

## **Kris Halterman on Liberty Live - Conversations with Kris Halterman, June 26, 2020**

Re-imagining Public Safety through Law Enforcement and Mental Health

Kris Halterman: Good afternoon. Today I have the pleasure of talking to Bill Elfo, Bellingham Police Chief David Doll, Whatcom County Sheriff Bill Elfo, and Mike Hudson, the executive director of REACH. Sorry, Mike, I cannot remember what the acronym stands for, so I will let you tell the people what meets - means. And the reason that I asked you three to come together is because we've had a pretty volatile two weeks with a lot of protests which have sort of culminated with this concern about public safety, and law enforcement, and mental health and I know that some of the blowback is that people are talking about defunding the police. Some people call it re-imagining law enforcement and the police. So I thought it would be helpful to have a conversation with three people that I know have boots on the ground and are very familiar with what's happening here locally, what that could or would look like, if it were to happen, and what's really happening here? You know, what are the concerns?

So, I would first of all like to just briefly give Mike Hudson an opportunity to introduce himself. A lot of people probably don't know about his program, REACH. So if you could, Mike, please let the people know what you do down in Skagit Valley.

Mike Hudson: 00:02:15 Sure. Thanks Kris. REACH is, rather than trouble everybody with acronyms, just let everybody know we're a recovery program for people who are in recovery from mental health or substance use disorder. We are not-for-profit, and we are peer run organization, meaning that everybody who works here has had personal history with either mental health issues or substance use disorder. And we are currently located in Mt. Vernon. We have other programs in Vancouver, WA. And we've been here since 2012.

Kris Halterman: 'Kay. And been successful?

Mike Hudson: I think so. They keep inviting us back, keep renewing our contract down here. And just in a way of background, Kris, you know, I actually live in Bellingham, and prior to coming here I was a member of the Compass Health Crisis Intervention team in Bellingham. And I kind of have a unique perspective. I've had an opportunity to work with law enforcement agencies, both here in Skagit County and Whatcom County, and I'm really pleased to say that every time I've been in a situation where we've had to involve the police, the officers that responded have been extremely well-versed in de-escalation and dealing with people with mental health issues 3:54 and they, they did everything right. It's really been encouraging to see that. And I hope people who are watching us in our little corner of the state realize that, my personal opinion is, we're kind of ahead of the curve in terms of that type of police interaction with people who are in mental health crisis 00:04:22 or some sort of substance use crisis.

Kris Halterman: So, I think one of the things that people need to know and this needs to come both from you, Chief Doll, as well as you, Sheriff Elfo: What is the current status of our local and state law enforcement policies and training regarding a lot of the issues that are at the forefront right now as far as use of force, mental health, funding, manpower? You know, I'll let you go ahead and start Chief Doll.

David Doll: 5:01 Well, you've hit everything!

Kris Halterman: Yeah!

David Doll: I think that right now the state mandate for every peace officer is to have a minimum of 24 hours of training per year. And there are additional hours that are required for crisis intervention training. And I do believe that both of our agencies far exceed that amount of training. I know that, I have a training staff here at Bellingham Police that offer a monthly training session for all of our patrol teams. In fact today's a training day right now. And it happens to be a training day up at the Plantation Range for Firearms. However, with every training that we have, we weave some element of de-escalation training 00:05:50 into it, so that we continue to re-enforce that training all throughout the year. The state requires two hours, and that's typically done in an online format, where all of us in the state attend some type of training. This year, I believe it's traumatic brain injury training. Last year it was autism spectrum disorder. It's actually very good training and it's there just for law enforcement. 00:06:18 But we do a lot of training in terms of crisis intervention.

Wait, Bill's socially distanced in my office, he's not this little, it's just that he's little on the screen today.

Bill Elfo: I like that better.

Kris Halterman: Just, before we move on to Sheriff Elfo, when you talk about de-escalation, I mean it's a word that gets tossed around a lot. And it may mean different things to different people. What does that mean, in, as, it, for law enforcement? 00:06:53

David Doll: Yeah, it's (inaudible) strategies that are used to resolve situations without force. And sometimes there's elements of force that are used in deescalation training. But it's techniques and strategies that we use to slow the event down to come to a peaceful resolution.

Kris Halterman: Mm-hm. Okay. Alright, so ways to talk to people, terminology, body language, etc.

David Doll: And a good understanding of the person's behavior

Kris Halterman: Reading them, as well as them reading you.

