

# Implicit Bias training for Bethlehem Police

The Bethlehem Gadfly Police December 18, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

Gadfly is rather astounded that he is just finding out this news (like, literally, 20 minutes ago), and from the *Brown and White*.

Gadfly tries to be alert to what's going on, but he does not believe that he previously heard about this program in all the buzz about the police department lately, a program which is said to have begun in the summer.

Before or after the retirement of Chief DiLuzio?

This is a good thing!

*Selections from Miguel Cole, "Implicit bias training begins in the Bethlehem police Department." (Lehigh University) Brown and White, December 17, 2020.*

The Bethlehem Police Department has been working closely with the Pennsylvania Youth and Disproportionate Minority Contact and Law Enforcement Corporation to develop an implicit bias training program for the department.

There is currently a pilot program in place that six of the city's officers have participated in. The program is still in its early stages as the two entities continue to iron out the details.

Bethlehem Police Chief Michelle Kott has spoken about what is involved in the pilot program, its importance to the department and what they expect to get out of this partnership.

Kott hopes to have the program available to all officers by either the first or second quarter of 2021. The pilot program is broken down into three sessions. Each session provides officers with information regarding implicit bias through PowerPoints, videos and tests. Kott said she would like to add a pre- and post-survey to the program to see what strides have been made.

“As you go through the course, you start to realize that this is something that no one is immune from,” Kott said, who took over as the city’s police chief following former Police Chief Mark DiLuzio’s resignation earlier this year.

Implicit bias refers to the subconscious attitudes and predetermined concepts an individual has regarding another social group. These biases are influenced by personal experiences and the context in which people live.

Virtually no one is free from implicit bias.

“All cognition is influenced by past experience, goals, culture. Even perceptual experience can be different in people raised in different cultures,” said Gordon Moskowitz, professor of psychology at Lehigh University.

Kott and Capt. Rodney Bronson, both of whom participated in the pilot program, took the Harvard Implicit Bias Test as a part of one of the seminars.

Through this test, both Kott and Bronson realized they had their own implicit biases.

“Your upbringing, your cultural conditioning, carries you through your entire life. It fills those biases that you might have and don’t even know because they’re in your blind spot,” Bronson said.

The training has had its challenges and barriers as they attempt to piece together what works best.

Because of COVID-19, the training program has been virtually constructed. However, both Kott and Bronson have expressed the desire to have this be an in-person program.

The implementation of this program is geared to help officers recognize their implicit biases in hopes to correct and improve community interactions.

The department got the ball rolling on this program this summer after the murder of George Floyd.

“It would be incredibly naive and irresponsible of us to say that there is no such thing as a racist cop,” Kott said.

In the past few months, there has been a lot of conversation about what it means to be anti-racist. To be anti-racist is to take the extra step and be actively against racism while promoting racial tolerance.

“It’s one thing to say that I’m not racist, I’m not prejudiced. But it is a completely different thing to be anti-racist,” Kott said. “That is the driving force behind this training; trying to make people aware of what is unconsciously going on in our heads so that we are able to have better interactions with the community that we serve.”

These biases can show themselves in many police-community interactions, from arrests to traffic stops to suspicion to stop and frisk. But recognizing implicit bias has surfaced as an important part of Bethlehem's police-community interactions.

“Just as with all other training, it is something that has to be done periodically. It can't just be a once and done course,” Kott said. “This is a practice that, as chief, I want to be a norm.”

**The Bethlehem Gadfly**