



Featured Initiative

Established in 2020, the CACP/Motorola Solutions Community Safety & Well-Being Award (CSWB) was created to recognize outstanding effort and contributions to improving community safety and well-being in Canada through the process of inter- or multi-sector partnership, community mobilization, shared issue/problem ownership, shared outcomes and shared measurement. Many deserving submissions are received and the CACP wishes to share initiatives that could be implemented and/or be adopted by other police services. Here is one such initiative.

THE IMMERSION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: Achieving cultural change through an immersive and experiential approach

Longueuil Police Service

Recipient of the 2021 CACP/Motorola Solutions Community Safety & Well-Being Award

The problem to be solved / The need to be met

Communities across Canada are becoming more and more culturally diverse, with many new Canadians arriving with perceptions of policing based on the experiences they've had with officers in the region or country they previously called home.

As communities grow from being a village, to a city, to a metropolis, population growth and diversity lead to a wider range of problems to be solved and a correspondingly greater demand for services. This is the case for Longueuil, a city that has been experiencing accelerated growth, with an aging population and the arrival of new residents with various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Ignorance, or a lack of awareness of both the macro-social changes and the unique differences among the population as well as the parameters and challenges related to police interventions, can negatively influence interventions, lead to confusion and misunderstanding, frustration and conflict, resistance and distance, and can ultimately contribute to withdrawal, a sense of hurt and discrimination.

To help populations at risk of marginalization and who are more likely to be discriminated against or be the targets of hate (e.g. people who are homeless or living in extreme poverty, who suffer from mental illness or have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, who display visible religious symbols, or belong to visible cultural groups or racialized minorities), the goal of this program is to improve the perceptions and understanding interns have of the diverse communities they serve. This program also allows citizens, organizations, and institutions to see the police in a new light, to help improve trust and confidence in police services. This program is one of the main vectors of culture change that the Longueuil Police Service has been implementing over the past few years.

Partners

The Longueuil Police Service (LPS) set up two advisory committees: one internal, composed of police officers, and the other external, composed of experts in intercultural skills and/or police training (directors of NPOs, teachers of police techniques at CÉGEP, HEC and the University of Sherbrooke, street and community workers at CISSSME, municipal social development officers, etc.).

The LPS mobilized 35 community organizations and three (3) schools to participate in the *Immersion Program* (organizations with which the service already had a close, ongoing, and functional relationship, but also new partners). In addition, the *Immersion Program* involved eight (8) culturally diverse families and 25 families with one or more members diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and other mental health issues.

The Solution

As a result of the challenges in the field, the Chief of the LPS decided to implement a five-week immersive, experiential, and reflective training/internship program. Thirty (30) unarmed volunteer police officers in civilian clothing, from the LPS, were introduced into community environments where multiculturalism, poverty and homelessness, and/or mental health crisis were characteristic of the area. Partner organizations and host families notified participants of the presence of police trainees on site or in advance of their arrival. The *Immersion Program* is a professional development training program and citizen outreach initiative that helped bring together the police and marginalized populations through partnerships with community agencies, religious groups, and educational institutions.

Objectives

The following objectives were identified for the *Immersion Program*:

1. Bring officers closer to populations at risk of marginalization.
2. Increase the awareness of all participants (officers, workers, citizens) of the realities experienced by one another.
3. Improve the knowledge of the various populations at risk of marginalization in the community.
4. Improve communications skills (i.e., reflective feedback) to better meet the needs and adapt to the cultural differences of the population.
5. Help officers adapt their interventions with populations at risk of marginalization.
6. Diversify and personalize their relationships with partners in the community and school environments.

