

Letter from Mike on Longmont Results

Good day to you John,

Here are my responses to the listed questions. I believe questions that request outcomes for philosophical, policy and practice changes are important. I also believe asking questions for outcomes regarding the status quo are equally, if not more important.

Unfortunately, we tend to only ask “what are the outcomes of your changes?” questions and hardly ever ask questions about the effectiveness of current policies and practices. That is why we are still stuck with policies and practices within a massively expensive criminal justice system with recidivism rates of 50-70%; with communities that cry out for more police when rates of violence increase; with little system transparency and accountability; with high levels of unhealthy dependency on police/government; and with neighborhoods that languish in disconnectedness. Where are the questions related to those realities? I digress.

We started making changes almost immediately after I was hired but we did so with the end in mind. The pace of change was important. We didn’t want to load too much too soon. There were times when we thought we might be proceeding too fast, and there times when we realized we could have moved faster. There were also windows of opportunities to accelerate change. These opportunities were typically related to high profile events and circumstances around the nation, the state and even locally. There is no doubt that as time went by, our staff began to see that the changes we implemented were, in many cases, much more effective than what was happening in the past. The accumulation of that effectiveness, positive feedback from the community, and our staff noticing that police departments from all over our country were visiting Longmont to study what we were doing all caused not only less resistance to change but also a climate and culture of innovation and entrepreneurial-like thinking. And then our staff began to receive invites from national and state conferences to speak on what Longmont was doing. The momentum over time grew and grew with occasional setbacks. So, yes, my extended tenure helped but mostly in maintaining a culture in which we could more easily build on previous successes and the time to learn from our failures.

Let me state what the status quo was prior to our changes. The changes began to really gain momentum during the years 2000-2004. In 2004, our community(Longmont) of

approximately 60,000 people in population experienced close to 5,000 part 1 crimes(burglary, larceny, sex assault, homicide, robbery, auto theft). Longmont had close to 450 self-identified gang members and thirteen gangs with a proportional amount of gang activity. Longmont, annually, was averaging 2-3 women dying as a result of domestic violence. There were approximately 30-40 neighborhoods(including large apartment complexes) that were considered unsafe. The police would always send at least two police officers on each call for service into those neighborhoods.

We utilized the criminal justice system exclusively as the only tool to address calls for service that involved crimes.

Our Latino community, which comprises 30% of our community, had a great deal of distrust in our police department for good reasons including high profile officer involved shootings of Latino residents(before my tenure).

Our school district was expelling(kicking out of our schools) approximately 90-100 students per year.

Overall, there was a hue and cry within our community for a police department that was more personal, more proactive and preventative in its approaches, more inclusive, more just, less aggressive and willing to form more partnerships with various aspects of our community including our business community, neighborhoods, school district, faith community, people of color community, non-profit community, our youth, senior community, and other components of local, county and state government. In essence, the Longmont police department could be described as an aggressive, armed and faceless entity that existed inside the four walls of the police facility fortress. And our community was highly disconnected with zero neighborhood groups. The number of partnerships that were legitimized was zero.

Fast forward to 2020. Longmont's population is approximately 100,000 people. Part 1 crime has dropped to approximately 3,100. Longmont has fewer than 70 self identified gang members, two gangs, and no gang activity. These gang members are typically much older men who still want to believe they are part of a gang but no longer commit crimes or any sort of disorder. Over twenty years, we've had a total of two lethal domestic violence deaths(still two too many).

There is not a single unsafe neighborhood in our community. I know this because the calls for service have dropped in those neighborhoods. An example is Stonehenge. Stonehenge, a government subsidized apartment village, was averaging 150 calls per month prior to making changes and now averages between 5 and 10. I also personally know there are no unsafe neighborhoods because I have walked each of those neighborhoods with my good friend, Dan Benavidez. Over a 5 year period from 2014-2019, Dan and I walked over 200 neighborhoods and met close to 4,000 people during that time. The vast majority of those neighborhood walks happened in apartment complexes and mobile home parks and often in Latino neighborhoods. Our purpose was to encourage people to feel and believe they belonged to their neighborhood and our community. We entitled our neighborhood walks "The Belonging Revolution." Many of those we met agreed to become more involved in their neighborhood and our community. One had "to be there" to get the sense of enthusiasm people possessed to engage more with their neighbors and to help with other social and health issues in our community. So much more can be said, but both Dan and I can attest that there was not one single neighborhood that was or felt unsafe during our walks. And that was confirmed by the citizen we spoke with during our walks.

Neighborhoods utilized a variety of strategies to lessen crime and disorder in their neighborhoods. They scheduled regular meetings to get to know each other. They, initially, would work side by side with the police. They became more attentive to activity in their neighborhood. They volunteered to walk their neighborhoods at all hours of the day. At their request, the city would install lighting in dark portions of their neighborhood. They worked closely on an ongoing basis with the police department's crime analyst to determine what was happening in their neighborhood. They utilized crime prevention through environmental design measures. What seemed to be universal is they would watch out for each other. If a neighbor was going to be out of town, or there was a change in a work schedule, or they were having visitors, or if their kid's schedule changed, they would let their neighbors know. They often developed on-line chat rooms. In essence, they began to realize that the more they knew about each other, the more get-togethers they had, the more they supported each other, the more they watched out for each other, the more they began to realize their neighborhood would be safer and quieter. And while crime and disorder may have been the impetus for changing their neighborhood activities and behaviors, they realized their connections were turning into new-found friendships.

