

# Changing the Perception by Simulating Real Life

By Sergeant Casey Bokavich, Redding Police Department

The law enforcement profession has been under considerable scrutiny and pressure as a result of several high-profile incidents that have rocked the very foundation of our society.

So in January of 2015, the Redding Police Department began a program of community outreach with the goal of educating civic-minded individuals regarding the use of force by law enforcement.

Like many agencies, the Redding Police Department had previously provided a cursory overview to members of the community on

the topic of use of force. However, the department observed that inaccurate and, at times, deliberate misinformation, regarding police use of force was being disseminated to our community through third parties. As such, the Redding Police Department recognized an opportunity to proactively reach out to our community in an effort

to provide accurate information available on the topic of police use of force. This effort has been a unique opportunity for citizens to take the same Force Options class that California law enforcement personnel are mandated to complete every two years as part of their continuing professional training. The four-hour block of instruction includes

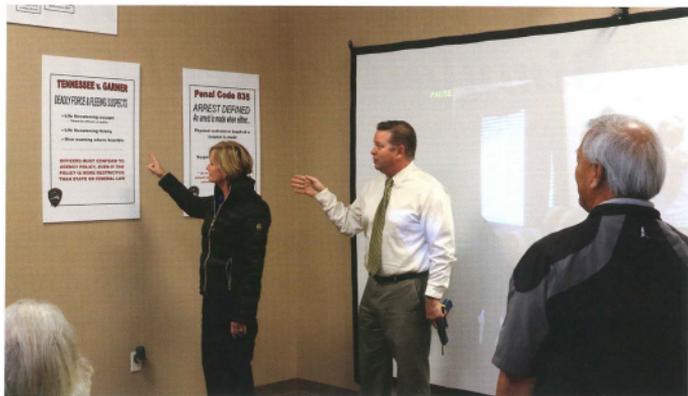


an extensive lecture and “hands-on” time using the department’s training simulator where participants assume the role of an officer. Participants are instructed to respond to the best of their abilities utilizing the information taught in the lecture. Each scenario is debriefed in the same manner law enforcement professionals are debriefed when they take the training.

Tactics are not discussed so as to not compromise another officer’s safety by disclosing such information in an open forum to individuals who have not been vetted. We have found that citizens understand and appreciate this perspective. It is stressed that the purpose behind the class is to shed light on the decision-making process regarding the use of force a law enforcement officer is routinely faced with. The scenarios are limited to “shoot, don’t shoot” events. We have found that if we try to incorporate other tools available to law enforcement in use-of-force situations, it is simply too much to ask of a citizen who does not have the training of a law enforcement officer.

Participants in the scenarios are “debriefed” and asked to justify their actions in a facilitated format based on case law, policy and the penal code just like an officer would have to. Those who do partake of the simulator get to experience first-hand the physiological, physical and emotional challenges any human being is subjected to while having to respond in a high-stress environment involving the use of force. The insight the participants gain, which they can then provide to the other citizens in the community, is invaluable. Other participants who are observing the scenario unfold are asked at the conclusion to assume the role of a witness. The experience has been very enlightening to the groups as they discover first-hand how difficult it is to provide an accurate description of what they just observed.

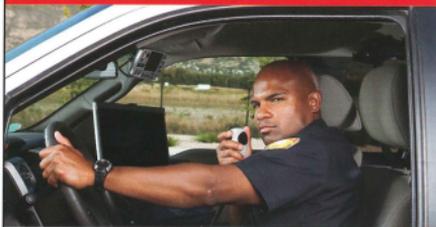
The insights the citizens have gleaned from the training have been nothing short of incredible. We have found that when provided with accurate information, participants will more often than not respond to the scenarios in a manner consistent with law enforcement officers. Those participants who “witness” a scenario can



apply appropriate case law, penal code and department policy in an accurate manner to explain an outcome that was either objectively reasonable or not objectively reasonable.

The groups that have taken advantage of this

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opportunity have included a local civil rights advocacy group, inter-faith council, elected officials from our city and neighboring cities, grand jury members and all of our city's department heads, including members of the city attorney's office. The feedback has been very positive from all of our participants.

"The "Options to Force" training was engaging and enlightening. The educational portion of the training was very informative. The videos of real life incidences were striking however the experience on the simulator was transformative. Even though I knew it was a simulator it was intense. I found myself solely focused on the threat of the gun, my body responding and my mind racing. Powerful!" Lynn E. Fritz, Chair, Shasta County Interfaith Forum.

This effort has been highlighted nationally in publications such as Force Science. As a result, our Force Options team has fielded calls from other law enforcement professionals and trainers from across the United States seeking more information on what the Redding Police Department has accomplished and experienced with this innovative and transparent delivery of information to the public. Below is sample list of some of the agencies we have been fortunate enough to assist.

- San Ramon Police Department, California
- Toledo Police Department, Ohio
- Missouri State Highway Patrol, Missouri
- Brookfield Police Department, Wisconsin
- Atlantic City Police Department, New Jersey
- Port Townsend Police Department, Washington
- Falmouth Police Department, Maine
- Surprise Police Department, Arizona
- City of Albany Police Department, New York
- Brevard County Sheriff's Office, Florida



To date, the Redding Police Department has not experienced any negative feedback with this community outreach program. The investment the department has made has opened additional avenues for discussion and contact with the public. For any additional information please contact Sergeant Casey Bokavich 530-225-4289. ■