David Doll: Right, and the opportunity to maybe identify what type of mental health issue that individual is having so we can use the best strategies to come to a resolution.

Kris Halterman: 00:07:45 'Kay. And Sheriff Elfo, would you like to weigh in on that? Do you need me to rephrase, restated or you kind of remember?

Bill Elfo: I think I remember, but you can fill me in if I miss one of the points. Yeah, I'll start by we've been imagining here for a long time on how we can serve the community better. We've got escalation of people with mental health and substance abuse issues. And by default, law enforcement is the service that's called to intervene when people's behaviors, mental illness, manifest 00:08:17 themselves in particularly dangerous ways. So all our deputies are trained in crisis intervention, well beyond what the state requirement is. We do it every year, much the way that Chief Doll described. We have specialized mental health deputies that deal with the most chronic, repetitive and escalating of cases. They actually go out and maintain a caseload of people. And the Sheriff's Office works with the community 00:08:46 in a variety of ways. There's the County GRACE program, and the LEAD program, there's mental health courts.

So, and we've worked with the health department as well as other law enforcement, including Bellingham police, to establish a Crisis Stabilization Center, that'll provide options for recovery and reduce the involvement of 00:09:06 mentally ill people in the criminal justice system, where safe, and appropriate to do so. So we're very proud of that. And the center will be opening up, it's my understanding, the projected date is August. So we've put a lot of focus on mental health. We've put a lot of focus on deescalation. We've put a high value on the sanctity of life and preserving it. We provide our deputies with a wide array of less-lethal or non-lethal options and a lot of training.

And fortunately, when we use deadly force, it's very seldom, but when we do, it's after exhaustion of every other possible remedy. So I'm proud of the job 00:09:52 our people are doing in that regard. I think you also had a policy question in there? Our community demands professionalism and integrity on their law enforcement agencies. That's been a long-standing expectation here in Whatcom County. With 18,000 law enforcement agencies and 800,000 law enforcement officers across the country, we're gonna see different types of standards and expectations. But ours comport with the best practices. The Sheriff's department is currently under, we're reviewing all our policies. We do that on a continual basis and we've hired an outside consultant to help us with that, just to make sure we're not missing anything. We hope to have them all online to improve transparency by the end of the year.

Kris Halterman: 00:10:53 And training, do you train with the Bellingham Police? Do you have your own separate training facilities? How's that?

Bill Elfo: We do some training with the Bellingham Police. And we do others with the small city police departments. But generally, our training venue is the Emergency

Operations Center and it's located out near the airport. So, we provide - we don't really, - our building's very small and that gives us a good classroom and places to go through physical exercises, as well.

Kris Halterman: And do you do specific deescalation training? Do you do, do you incorporate a lot of mental health training, along, you know - as Chief Doll, I know you've got separate deputies that that's their specialty, but do the other deputies also receive that type of training?

Bill Elfo: All deputies, every Sheriff's deputy, whether on patrol, law enforcement, and working in the jail, receives comprehensive deescalation training. And we consider that valuable. It pays dividends everyday, not only 00:12:01 in reducing the use of force that we need to exercise, but in keeping our people safe and reducing injuries to them, as well. So we far exceed what the state requires.

Kris Halterman: And Mike, an agency like REACH, how does that blend in with local law enforcement?

Mike Hudson: Well, we're kind of fortunate. We're just around the corner from Mt. Vernon Police Department 00:12:35 and three years ago, they hired a, an imbedded social worker, and I understand that the Bellingham Police Department now has an embedded social worker, as well. That person is involved in outreach, and we assist them in a lot of those instances. We also have a number of people who are in crisis from time to time, who are here. In fact, just to kind of reinforce what Sheriff Elfo said. I know that nationally statistics are that police officers are generally the first responders to the people who are in mental health and about one in three individuals who go to an ER because of a mental health issue are taken there by 00:13:34 by a police officer. So, it's really critical that they understand how to approach folks like that and, as the Chief said, how to deescalate the situation. And there's a lot of nuance to that. There are a lot of different types of issues. You know you treat somebody who's schizophrenic a lot different than you do someone who is going through a bipolar incident, for example. And it takes a lot of training and observation and patience to kind of understand those differences. And sometimes I can imagine on the street there's not a lot of time to kind of sit back and say, well, let's consult the book here and see what's going on. 00:14:29 So I can see -

Kris Halterman: Just for the viewing audience, if you don't mind, I'm going to bring up that document that you shared with me, with regards to statistics and you can sort of share that information with people. Let's see here.