I am copying Dan on this email so you can contact him. I will let him know about your reaching out to him. A little more about Dan. Dan was our first Latino city council person. Dan co-founded a Latino advocacy group called El Comite that is still quite valuable to our

community. He founded other community non-profits and mentored untold number of youth in our community. As I already stated, Dan was part of our Belonging Revolution and walked every single one of the over 200 neighborhoods. Dan can also speak to the vastly improved trust levels between our Latino community and our police department.

In terms of other data, we significantly leveraged the social capital in our community to help with those struggling with addiction. The police opened their doors to anyone in the community struggling with a chemical substance addiction. Several hundred(I don't know the exact number) walked in and each and every person received free addiction treatment. The police had agreements with over one different addiction treatment service providers. We estimated that close to three million dollars in free addiction treatment services were provided to people in our community(this was before I left in July of 2020). We were also able to recruit forty businesses that were willing to provide employment to those who were currently in addiction recovery treatment. Untold numbers of citizens served as support people for those who requested treatment.

We also implemented restorative justice and practices starting back in the late 1990s(I assisted in confounding our restorative justice services). Over 7,000 people(kids and adults) were referred to restorative Justice by our police officers. Recidivism rates were less than seven percent. I could write volumes on restorative justice in our community. Without a doubt, Longmont has the most robust restorative justice infrastructure of any city, regardless of size, in the United States. The important thing to know about restorative justice in Longmont is that the vast majority of the services were provided by volunteer citizens in our community under the umbrella of a local non-profit. We estimated approximately 15,000-20,,000 community citizens participated in some aspect of the restorative justice process over the years. That level of citizen involvement helped significantly with our desire to change the nature of the definition of 'justice' from being viewed from the punitive, pound of flesh perspective to a more enlightened perspective that included chosen accountability on the part of the person who committed the crime, the centerpiece importance of the victim's voice, and the community's influence on the outcome of the restorative justice process.

We utilized the research of Dr. Bruce Perry, a neuroscientist, to form policies and practices related to our response to the health and social issue of addiction and mental illness. Instead of just having police officers respond to calls for service involving people struggling with their addiction or mental health, we repurposed a healthy chunk of resources to hire

peer support counselors, treatment providers and social workers to respond to these calls instead of just police officers. We utilized considerable social capital in the community for treatment, housing and employment. I met with one of the managers in that unit recently and was informed that they respond to a minimum of 100 people per week. I have no other outcome data at this time. I can personally attest to people who participated in these services before I left. Anton, Rubio and Estubio were all people with whom I was personally familiar. Each were homeless and struggling with chemical substance addiction. By way of history, the police responded approximately 1,000 times over the years to each of these men. Now they are all employed, have housing and making progress in their lives.

Our partnership with our schools included the insertion of school resource officers(SROs) into each of our three high schools and six middle schools. All I can say is WOW! The most prominent policy and practice of our SROs was to develop relationships with all the kids in their schools. Our SROs are absolutely convinced they prevented significant crimes from occurring. Its hard to provide data because prior to our SRO program, the schools would not report the crime and there was limited, if any, data collection. However, and without belaboring all that happened, the school district's expulsion rate is less than ten students per year compared to the approximately one hundred prior to the SROs presence in the schools.

We went from zero legitimate partnerships with various parts and aspects of our community to literally hundreds. The leveraging of these partnerships served our community as we inched closer to the ideal that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In terms of elected officials, I met individually with them every six months and kept them apprised of what we were doing and why. We also invited and included them in many of our efforts to build community capacity, the advent of new programs, and to actually participate in our walks, our strategic planning, the hiring and promotion of police officers, and our staff meetings.

Master police officers played a significant role in the strengthening of our neighborhoods. They were the point person or lead for every neighborhood in our community. Their role consisted of helping a neighborhood establish strategies to galvanize and help socialize the citizens living in a particular neighborhood. They would be the neighborhood's liaison with the police department. They were, initially, conveners and facilitators. They would attend the meetings and offer suggestions. They kept the neighborhood informed as to what was

going on and would be available to answer questions. They served as encouragers, sustainers of gatherings, and even made assignments to the residents of the neighborhoods. They kept track of crime and disorder and leveraged whatever public safety resources necessary to prevent crime, apprehend those committing crimes, or mediate between neighbors who did not see eye to eye. Their metric for effectiveness was THEY WERE NO LONGER NEEDED.

Threaded throughout this email is what we did to disassociate from the criminal justice system and connect more with the heart of our community. We added many options, alternatives and tools for our staff to respond to the messiness of the human condition that would often result in the commission of crime. Restorative Justice, our Angel Initiative to respond to addiction, other practices to more effectively respond to those who committed crimes but were suffering from addiction or a mental health disorder(or both), programs which supported kids who were committing crimes(without invoking the criminal justice system), our school resource officer initiative, and generally a the culture of guiding our staff to find and initiate the most effective solutions to the circumstances they encountered have grown considerably over the years.

The new public safety chief and the person who replaced me is Zach Ardis. I will send you a newspaper article about his hire and why he chose Longmont to become the new public safety chief.

I hope this is enough for you and for those who have questions. I would just ask those who asked these questions to ensure they ask similar outcome questions about the current status quo.

With my continued gratitude,
Mike Butler