

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PLAN

GOAL 1.3 LISTENING SESSIONS



Summary: December 10, 2020 Indigenous Group Listening Session

On December 10, 2020 Santa Rosa City Council Member Tom Schwedhelm, Chief of Police Rainer Navarro, Community Engagement Director Magali Telles, Community Engagement Coordinator Danielle Garduño, and Community Outreach Specialist Gustavo Mendoza met with six (6) members of the Santa Rosa indigenous community for a listening session and dialogue. These individuals included Maria Cardenas, Delamar Billy, Elizabeth Billy, Dino Franklin, Joe Salinas and Rueben Crowfeather. All participants requested that their names be used in the listening session summary and gave the City of Santa Rosa permission to use their names.

Listening Sessions and Discussion Questions

Law Enforcement Specific Questions

1. What does it mean to feel safe in your community and how does that look?

Maria Cardenas mentioned that safety is based on personal perspective. For example, feeling safe in her community means that her children are safe: it is safe for them to walk down to the street and go to the park. Safety means making sure that her children are not seeing anything that will negatively impact them, like seeing people drinking or doing drugs in public parks.

“Safety is a product of trust,” says Dino Franklin. He goes on to say that he trusts that when he leaves his home, he will come home safe. Being safe also means being able to go to a public park because “what else do we have?”

Delmar Billy, a south west Santa Rosa resident, mentioned that they had a lot of homeless individuals living on the trail near their house, which made it difficult as far as safety goes. He and his wife didn’t feel safe having their kids and their kids’ friends go outside to play. He also mentioned that safety means being safe for others and teach our kids to be safe and respectful to others.

Elizabeth Billy stated that she feels safe knowing that when she calls law enforcement, they will respond and will be helpful. “Taking me seriously and making sure I am safe.” She also mentioned that law enforcement can help her and others feel safe by assisting residents with navigating the system.

2. What has your overall experience been like with the Santa Rosa Police Department (SRPD)?

Ms. Cardenas spoke of several experiences she has had with SRPD. Her first experience with SRPD, she was pulled over and the officer immediately asked her who her parole officer was. “He didn’t ask if I was on parole.” The second time she interacted with SRPD, she had called for help after an incident had already occurred. The responding officer asked “why I didn’t call at the time of the incident” instead of assisting her. The third time she interacted with an officer from SRPD, the officer was cordial and understanding. Her final experience with SRPD was

when she was organizing a community event at the Santa Rosa Junior College and she reached out to SRPD to have them participate in the event. She did not receive any response from SRPD and nobody from their staff showed up for the event.

Another participant mention that their experiences recently had been good compared to more negative experiences in the past.

Rueben Crowfeather spoke about his first experience with SRPD since moving here from Minneapolis, MN. He mentioned that he moved to Santa Rosa from the community where George Floyd was killed and that his experience with law enforcement made him nervous when he was pulled over here. He also mentioned that his only form of identification at the time was his Tribal I.D card as he has not had a chance to obtain his California driver's license. He stated that two officers got out of the car and both hesitated before approaching his vehicle. However, the interaction with the responding officer was good and Mr. Crowfeather mentioned the officer was polite.

Mr. Crowfeather suggested having officers conduct spiritual check-ins with someone from the Indigenous community, or another person of color, prior to starting their shifts. "This would help make sure they are in a good frame of mind before hitting the streets."

Another participant mentioned that one of the biggest issues they have in their community is that they teach their children how to behave to avoid having interactions with officers. "I was taught to avoid the police, which it meant they couldn't be trusted."

Q&A and Discussion

Staff dug a little further into the discussion by asking a follow-up question: how do you feel about early interactions between youth and police officers?

- Police presence at a school in a low-income neighborhood is not necessarily positive. This needs to change. Have the cops come to these schools and have positive interactions.
- "I saw the police beat on my brother, which scarred me for a long time, I was nine at the time. I always had fear of the police." The participant, Mrs. Billy went on to say that she thinks it is a great idea to have early interactions with law enforcement so that their first experiences are not scary or negative. She went on further to say that it is important to teach children and retrain the way of thinking that officers are bad. "We want our kids to call the police if they need help." Maybe adopt a similar philosophy that the fire department uses when working with youth.
- Mr. Franklin stated that he grew up in the 80s, when things were very different. He mentioned that officers profiled youth as gang members in the community. He stated that there are ways to make sure this doesn't happen again, including having the officers have a presence outside of the uniform, such as coaching, teaching or other extra curricular activities. This helps youth have good relationships with law

enforcement. He also mentioned that the community has a responsibility to teach their children that not everyone is bad like that. Officers need a presence in the classroom – “kids don’t want to be officers, firefighters, or doctors anymore. We need to change that.”

- Another participant said, “we want to support you, Chief [Navarro].”
- Police Chief Navarro acknowledged that the lack of response to the event organized by Ms. Cardenas was wrong and that someone should have responded to her request, regardless of whether they would be able to attend or not. He apologized to her for this and stated that he would like their department to be invited to these events in the future.
- Joe Salinas stated a concern that he has been holding on to during the listening session: “My nephew, Marcus Red Bear, was shot in the face during a protest. I don’t ever want to see that happen again. As a parent, if it was my kid, I would have responded.”

3. What ideas do you have in strengthening relationships with the police?

The group participants had several other suggestions for strengthening relationships between SRPD and the community. This included using Ya-Ka-Ama as a space for activities, such as a cadet camp for youth, which could also serve as a restorative process and a bridge builder between SRPD and the community. One participant mentioned a similar program in Woodland, California.

“Bring them back to the culture.” Other ideas included having someone come in and educate officers about local indigenous culture. Create cultural awareness in the department. In addition, group participants agreed that there needs to be a better understanding among officers about the differences between mental health situation and having people with mental health issues sent to jail. One participant mentioned a need for extra mental health beds in the Sonoma County Jail and that more resources are needed in the community for mental health issues.

Group participants also mentioned activities with the indigenous community including proposing a Mud Run for youth or indigenous people sponsored by SRPD. This would include having officers participate. Another participant suggested that SRPD put together a co-ed officer team to play in the Battle of the Rez’s (slow pitch softball tournament). Chief Navarro said he would definitely consider it.