve the impact of policing operations on those individuals. The task force is also working on building a bridge between communities of color and law enforcement based on trust, empathy and understanding. These Conversations have continued regularly for 3 years, and some impressive initiatives in policing have resulted in positive changes. The task force has expanded over time to a second group with the police chiefs and community members from Eastham and Wellfleet.

Relationship and Trust Building Conversations

The group made great strides in building a trustful relationships amongst themselves by sharing knowledge and experiences, through group reflection, article reviews and discussions. The key components of these conversations include a safe space to speak openly, respectful listening, support, honesty and ownership of one's own feelings. The success of these ongoing conversations has built unity, better understanding and mutual respect among the members as well as led to actual changes in policing.

Transformative Empathy

The “work” done to develop empathy between both the police and community members of the task force has been transformative. Sharing each others’ lived experiences has led to better understanding and knowledge about what police do and why, as well as the historic and current experiences of people of color with the police and society at large.

Responsive Action to Address Racial Bias, Build Community Trust and Relationships

The empathy and trust built in this group has led the police chiefs to institute specific improvements or changes to policies and specific operations to address racial and other biases. These procedural changes have reduced the risk of potential tension between police and community members that could lead to a dangerous situations. Examples include:

- higher scrutiny and additional questioning when responding to “suspicious persons” calls
- anti bias training for increased awareness and sensitivity and for officers doing traffic stops and questioning drivers of color
- decisive and quick response to complaints of racial profiling, discrimination and hate crimes
 - police officers calling in stops and reason, followed by ongoing monitoring for patterns to ensure fairness and people of color not being unjustly or over stopped
 - eliminating unnecessary questions like “is this your car?”

Members of the Original Police Taskforce

Police Chiefs: Michael Anderson of Chatham (following Chief Pawlina’s retirement); Heath Eldredge of Brewster; Scott MacDonald of Orleans; Mark Pawlina, of Chatham; David Guillemette of Harwich

Community Members: Jeff Spalter (chair), Becky Alden, Tia Cross, Jeanne Morrison, Pancheta Peterson, David Purdy, Deborah Ullman, Wesley Williams.