

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE, IN REGULAR MEETING OF MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2023 AT 5:30 PM, MUNICIPAL CENTER I, TOWER ROOM 146, 50 E CIVIC CENTER DRIVE, GILBERT, ARIZONA

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MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Katie Hackett; Vice Chair Sean Warren; Members Iya Affo, Chris Curley, Amy Holstein, Alexandra Rodriguez (*attended virtually*), Javier Rodriguez, Christine Sabel, Heather Watts; and Alternate Suzanne Lunt

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Council Liaison Kathy Tilque, Staff Liaison/Volunteer and Community Resources Manager Melanie Dykstra, Assistant Town Manager Dawn Prince, and Deputy Town Clerk Judy Martinez, Police Chief Michael Soelberg, Police Assistant Chief James Bisceglie, Police Lieutenant Rob First, Special Victims Unit Police Sergeant Scott Gallas, and Special Victims Unit Police Officer Denise Parker

GUESTS PRESENT: Founder and CEO of CeCe’s Hope Center Lea Benson and Vice President of Starbright Foundation Lori Regnier

### CALL TO ORDER

Chair Hackett called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chair Warren led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### ROLL CALL

Volunteer and Community Resources Manager Dykstra called roll and declared a quorum present.

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The staff and guest speakers present introduced themselves.

## TASK FORCE MEMBER WARM UP – ENERGY CHECK-IN AND WEEKLY HIGHLIGHT

The members participated in a warm-up exercise by sharing if they would rather be a penguin or a duck and their energy level.

### AGENDA ITEMS

#### 1. Consider approval of the minutes of the March 6, 2023 meeting.

A MOTION was made by Member Affo, seconded by Vice Chair Warren, to approve the minutes of the March 6, 2023 meeting. *Motion carried 9-0.*

#### 2. Presentation from Gilbert Police Department on Human and Sex Trafficking

Special Victims Unit Police Sergeant Gallas discussed human smuggling and sex trafficking, then said his unit was made up of 10 detectives including a new position. He said most online sex crimes came from cyber tips, then discussed how the internet files were attached to metadata and how that would be flagged and reported. He discussed different case types including sex crimes, assaults, conduct with a minor, molestation, indecent exposure, luring, internet crimes, and missing persons. He spoke of how the advancement of phone technology had connected them with ways to track and locate predators. He reviewed some statistics since September 2022 including 13 cases of prostitution, 37 child exploitation, 60 runaway juveniles, 29 arrests, and 25 current child exploitation cases.

Special Victims Unit Police Officer Parker discussed prostitution in Gilbert and how it was more discreet than in some cities, but said the cases were typically from social media apps and massage parlors. She discussed enforcement efforts including working with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Task Force, as well as decoy and rescue operations. She then discussed reactive cases such as cases reported to Gilbert Police Department (GPD) and cases investigated by the Special Victims Unit (SVU). She discussed operations she had participated in, including one where instead of the women getting arrested, they were given food and resources.

Chair Hackett asked what happened when someone was arrested. Sergeant Gallas stated it was a misdemeanor, but discussed how the punishment increased with each offense.

Member Affo asked about ways individuals were lured. Sergeant Gallas and Officer Parker discussed how individuals were typically lured online and how internet crimes related to jurisdiction and enforcement.

Member J. Rodriguez asked about prostitution cases in Gilbert and how they were discovered. Officer Parker discussed that Gilbert did not have an area like “The Blade” in Phoenix and then discussed reactive cases where instances were reported.

Lieutenant First discussed increasing the work of the Department, adding that they had an opening for quite some time for a victim advocate within GPD.

Chair Hackett asked why they had the opening for so long. Lieutenant First said applicants had failed the background check or testing; others had declined the offer.

Officer Parker discussed Chandler’s “Blue Wave” operation resulting in 17 suspects being arrested for sex-related crimes. She discussed four Gilbert arrests, two during that operation and two more subsequent arrests. She said there were nearly 350 arrests in Phoenix for sex-related crimes during the time of The Super Bowl, The Waste Management Open, and the Barrett-Jackson Auto Auction.

Sergeant Gallas discussed internet crimes against children and working with The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). He discussed impacts of social media, sextortion cases, reciprocal cases and how the “internet made the world small”, adding that cases crossed other jurisdictions. He also discussed enforcement efforts and working with Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) and Phoenix-area task forces, adding that peer to peer technology would be coming soon. He discussed Gilbert’s most vulnerable population including runaway juveniles, group home residents, youth having access to social media and those suffering from mental illness or depression or were lacking home support and were gravitating toward attention.

