

July 24, 2020 KGMI News Podcast: Bellingham Police Video Series

[This transcription is of the body of the show, but omits the introduction and concluding informational remarks, such as website location of the mentioned video series, etc.]

Officer Knutsen: Well, the Perspective Project is a video series that we started, the first one was in 2013, but it was a small, pretty limited audience and it wasn't thought out much, other than our chief at the time, Chief Cook, asked our bike unit to put on a presentation for his Chief Advisory Council. And they were just wondering about downtown issues and what the struggles were and how we try to deal with some of the ongoing issues.

And so, there was four of us in the bike unit and we just used our phones and interviewed the people that we talked to, which we'd built good rapport with. And it was stuff that we saw every single day, and honestly, took pretty for granted. But when we compiled the footage and showed it to the council, people were really surprised and some of the honesty of what people shared with us, some of the struggles with addiction and why some of the issues were compounding downtown, and so, something that, again, we were used to seeing on a daily basis, the average citizen was really, really surprised to kind of see our perspective.

So, again, it was a limited audience. It was for that group and it kind of planted a seed back when I was on patrol. I thought there was a lot of power in being able to show, our perspective, what we see daily to people who just don't get to see that. And then to be able to cover various issues as a police officer, and especially in the last recent years, I feel like we find ourselves in the middle of a lot of issues like homelessness and behavioral health, property crime. There's a lot of issues where we hear opinions and viewpoints from a lot of community members and oftentimes we find ourselves in the middle of those. And so, again, I thought it might be an opportunity to show, I guess, multiple, different sides of some of these issues that are impacting our community.

KGMI Host: So what are some of the topics or issues that you're using these video series to discuss right now?

Officer Knutsen: Yeah, so the first issue, or sorry, the first episode that touched on, we sat down with Deputy Chief Flo Simon and we talked about race and policing and defunding the police. And I really tried to focus on a local department view of some of the issues. I know that on the national level, and in, you know, national headlines you'll hear a lot of talk about systemic racism and policing across the country.

And we've received a lot of questions from people about how are these issues impacting our community? How does it affect our officers' ability to do their job or how they do their job? And so we took that first episode to try to jump in to that topic and, again, look at it from a very, very local perspective and share some perspective on how we view those things.

And Deputy Chief Simon, actually I learned this through the interview, she's the second black officer to work for Bellingham PD and she came in at a moment in time when the Chief was trying to make a culture change, as we touched on in that episode. And so I thought it was really relevant to sit down with her. She's been here for thirty one years and talk to somebody who was around when a lot of these issues were starting to come to light and, you know the chief at that

time, identify some areas where some changes needed to be made. And I thought her story was great for dealing with that.

KGMI Host: Jon Knutsen and outreach officer for Bellingham Police Department talking with me about the Perspective Project video series that the BPD created. And so the point of the video series is to inform the public and just kind of give your answers to a lot of the many frequently asked questions that the community has. This is just kind of a resource for the community to find answers to some of those questions that they may have. Is that accurate?

Officer Knutsen: Yeah, I would say that for the first three episodes that's accurate. And that's a little bit of us tailoring the video series to meet a certain need, you know, right now. Down the road I hope to be able to, I'll just use homelessness for example. We have a homeless camp clean up co-ordinator that I would love to sit down with and interview and go out and look at some of the stuff that she does. That's an issue that our city is wrestling with and I would like to present - you know, I hear from the homeless advocates, and I hear from people who are, you know, frustrated with some of the issues that seem to not be being dealt with. But I would kind of like to show what we hear from all sides and let the community kind of process that information and come to some of their own conclusions as far as how they think we as community should proceed.

But yeah, right now with everything going on, I felt like it was really important to try to address the questions we're getting as a department because there's a lot of mistrust right now. And, again, I understand where people are coming from. If you watch the news and have no context for what your local police department is doing, it's very easy to get swayed with all the negativity.

And a few people have commented, you know, that it comes across as propaganda, or copaganda is probably my favorite play on words, but I, again, I understand where they're coming from but I think it's kind of sad that us trying to share what we're trying to, how we're trying to be positive in the community, I think it's a little bit sad that that comes across as propaganda. We're just trying to answer back to some of the negativity that we're just being inundated with right now.