Planning

The implementation of the *Immersion Program* was carried out in two phases: the planning and organization of the activities and the delivery of the course itself:

Planning activities

1. Promotion of the *Immersion Program* among municipal actors
2. External consultations
3. Resource planning
4. Meetings with the Fraternité des policiers et policières de Longueuil
5. External engagement with partners
6. Development of the training plan for the *Immersion Program*
7. Completion of collaborative agreements with external partners
8. Planning of internship activities
9. Internal engagement and recruitment campaign
10. Completion of logistical arrangements
11. Creation and drafting of tools

Conducting the internship

12. Completion of activities outlined in the *Immersion Program* training plan
13. Promotional activities

Implementation

The *Immersion Program* is an immersive, experiential, and reflective training approach consisting of:

1. Immersion activities in partner organizations and host families
2. Role-play of mental health interventions
3. Reflective feedback in small groups
4. Experiential sharing activities in large groups
5. Testimonials
6. Themed learning sessions
7. Mini soccer tournaments with local youth
8. A final networking activity for police officers, community organizations, and educational institutions
9. A recognition event dedicated to interns and partners
10. The presence of a journalist from a provincial media outlet throughout the internship

Marketing and Communications

All partner organizations maximized their respective communication networks to promote the project and its resources. The following public relations initiatives were undertaken:

1. LPS Chief Fady Dagher introduced the *Immersion Program* to LPS executives and their teams as well as to the City of Longueuil's executive management team.
2. The planning team presented the *Immersion Program* to local partners and other local organizations.
3. The journalist from *La Presse* who observed the internship program published a five-episode series of articles in their newspaper which generated many follow-up interviews and many perspectives shared in both traditional media and on social media platforms.
4. LPS Chief Fady Dagher and two police officer interns appeared on the television show "Tout le monde en parle".
5. The LPS received a number of invitations for speaking engagements from FRANCOPOL, the Association of Chiefs of Police of Québec, the École nationale de police de Québec, a number of cegeps offering police training, the Union of Municipalities of Québec, and the City of Longueuil.

Financial, Human and Material Resources

- Expenses related to covering the duties of the 30 police officers selected as interns for the *Immersion Program* were \$125,000 in compensation with benefits, and \$15,000 in goods and services, for a total of \$140,000.

Program evaluation

Three means of evaluation were employed **during** the implementation of the *Immersion Program*:

1. Interns were encouraged to note and share their observations, criticisms, and suggestions with the project managers in order to influence the progression of the current session, or to help improve future internships.
2. Individual and/or combined debriefings at the end of the day with the trainees and representatives of the partner organizations who had hosted them.
3. Group discussions during meetings about the internship, their personal concerns, areas of improvement, etc.

Four means of evaluation were employed **following** the implementation of the *Immersion Program*:

1. Final wrap-up meetings: Discussions took place in the days and weeks following the internship.
2. Reports: Each intern was required to complete two (2) end-of-program reports.
3. Interviews: Qualitative interviews were conducted with partner organizations following the internship.
4. Public testimonials: Many moving testimonials were expressed by both police officers and partner representatives during the final networking event.

The *Immersion Program* does not consist of invariable teaching methods and techniques. Instead, it involves a co-creative, dynamic, and highly adaptive process, that can be adopted and adapted by other police services. The program can be developed and implemented according to the realities of the field, local dynamics, and the specific needs of each police service (i.e., prevalence of a particular problem, abundance of services and organizations in one field or another, lack of specific police skills, etc.). The number of trainees, the period of internship, the diversity of internship environments, and the time allocated to the actual organizational steps can all be adapted according to the availability of partners and the human and financial resources of the respective police service.

Impacts of the program

The *Immersion Program* is a very complex and ambitious project, with 107 police officers expressing interest in 30 available internship positions. The pilot project was deemed to be a great success. The experiential approach has proven to be particularly effective for participants in terms of:

1. Understanding the “grey areas” inherent in many situations, particularly those involving populations at risk of marginalization, whose unique needs and realities require an adapted and measured intervention.
2. Increasing confidence levels in managing incidents involving populations at risk of marginalization.
3. Increasing confidence levels in initiating alternative approaches to de-escalation.
4. Increasing the knowledge of available community resources.
5. Improving exchanges and community relations with local community groups.

Following the *Immersion Program*, some police trainees developed outreach initiatives involving actions such as systematic visits to Youth Homes, projects with community organizations and religious cultural communities, and/or offering training to members of these communities (i.e., the Sentinel project).

As for the partners, the *Immersion Program* has succeeded in building bonds and bringing together groups that had long been ignoring one another. Many have expressed an interest in maintaining their involvement and collaboration in the program, with some even contributing to the creation of new activities to be integrated into the project.

To learn more

If your agency is interested in learning more and wishes to explore the possibility of implementing a similar initiative in your community, you are invited to contact:

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