Mike Hudson: Sure. It was from the Washington State Department of Health, and basically it was a situation report on how people are, in our state, are kind of responding to what's going on in the country with the Coronavirus and all the civil unrest and of course, the - Seattle has been the epicenter for both 00:15:17 of those things recently. And it shows pretty clearly that, generally, people's anxiety is pretty high. And also their depression is greater in people. 00:15:40

Kris Halterman: Wait, slow down there little tab-ola. Sorry about that. Just trying to get it to behave with me right at the moment.

Mike Hudson: Yeah, the other one that struck me is the number of domestic violence calls that have gone out and, more often than not, there is a mental health component to that. And that can be, that can be a real difficult wrinkle, I can imagine what a police officer, or sheriff's deputies trying to untangle that sort of situation.

Kris Halterman: Right. Well, and if you look at this graph up here, 00:16:23 basically shows you. The teal green here is 2020, what we were experiencing prior to all of the COVID that happened. And you can see a huge spike up.

Mike Hudson: Yep.

Kris Halterman: You know, even though 2019 looks like it was pretty elevated, as well, doesn't look like when we get into the darker days of the year that life gets any easier for people, you know, dealing with mental health issues, but we definitely hit a huge spike as soon as that COVID happened.

Mike Hudson: Well, and going back to, bringing all back to, you know, current events, the first of the year, the economy was clicking along and everybody was feeling pretty good about things and then the bottom fell out of everything, so -

Kris Halterman: Yes. And then these others, again, 00:17:13 the teal greenish are here is 2020, this is 2019. Again you can see a -

Mike Hudson: That's suicidal ideation. That one's, uh -

Kris Halterman: Yeah, what's an ideation? Does that mean that I'm thinking about it?

Mike Hudson: Uh, basically yeah. Thinking about it, or taking kind of those initial steps. We kind of- if someone has a plan, if they've thought it through enough, so that they've said, well yeah, this is how I'm going to do it, then that's pretty serious, but -

Kris Halterman: 'Kay. And then we have, down here, these are actual attempts at suicide, so again, you know, you can see where 2019 was - this was the state of Washington, not Bellingham, folks, that there was quite a bit of activity, but we had quite a huge spike right there, right around the time that the COVID began to happen.

Mike Hudson: Yep.

Kris Halterman: And then the one 00:18:13 that I found the most interesting was overdose drug use, had a pretty good spike, and then, I'm not sure, that mean everybody got locked down here, Mike, that, you know, we had quite a decline down there?

Mike Hudson: I, I, could only speculate, Kris, but, yeah, that, that's possible.

Kris Halterman: Yeah, well, I guess there's some benefits Chief Doll and Sheriff Elfo of getting locked down as far as hopefully saving you guys some of that anxiety because there's nothing, no fun about dealing with overdoses.

And this was the most, 00:18:52 this is the most dramatic. This is the different, the blue, the kind of the gray blue there versus the rusty orange, that's the spike in actual experienced assaults and violence, domestic violence offenses, and around the state of Washington, between April 6, to May 31st, is just what this correlates to, but Bill Elfotween May 25 through the 31st, domestic violence rose by 21 percent, versus 2019. So that's pretty much, that's pretty dramatic, and realizing that not only are mental health people having to deal with this, law enforcement is also very, very impacted.

And then again, this one here, which is pretty interesting, you've got the - let's see, the green one is SPLL, what is that one again? That is, that is a suicide prevention line, so that had a little bit of a tick up and then down in April. And then you've got the Washington Recovery Helpline, so this one here, relates there, where you can see definitely see April to May that those are pretty flatlined. The part that I also found pretty interesting was people trying to quit smoking. This is 2020 - they are not reaching out for help on trying to help them to quit 00:20:40 smoking. They've decided that probably one of the safest ways that they can deal with the anxiety and stress and they don't need any more. So -

Mike Hudson: One of the next ones down here is the product sales of marijuana and alcohol.

Kris Halterman: This one here?

Mike Hudson: Nah.

Kris Halterman: This one - you talking about the green one?

Mike Hudson: Yeah, no the next paragraph.

Kris Halterman: The next - okay.

Mike Hudson: Yeah.

Kris Halterman: You're talking about the next page.

Mike Hudson: Yeah.

Kris Halterman: Okay, so this one. But this one - this graph here talks about, which really is telling, so you've got this green, lime green one here which is sentiment, so these are, this is so, this is how people kind of track you on social media.

Mike Hudson: Right.

