The View of the Executive Director

It is painfully clear to me, after seven years in this position, that one cannot rely only on institutional collaboration to get things done when it comes to bringing attention to civilian oversight of local law enforcement. Far too many of our well-established institutions that could be of assistance are so stuck in their past glory that they find it difficult to change the way they do things. This if-aint-broke-don’t-fix-it attitude makes it difficult for such groups to share their resources or work with other like-minded groups that function differently on behalf of our citizens. We get more things done at ACRB by relying on ourselves and thinking outside the box. For example, we are among the first civilian oversight agencies to be issued mobile units to ensure a quick response to a citizen complaint and inform neighborhoods about our programs and services. Our ACRB Road Show is coming to a community near you. We facilitated a meeting between the Atlanta Police Department and the Fraser Center, on behalf of those with developmental disabilities through our mascot Captain Integrity who urges kids to always tell the truth to someone they trust if they encounter police misconduct. Our Police Interaction Quiz was highly acclaimed by City Council President Felicia A. Moore and others for ensuring that our citizens are aware of their rights and the ACRB. Our KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING WORKSHOPS will come to you. No group is too big or too small. Contact us at 404 865 8622. And if you have ideas, no matter how unusual, we would love to hear from you.

ACRB Brings Attention to Police Interaction with the Developmentally Disabled

ACRB brought to the table members of the Atlanta Police Department, those with developmental disabilities and The Frazer Center, one of the city’s preeminent non-profit educational institutions that helps them live normal lives.

Rocia Terry, the center’s adult program coordinator, said many of their adults drive, work, socialize and take public transportation. Yet they also must cope with the effects of autism, personality disorders and various developmental disabilities that can often be misinterpreted if they become excited, saddened, confused, distracted or angered. To the untrained eye, their actions may appear unusual or confrontational. As ACRB works with Frazer Center to custom-design a KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING WORKSHOP for the developmentally disabled, the agency also facilitated the meeting.

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The developmentally disabled, their counselors, members of the APD, executives with the Frazer Center and the ACRB met, shared knowledge, experiences and talked about devising signals to alert an officer in advance about a citizen’s condition.

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The verbal exchanges were frank, direct and revealing.

“Some of our participants love you guys,” Ms. Terry told the APD representatives, “...But some of the participants have anxiety with cops,” she said. “And, you know, it’s understandable, “Officer Tresa Norwood replied, “...a lot of that comes either from personal experience or...social media and TV. A lot of the stuff they see is what they think or what they believe. So now this has become their perception of all police. So we try to dispel that or we try to break that and get them to understand that, hey, you like basketball? I can play basketball with you too, or whatever it is. So that’s why we say if you’re having an event and you want police out, just ask. We’ll be more than happy to come out because I enjoy interacting with the community. There is no need for any of the participants or anybody to have a grudge against me or have a dislike for me and you don’t even know my name.”

ACRB Executive Director Lee Reid wanted to know, “As officers on the street dealing with the disabled and other individuals who are experiencing challenges, what would...you want for us to impart to others?” Officer Donald McKinnon responded, “I probably would say communication. The more information, the better. I was also thinking, I don’t know if you guys could work with your participants on maybe getting, we talked about if someone didn’t have ID or anything on them, if they could have something saying ‘if they’re detained’ or ‘encounter police.’” “A card?” Mr. Reid asked. “Who to contact. Right. Have contact information, who that officer can get in contact with to give them something to follow up on,” Officer McKinnon added. “A bracelet or something,” Officer Norwood suggested, “Or something so that the officer knows, you know, what the deal is.”

Two of Frazer Center’s participants had questions for the APD. Kim wanted to know about police procedure during a hostage situation. Patrick shared a dispute with the manager of a group home who threatens to arrest him and under what conditions could he be arrested. The officers responded in specific detail.