Officer Parker discussed going to CeCe’s Hope Center and having the pleasure of meeting some of the individuals there who shared their experiences with her.

Member Sabel asked if the victims were predominantly female and what was the ratio. Sergeant Gallas stated it depended on the type of cases, noting that sextortion cases were almost exclusively male and that males were less likely to report it.

Sergeant Gallas discussed what was next for the GPD including investigative developments, how the Department was working with the FBI now, of diversifying with Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC), and adding a victim advocate. He spoke of more educational opportunities including staff and patrol briefings, forming relationships with school personnel, and having meetings with non-profit agencies. He then discussed long-term goals including a family advocacy center

with a best-in-class facility and robust victim services, a safe space to increase reporting, and better investigative resources. He also discussed splitting the Special Victim Units (SVU) in the future with more focus on proactive details and human trafficking. He also discussed awareness and education to decrease parent naivete regarding social media activity, reluctance from parents and schools, and overall social media and human trafficking awareness.

Member Affo asked about opportunities for helping the Gilbert Police Department with these efforts.

Sergeant Gallas said there was opportunity for increased relationships with non-profit partners in the Town, noting that their educational content could possibly be edgier than what Town of Gilbert could do. He said he would love to do more educational posts on Town of Gilbert accounts to raise education and awareness, adding that lack of attention and awareness led to some of those conditions.

Vice Chair Warren discussed his work with churches and with an East Valley group of campus safety directors. He asked what type of relationship did GPD have with faith-based communities to report incidents or individuals who may be a risk.

Chief Soelberg discussed the different opportunities for the GPD to work with faith communities including quarterly meetings that churches attended, a faith summit, and The East Valley Mayor's Faith Breakfast. He said that churches could ask the GPD to attend church events and could also contact GPD with red flag situations.

Vice Chair Warren asked if someone was charged with a crime, could that information be passed in a loop to non-profit groups.

Chief Soelberg said if it was an adult, they would publicize it. He discussed how efforts would grow with a new advocacy center and a human trafficking task force, then discussed how with social media and the internet there could never be enough staff. He discussed how the offenders of these crimes had no barriers and how many non-profits had helped with their proactive work. He discussed the balance of pushing for opportunities but staying within the law.

Office Parker stated she would reach out to Vice Chair Warren regarding churches.

Police Assistant Chief Bisceglie discussed what teens were able to do with phones and how it could be overwhelming to parents. He said there were so many resources for parents but emphasized the importance of education and outreach. He discussed an app called Bark that helped with monitoring texts and emails that could flag potential risks to youth.

Chair Hackett suggested partnering with schools to provide tools and resources.

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated that the Bark app could also be used to flag risks for mental health issues and suicide by looking at key words and terms.

Police Chief Soelberg spoke of grant opportunities and training that GPD could seek.

Lieutenant First discussed the opportunity to educate hotel workers on signs to watch for and what to do if they noticed any potential issues.

Member J. Rodriguez asked about monitoring possible health or behavioral issues with staff working those cases with difficult subject matter.

Sergeant Gallas discussed his responsibility to monitor his staff's health and to watch for changes in behavior or for stress and burnout.

Officer Parker discussed the bond between officers in this industry.

Member J. Rodriguez asked about succession planning in the Police Department.

Alternate Lunt asked if officers had access to therapy.

Sergeant Gallas discussed Gilbert's Wellness Team and The Officer Craig Tiger Act that was passed by law to require free and confidential counseling sessions for officers after a qualifying event.

Member Affo stated that Gilbert Police Department had an incredible wellness program.

Member J. Rodriguez asked about the evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) and how the Department would address potential issues with AI components.

Police Assistant Chief Bisceglie stated they had no plan for that, but said AI may not be as far as people think. He said the GPD were contacted daily by vendors and tech companies, but the GPD vetted that information. He said that having Officer Parker on board allowed the GPD access to more information from the FBI.