Kris Halterman: So, so this is the green one right here, which trends sort of downward is sentiment, how they're feeling when they're using their emotional - I like that, that makes me angry, that makes me sad, etc. Then you've got anxiety, which is definitely on an uptick over here in the golden yellow color there. And then loneliness.

Mike Hudson: Yep.

Kris Halterman: I'm sorry folks, but that is my biggest concern for a lot of people with this lockdown, and you guys are the recipients of all of this. We've got a huge loneliness factor going on here because some of the people, you know, they've been locked down. So let's 22:07 talk about that, with regards to, with regards to what you guys are seeing, Chief Doll and Sheriff Elfo, here locally.

David Doll: Well, first of all, I think that we need to give a lot of credit to our first responders who have been out in the field during this pandemic, because those are the folks that can't stay home and can't work from home to be out in the field. And I remember when we started to meet about preparing for dealing with COVID-19, everybody was scrambling to get the proper Personal Protection Equipment, the PPE so that our personnel could respond out in the field, and develop policies and procedures. What happens if we go into a situation where we have a confirmed person and how do we decontaminate? What kind of programs can we put in place? What kind of staffing do we put in place? 00:23:09 It was an organizational change for us. It turned our world, pretty much, upside down. And even still is impacting - the Bellingham Police Department is closed to the public. And so we have to find new ways to serve our folks, to keep our officers motivated and to keep them safe.

And just as we begin to open up a little bit, we see the spike in cases right now, so it's again, all over, my folks are all over saying double down on your personal protection, double down on making sure you have an appropriate mask and gloves and social distancing, all that stuff. That was our biggest concern going into this. 23:56

Kris Halterman: Okay.

Mike Hudson: Kris, and one of the things that we've seen - our agency is considered to be an essential service and we have had the ability to stay open for face to face interactions with people throughout this whole thing. But most of the other places where people go to for resources and help, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and many of the treatment centers for substance disorders have been closed. They have not been able to meet with folks face to face. Several of them have been doing some tele-med things but for the homeless

population that doesn't work out very well. And we see those folks and they're really struggling. They're having a real hard time. So.

Kris Halterman: And before I forget to ask because I've seen some people asking that question and it's a little off-topic but since today is the day that everybody 00:25:13 is supposed to mask up, what is the legal ramifications if you are wearing a mask and you have a concealed carry or are doing open carry - is that lawful or unlawful?

Bill Elfo: We just researched and there's no crime with wearing a mask while carrying a firearm pursuant to the lawfully issued concealed pistol license.

Kris Halterman: Okay. And thank you very much, because there were a lot of people saying, well I can't do that because... - and it's like okay well I don't know the answer but I'm certainly going to ask you guys.

Bill Elfo: Some states have that (indistiguishable) 00:26:01. I was wondering if I could address the COVID issue, as well.

Kris Halterman: Yes, please do.

Bill Elfo: Yeah, and I echo everything that Chief Doll has said about the people and their excellence in going out there and performing their jobs, but you know, we're also, in our community, our office is responsible for operating the only jail in the County and we do not have negative pressure capabilities to isolate people with airborne diseases, so it's been a real challenge with maintaining some type of spacing, screening people, which has resulted in booking restrictions for people without would normally be in jail like with some serious or repetitive offenses being let loose now by the courts, because there's just, we have to maintain some control over the population levels if we're going to prevent the control of - the spread of COVID within the facility.

And also, as Mike mentioned 00:27:01 a lot of these social services aren't available. A lot of the help we get, with the mental health professional, or a couple of these deputies on patrol, or the County's GRACE program, and right now it's all hands on deck at the Health Department to fight the COVID virus and do the case-tracing and everything else they're doing. So a lot of those services are not operating right now and we're seeing correspondingly an increase of people with mental health disorders that are showing themselves in some harmful way and the domestic violence calls as you showed on the charts that applies to us, as well.

Kris Halterman: Okay. So, thank you for sharing that. So I, this is just me personally, okay, it has nothing to do with you guys. It's just, it's myself, something that I believe is that the role of law enforcement, and I don't know if it's partly because of the changing demographics and society but you know, we've really tried to mesh law enforcement with social worker and I'm not sure that that's a good fit. Having somebody who specializes in that, having that resource available within your department is good and it's laudable, and important, and necessary. But to expect our law enforcement to, all of

them to all be like a social worker, I'm not sure that that's the most effective way to be helping society. Can you address that? Am I wrong or is that a difficulty? I see that in law enforcement. 00:28:59 I see it in the public schools and I'm just not sure if that's a recipe for success or failure.