“As far as ACRB is concerned, we’ve learned some things,” said ACRB Project Manager Myola Smith. “We will continue to look into APD’s de-escalation program and some other information and we will share that information with the Frazer Center and hope to have another follow up meeting. We’ll also run the information by APD. But just something we can all agree on to make these meetings purposeful.”
A Your Story Testimonial Update

On April 28, 2015, after considering the findings of an ACRB investigator, the ACRB voted to sustain an excessive force complaint filed by a citizen against Sgt. Thomas Apple of the APD. The citizen, who wishes to remain anonymous, alleged that Apple choked him while at the Zone 6 Precinct. Although the Board called for a 7 day suspension and training on APD’s restraint techniques, then-Chief George Turner did not act on ACRB’s decision and recommended penalties. Armed with the agency’s detailed incident report and the Board’s vote in favor, the citizen sued the APD, Sgt. Apple and Zone 6 among others. The process took four years, but in 2019, he won a $4,000 settlement. Given the type of violation of APD standard operating procedures (SOPs), the citizen says he could have held out for a much higher payout. But he explained, “It was not about the money, but “to get the city to admit they were wrong for what they did.” Although it took years, the citizen did walk away vindicated, satisfied with the outcome and feeling that he did indeed obtain justice by filing a complaint with the ACRB.

And when people don’t feel that they have their best service and best experience, it’s good to know they have somewhere where they can go. The legacy of Ms. Kathryn Johnston (killed by corrupt APD officers 13 years ago) that really helped get this initiated. Thank you all for what you do, and I am ready to draw the name.”

Council President Moore chose the Grand Prize winner, Rebecca Robinson, a Performance Auditor Senior with City of Atlanta. Robinson works on the 12th floor of City Hall Tower. “I’m just happy to have participated,” said Robinson, “I found out about ACRB when we were doing the body-worn cameras audit. And you all do amazing work here.” Robinson won a huge original framed Selma Glass Jazz Poster from the Atlanta Jazz Festival, two passes to Tony Award winner Kenny Leon’s True Colors Theatre and two passes to the Museum of Design Atlanta (MODA), compliments of the Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs.

Grand Prize Winner of the ACRB Police Interaction Quiz is Chosen

Kudos to the grand prize winner of the ACRB POLICE INTERACTION QUIZ. The series of tests ran for six months and was taken hundreds of times on the ACRB website, acrbgov.org, beginning in early November 2018 and ending in early May of 2019. In that time citizens learned what their rights are when interacting with police and how and why to file a complaint with the ACRB. Hundreds of prizes were awarded to those who chose to keep taking the quizzes until they correctly answered at least 9 out of 10 of the multiple choice questions. For those who passed all three quizzes, Atlanta City Council President Felicia A. Moore drew the name of a grand prize winner, but not before thanking the agency. “What you do is important and actually needs to be expanded and heightened in the city. We need to work on our relationships between our citizens and police officers.

The legacy of Ms. Kathryn Johnston (killed by corrupt APD officers 13 years ago) that really helped get this initiated. Thank you all for what you do, and I am ready to draw the name.”

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The keyword in the Atlanta Citizen Review Board is CITIZEN. The agency is only as effective as the level of Citizen involvement. This is why ACRB urges all Citizens to regularly monitor, question and support its work. This is why ACRB urges all Citizens to know where your elected officials stand on civilian oversight of police and corrections. This is why it is so important for Citizens to be registered and vote. This is why Citizens need to join and be active in community groups. Get involved in Neighborhood Planning Units (NPUs). Attend Public Safety meetings, Atlanta City Council meetings and KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING WORKSHOPS. Become a member of the ACRB Board. Currently there are two vacancies. Contact ACRB for details. Fill the chambers to capacity when Council votes to fund issues that matter to Citizens like you.

Images from the 2019 Atlanta Jazz Festival by photographer Drew Dinwiddie

A Jazzy Selfie

Thanks to ACRB Chair Cecilia Houston-Torrence (right) and Camille Love (not shown), Director of Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs for including the ACRB for the first time at the 2019 Atlanta Jazz Festival. Board member Sherry Williams (left) poses with Captain of Recruitment Sharyl Chatman with Atlanta Fire and Rescue.