### **3. Presentation from CeCe's Home Center**

Lea Benson, Founder and CEO of CeCe's Hope discussed her background, stating she had been in the program for 17 years. She summarized her work with the Street

Light program and opportunities to work with that initiative around the world. She discussed why she left Street Light and how she started CeCe's Hope Center. She said CeCe's board was comprised of councilmembers from the Phoenix area, including one individual who worked solely with churches for CeCe's Hope, and of businesses from the East Valley. She discussed the training that was required for someone who helped with the organization. She said intervention was not enough and there needed to be prevention, discussing courses about trauma. She highlighted information referral, adding that the housing program was very strict. She discussed mentors who were former prostitutes and how they were manipulated and pulled from loved ones without them knowing what was happening. She discussed cases of neglect, adding that some of the girls there were mentally ill. She spoke of those who were professionals and got into a negative pattern based on mistrust, then discussed the power of manipulation and how it was part of their way of life. She spoke of the impacts of trauma and how some of the girls needed parenting and education and that every approach needed to be different. She said many of the individuals also came from foster care. She discussed how some just needed a friend or mentor, then discussed trauma-informed care.

Staff Liaison Dykstra asked Lea Benson to discuss housing. Lea Benson stated their house was located in Gilbert, then spoke of envisioning a different housing opportunity for the girls in the future.

Member Sabel asked how many girls were there. Lea Benson stated it was a 10 room home.

Chair Hackett asked about intervention services. Lea Benson discussed trauma-informed care and working with schools and counselors about how to identify trauma.

Member Holstein asked what curriculum was used.

Lea Benson stated the individuals there were not ready for curriculum; they needed one-on-one therapy, which was difficult to find. She said they were looking at group therapy, but said individuals were reluctant to share in that environment.

Vice Chair Warren asked if there was a waiting list. Lea Benson said no, there was not currently a waiting list, then discussed concerns of finding a house to use, stating people who were worried about issues with the residents there.

Member J. Rodriguez asked if they were looking for more volunteers. Lea Benson said no, they had enough and were strict with volunteers. Lea added that because

girls came from all over, it was hard to receive grant funding, especially from cities who wanted to have them highlight how many “residents’ they were assisting.

Chair Hackett asked if Lea Benson could wave a magic wand, what would she need or like.

Lea Benson answered she would like a dedicated clinician. She also discussed legislation needed around online perpetrators who start to insinuate things and how they could be penalized proactively before they trafficked someone; she said officers needed to be in that focus group to support legislation from a prevention perspective. She also discussed funding for facilities, but reiterated that more volunteers were not currently needed, that it was a specialized issue. She said that Councilmember Bongiovanni, who had a master’s degree in social work, had recently joined their board and suggested getting an internship started with social work students.

#### **4. Presentation from Starbright Foundation**

Lori Regnier, Vice President of Starbright Foundation, discussed the trafficking prevention side and her work with students to education on making healthy choices, such as advising them of the dangers of sharing photos. She discussed how she would work with an officer to take the kids in one room and the parents in another, then swap. She discussed how she kept in contact with students who just wanted a relationship and support. She provided examples of incidents she had seen in the Gilbert area.

There were no questions for Lori Regnier, but the group thanked her for the information.

#### **5. Review and discussion of priority area of Human and Sex Trafficking**

Staff Liaison Dykstra asked the CETF if they felt they were ready to being the exercises on discussing this topic and coming up with ideas as the next meeting or if they would like more presentations. The consensus of the group was to begin the exercises at the next meeting.

#### **6. Discussion and assignments of action items for the CETF members**

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated the assignment for the CETF was to review the resources and watch the videos that were provided, come up with questions for future meetings, and to research some of the topics.

## **COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS**

None.

## **FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE AND TOPICS**

Future agenda topics may be requested and compiled for a list of potential agenda topics; however, the merits or details of the items may not be discussed until placed on an agenda.

There was no additional discussion.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### **Report from Council Liaison on current events.**

Council Liaison Tilque said she would be presenting on the efforts of the Community Engagement Task Force to the Town's Leadership Forum on April 6, 2023. She spoke of the water conservation efforts within the Town and said she would continue to discuss those efforts. She also discussed the Town proposing to keep the tax levy at the same rate for the coming year and that it would not be a tax increase.

Assistant Town Manager Prince stated though the tax rate did not increase, they still had to post it as a tax increase because the amounts would increase based on the assessed value of homes; she reiterated that the tax levy rate would stay the same.

### **Report from Staff Liaisons on task force assignments and current events.**

Staff Liaison Dykstra highlighted the Zero Suicide Community Presentation from Dignity Health that would be on April 17, 2023 at the Public Safety Training Facility.

### **Report from Task Force Members on current events.**

Alternate Lunt discussed the Gilbert Community Preparedness Fair on April 15, 2023 at 777 E. Elliot Road.

## **ADJOURN**

Chair Hackett adjourned the meeting at 7:48 p.m.



ATTEST:

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Katie Hackett, Chair

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Melanie Dykstra, Staff Liaison