David Doll: I don't think you're wrong at all. 00:29:04 In fact this is a conversation we've been having for years. But the reality of it is that the social service isn't available. We have defunded social services throughout the years. And a very stark bit of statistics that I had from an (indistinguishable) editor Chief of Police last year was that back in 1960, we had about 150 or 60 million people that lived in the United States. We had 600,000 hospital beds that were dedicated to mental health needs. Today we double that population and those dedicated beds have gone down to 60,000.

Kris Halterman: Woah.

David Doll: Severely mentally ill people that need help that are out on the street. And when people have a mental health crisis on the street, it's 911 that gets called, and our officers are the ones that respond. So, I think you are absolutely right. You know, Sheriff Elfo has led this county with his behavioral health program with his deputies, and we followed suit about a year later to add our own behavioral health officer, because that's where the need is. We need to have someone who has dedicated time to concentrate on a high utilizer of County services to get them the service that they need. You mentioned we have an intensive case manager working in our department and that's through the GRACE program and that intensive case manager, who's a Master's level clinician rides with our behavioral health officer. And they both carry a case load of helping people. So, as usual, law enforcement becomes flexible and nimble and responds to the needs. But when we hear about programs where social service agencies are going out and handling people in crisis, I'm all for that. Sometimes they need our help and sometimes they don't. But putting the proper people into place to help folks in crisis is going to be critical. And when we talk about re-imagining law enforcement, that's one of the things we talk about.

Kris Halterman: Yeah. Maybe separating them somewhat and making sure that there's - I mean, that's the tough thing, like I said, you had 600,000 beds, now you have 60,000 beds and, you know, I don't mean to bring up a sore subject but, you know, our Whatcom County jail is inadequate for what we're going through right now. And are we, Sheriff Elfo, are we, and Chief Doll, are we seeing 00:31:46 a high level of recidivism - because - or a revolving door or criminal activity - because of a lack of capacity?

Bill Elfo: Well, we've seen that particularly when we imposed the higher level of booking restrictions with the onslaught of COVID. People were getting arrested, and they're committing new crimes the next day. But, you know, people, you know, I don't want to mix the conversation with mental illness. In most cases that we deal with, the people we deal with are mentally ill, they don't really belong in jail. Let's say they commit a serious crime and safety requires it, our focus is on diverting them and I see law enforcement being the most practical service provider to do that.

You know, we get a call 00:32:34, some dangerous incident and someone's injured, the fire department responds and they stay until law enforcement gets there. A mental health professional's not going to respond to a dangerous situation without law enforcement. So we're there anyhow, to be as helpful as we can, and help find solutions. You know, there's nothing we can do to solve the problem of the state and the federal government cutting the capacity. I mean, that's an issue for our other elected officials to deal with. But, you know, we're where the rubber meets the road. We deal with it everyday. We need to have practical solutions. And I think we both, I'm going to [indistinguishable] Bellingham, the Sheriff's office, and small cities are doing a great job working through that. 00:33:21

Kris Halterman: Yep. And I didn't mean to infer that I thought that they should be locked up. What I meant by our jail is the fact that, you know, if you had a re-imagined jail, you would have the better ability to actually address, and you know, for diversion for people with these mental health issues. And having a place for them to go while this is, you know, while they're receiving treatment and things of that nature is definitely something that our state and federal law makers need to get a grip on. We might be having some issues here financially, but this is, this has been a slow, slow drip that - and it's basically the pot is starting to boil and we need to deal with it. We can't just keep sweeping it under the rug. 00:34:10

So when we talk about re-imagining defunding - I mean, have you heard, that actually reducing your operational costs, you know, funding and Mike, you can chime in on this too, you know. Because you guys depend a lot upon state funding, as well, if I'm not mistaken.

Mike Hudson: 00:34:37 Yeah.

Kris Halterman: You know, where - what would that, what would that look like if you were to - I mean is, my personal knowledge is that we don't actually have enough police officers now and there are a number of good officers that are at retirement age and it's, you know, how is, what does that look like, if you get less funding and you're actually having a high level of officers that are, you know, they're aging out and retiring, what does that look like for the Bellingham Police Department. 00:35:09

David Doll: Well, gosh, that's a lot to take in for a moment because there are actually two different issues. One is, the hiring pool that's out there and our ability to get the training at the academy, which is very difficult, with the present - the situation with COVID, the academy is running at a very reduced level, and all of our personnel, all police officers in Washington State go through the same police academy. There's two. There's one on the east side, but the main one is in Burien and it's a five month long academy. 00:35:45 And they typically run, I know Bill is on the training commission, I want to say six to eight classes at a time?

Kris Halterman: Mm-hmm. Okay. So.

Bill Elfo: Yeah. So.

David Doll: Yeah, and so - but you know, we, the police department, we staff our patrol officers based on call load. We use the patrol allocation model, which means that we have officers that go into service at various times of the day, based upon our call load. And so, we aim for our officers to have what's called a 50/50 split of time, where they have half their time that's obligated, and half their time is un-obligated. That un-obligated time is used to do community policing efforts, establishing relationships, reaching out and talking with community members, and not necessarily having to go, call to call to call to call, and anybody being on that, in our personnel, we can put into special services, such as, behavioral health or neighborhood police officer program, or training. Of course we have investigations too. And being a detective today is a lot different than being a detective back when I started 36 years ago. The crimes have changed. They've become more complex. They've become more cyber-related and you know, that's - I will never again 00:37:07 stand in front of a Rotary Club like I did about two years ago, and say we don't have bank robbers anymore because of this crime that's happening over the internet. And of course, the next day we had a bank robbery, so I had to deal. But crimes are becoming way more complex. Especially human trafficking crimes that are on the internet, and we are always catching up on how we investigate things.

So, a drop in personnel would be 00:37:37 problematic for us to properly serve our community. Now, that's not to say, that if we had a reduction of calls, based on sending social service workers to mental health issues or neighborhood issues, or unsheltered issues, there's a possibility that within time, once those programs are established, we would need less police officers, but not in the near future.

Kris Halterman: Okay. And Sheriff Elfo, kind of - Mike, you wanted to say something?

Mike Hudson: Well, I was going to say, while I was getting ready for this call, I went to the National Council of State Legislatures website and they've got a lot of information on increasing collaboration between police and mental health professionals. One of the studies I found there, it - titled, "Police Encounters Involving Citizens with Mental Illness, the Use of Resources and Outcomes," stated that 87 more resources are used for calls for service involving mental illness and that's not just officers on the street, it's kind of the whole criminal justice system, jails and whatnot. But, you know, if we can whittle down some of those costs by deferring prosecutions and making sure that folks who are in crisis, wind up in a facility that can help much better than Sheriff Elfo's jail and whatnot. You know, we can reallocate some of those funds so that it's not going to cost as much. 00:39:28

Kris Halterman: So what about, like you said, you know, there were 600,000 beds, now there's 60,000 beds. What resources do you have when somebody's having a, you know, a moment of crisis, is there, is it, at least locally here is it fairly easy to find a place for them to be - is it like - no? Okay, well that's why I'm asking the question. I

mean, I know some of the issues right now is that even if you find a place, it's for a very short limited period of time.

Mike Hudson: Yeah. Exactly. And honestly, Kris, this is a really big conversation for the show. And you know, organizations like ours, for example, didn't exist fifteen years, or so, ago. We focus on recovery long-term. We believe that recovery from mental health and substance use disorder is possible for anybody, but it's a lifelong process. It's not something that you go away for 30 days and then you're cured and you're back to business as usual. So we feel that by helping people maintain that recovery over a period of time, we'll, we can keep them away from involvement with either illegal activities or finding themselves in situations where the police are having to be involved. 00:41:06 There's just no easy answers to that and the reason there's so many fewer beds now than there were back in the early 60s is that there was a mental health civil rights movement -

Kris Halterman: Mm-hmm. One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest!

Mike Hudson: Exactly! We refer to the people who come here as consumers, consumers of mental health services and those folks said, hey, this isn't right either and we deserve something better. So they disbanded all the mental health hospitals and turned everybody loose. Problem was they didn't institute programs for them for what they were going to do after they left the hospital. So.

Kris Halterman: And Western State's been having some issues, as well, of late, you know, with their certification and issues, big issues.

Mike Hudson: Absolutely.

Kris Halterman: So, are you having conversations with the state legislature about, you know, re-imagining being able to, you know, what's - because you've got to stabilize somebody. Once you've got them stabilized then you've got to sort of try to help them to, you know, help them to help themselves back into society and that doesn't happen over night.

Mike Hudson: No, no, sure doesn't. And, we do, we constantly have conversations with legislators and policy makers and the State of Washington. Well, and just recently moved the Division of behavioral Health and Recovery out of the Department of Social and Health Services and into the Department of Health, 00:43:01 where I think it's a much better fit. It's - we're about three years into the collaboration - not collaboration, the combination of mental health and substance use disorder being looked at as kind of a joint problem and refer to it as behavioral health because so many times, people with mental health issues wind up self medicating and find a lot of those problems there. So, it's just a really, really -

Kris Halterman: I know. I know. Well, you know, you gotta start somewhere, Mike. You have to start somewhere. And Sheriff Elfo, what's your - how are you dealing with this,

you know, as far as recidivism - I know you've got limited capacity. Is it making it tougher? Is it making it less safe out there? 00:44:04

Bill Elfo: Well, your question started with the concept of defunding the police.

Kris Halterman: Yes. And, yes.

Bill Elfo: If I could respond to that first. Public policy shouldn't be governed by a slogan on a sign. If our community values professional law enforcement, integrity, accountability, transparency, they need to fund those things to keep a professional law enforcement agency operating. From my perspective law enforcement needs more funding not less. I currently have the lowest ratio of deputies per citizens of any law enforcement agency in the County and we cover, if you count the fresh water, 2500 square miles, 2150 land miles, with some real remote and hard to get to locations, as well.

So, we really struggle in that regard. And an organization is only as good as the people they serve in it. And we want to be able to recruit the best people. We want to be able to retain the best people. We want to be able to train the best people, to ensure we don't have incidents that happened in Minneapolis. If we go to defunding the law enforcement, lower the budgets, lower pay scales, we're going to get people - we're having difficulty attracting people now in the law enforcement. And it's escalated since March with all the law enforcement rhetoric that you hear in the community.

So, if we're going to keep the good service we have, the professional group we have, keep the training, we need to remain funded. 00:45:45 As far as, I agree whole-heartedly with Mike, that's a high priority, and in our county some of the things, the Sheriff's office isn't operating, but in the County Prosecuting Attorney's office they have Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, try to get people out of the criminal justice system. They have the drug court, the mental health court and other programs to try to get people health and deal with them that way, rather than through incarceration and punishment.

Kris Halterman: So, a lot of, as we all know, you know, we're having a problem with our economy, and of course, you know, best thing we can do is to all be as responsible as we possibly can and get our economy back on track and reopened, and as quickly as is safe to do. So that's great, but our top priorities to, for our state constitution, and federal, just government in general, is safety. That's the purpose of government is public safety. And that's public education, law enforcement, fire, proper treatment of mental health. And when we deal with those issues, and keep those things in balance, we all get to go out and live our lives, you know, much more productively when we don't have to be afraid that, you know, for our lives, for our businesses, our homes, etc., our transportation, that type of thing, so I'm hoping that there's a serious conversation going to be happening with our local City and County Councils, that, not to just go after every national slogan that happens here and keep your eye on the ball

and what makes Whatcom County, Skagit County great places to live Bill Elfocause we value these things. 00:47:56

I know that we're kind of, goin' a little long in the tooth here but I want to give each of you kind of an opportunity to sort of wrap up. If you, if you could have your wishes, how, what changes would you like to see have happen here locally in our state, and possibly our nation. I'm going to start with you, Mike.

Mike Hudson: Oh gosh, thanks.

Kris Halterman: You're welcome. I'll give the other two, you know, a little more time to think about it.

Mike Hudson: I don't know if it's my age or what, but I tend to be a little more optimistic about things than maybe, or maybe just patient about things than some other folks, and I see, again, from my own personal perspective, a lot of improvement locally with the interaction of law enforcement here and mental health, people who are struggling with their mental health. So, I would just like to see more of that. I'd like to see that continue, and for other law enforcement agencies to kind of take a look at the programs that Whatcom County, Bellingham, and Mt. Vernon here have put in place, and see if they can't implement some of those same things and continue to work together and be a little more proactive, as opposed to reactive.

Kris Halterman: 'Kay. 00:49:40 Sheriff Elf, you're on the spot next.

Bill Elf: Well, I'll save time by agreeing with what Mike said. I think he, that's, we've got to put more, we've got to do more, in terms of mental illness, substance abuse and provide alternatives to the criminal justice system, where safe, and where appropriate. But I'd like to see us. You know, we have a neighborhood deputy program we started years and years ago. We've got a resident deputy program, that's the deputy actually lives in neighborhoods and services those areas. And that's where we get to know the people, and develop relationships. We encourage our deputies to be involved in coaching sports and being involved with different youth activities, and, you know, volunteering. They're part of the community. They're not an army of occupation. They're part of the community they serve. And I think, for that reason, you know, we see a lot of negative criticism that's directed at local law enforcement based on something that happens, you know, thousands of miles away. But at the same time, we hear, for every bad comment or standardized email, where you get ten emails with the same content, it's a mass mailing, I get ten calls from, or cards or emails, people are bringing goodies into the office, just overwhelming.

So, I'm glad that we have the support of many of our citizens here in our community. 00:51:10 And we have their trust, that's really important. Once we lose their trust, it's gone, so we need to be accountable to them. We need to maintain their trust and we're not immune from making mistakes, but when we make a mistake we need to own up to it, and fix it so it doesn't happen again.

Kris Halterman: 'Kay. And Chief Doll. 00:51:27

David Doll: That's great. I mean, I don't know what more to add to all that, other than to thank our community so much for their support. Probably the best thing our community can do right now is when you see a police officer, thank 'em, when you see a firefighter, thank 'em, because right now they're hurtin'. And right now they're still out there, they're doing the job in difficult circumstances. COVID, COVID's a cake walk compared to what we're going through right now, in terms of the national mood. But to take the opportunity to thank your police officers - you thank a police officer today, you're going to make their day, absolutely make their day, so I agree with everything Mike and Bill said. One of the fears that I have is that, we don't want to separate police from the community. That takes us back to the professional era, late 50's, when Sheriff Elfo started his career, you know. We want to have continued relationships with our community. We don't want to go back to just the facts. We want to be part of our community, and I don't want to lose that.

Kris Halterman: Yeah, well I whole-heartedly agree with you. I happen to -

Bill Elfo: Oh, Kris.

Kris Halterman: Yeah. What?

Bill Elfo: I witnessed you hear about this inhumanity of our law enforcement officers here in our county, but I remember a few years ago, one of Chief Doll's officers, responded to an armed robbery and got involved in a pursuit 00:52:51 and while he was pursuing these people out the Mt. Baker Highway, they were firing at him with a shotgun and the vehicle crashed out at Smith Rd. and the Mt. Baker Highway and the guy got out and fired at one of David's officers and one of our deputies, and he was shot in the leg by law enforcement and his femoral artery was blown out. And from one second we see the deputies involved in the firefight, there are officers involved in the firefight with this guy, and the next our deputy happens to be a National Guard and Air Force medic, is applying first aid, which the doctors at Harborview attributed to saving his life. He used above and beyond techniques. So those are the kind of people we have out there that care about our community. They're not a bunch of thugs. They're not a bunch of killers. People should be proud of the officers that are on the street everyday. 00:53:46

Kris Halterman: Well, I want to reiterate that I personally, in our neighborhood we've had sheriff's deputies. We've had a assistant sheriff living here. We've had police officers in the neighborhood. And they are some of the kindest, most responsible, community-service oriented people that I know. And I thank them, almost every time - I kinda forget once in awhile - that I see them. And it broke, my heart, Chief Doll, to have one of them say, it's a really tough time to be a white male and a police officer today. And -

David Doll: It's even a tougher time to be an officer of color in our nation.

Kris Halterman: Yeah. Yes.

David Doll: It's a hard time for everyone.

Kris Halterman: Right, and I want people to be color blind when it comes to people's needs. You know, and I'm not gonna, I'm not going to disregard what happened with George Floyd. He obviously needed some good mental health and drug treatment program. Something more than, you know, a revolving door system. And that's where I believe we are failing in society. We have a really tight link between drug abuse and drug use and rising mental health and some issues that are going on even with our young kids that are being medicated at - you know, that's another, that's me, not you guys - you know, being medicated at an early age and sometimes that manifests itself in ways that it shouldn't be. But, I know that during times of COVID it's tough to do community policing because of - I mean, how much, are you, are they able to go out there right now, still doing the bicycle patrols with everything going on, or not?

David Doll: We do have bicycle patrols that are out there. It's the community meetings that, you know, we're all in these little boxes on the screen right now and that takes away a lot of it

Kris Halterman: Yeah. Anyway, I hope we get back to it as soon as possible. We need it. We need everybody working together. Not finding ways to tear each other down and destroy property, ruining opportunity for people to be able to go out and work and live and play. That's what it's all about. So, anyway, I want to thank all of you. I hope that everybody stays connected, and that we work this out in better times and we get to talk again. Thanks. 00:56:23