

Vera

**Supporting 911
Callers in Crisis:**
*Engaging Community and
Measuring Success*

Jackson Beck

November 15, 2023
CrisisCon23 - Charlotte, NC

Vera's Key Initiatives

We bring community and government leaders together to develop and pilot evidence-based solutions that restore communities and end mass incarceration. **When a solution works, we scale it nationwide.**

Advancing Universal Representation

Growing a national movement to provide publicly-funded access to high-quality, independent legal representation.

Ending Girls' Incarceration

Aiming to zero out the incarceration of girls and gender-expansive youth in the country's juvenile legal system by 2050.

Unlocking Potential

Helping provide people who are incarcerated with a clear path through greater access to a high-quality college education.

Redefining Public Safety

Advancing new approaches to community safety and evidence-based alternatives to end overreliance on policing and reduce racial disparities.

Reshaping Prosecution

Vera works with the most powerful decision-makers in our criminal legal system to improve public safety and address systemic racial disparities.

Beyond Jails

Undoing the devastating impacts of money bail, pretrial detention, and jail incarceration by reducing jail populations and advancing reparative justice.

Restoring Promise

In partnership with the MILPA Collective, Vera creates housing units grounded in dignity for young adults in prison, disrupting harmful practices and policies.

Opening Doors to Housing

Working to remove barriers to affordable housing for the millions of people with conviction histories.



Civilian Crisis Response

A Toolkit for Equitable Alternatives to Police

St. Petersburg, FL's Community Assistance and Life Liaison program (Photo by Tina Russell)

vera.org/civilian-crisis-response-toolkit

Learning from national and local experts (2021-2022)

- 35 interviews with 44 program leaders, advocates, researchers, and equity experts (racial equity, immigration, disability justice, peer advocacy); review of program materials
- Civilian crisis response programs at different stages of planning and development, and unique approaches and strategies



St. Petersburg, FL's Community Assistance and Life Liaison program (Photo by Tina Russell)

Featured Programs and Places

St. Petersburg, FL: CALL

Rochester, NY: Person in Crisis

Denver, CO: STAR

NYC: B-HEARD

Eugene, OR: CAHOOTS

Portland (OR) Street Response

San Francisco, CA: SCRT

Olympia, WA: Crisis Response Unit

Toronto, Canada: CCSS

New Vera report: *Coordinating Safety: Building and Sustaining Offices of Violence Prevention and Neighborhood Safety*

- Our research shows that building centralized government offices or departments of violence prevention and neighborhood safety is a promising approach for jurisdictions to implement comprehensive, coordinated, and data-informed strategies
- Local city or county-level offices can lead a coordinated public safety ecosystem that empowers civilian government and community-based personnel and resources
- An increasing number of offices are tasked with managing alternative 911 response initiatives

Supporting 911 Callers in Crisis

1. Alternative 911 Responses

2. 911 and 988 Coordination

3. Community Collaboration

4. Measuring Success

Alternative 911 Responses

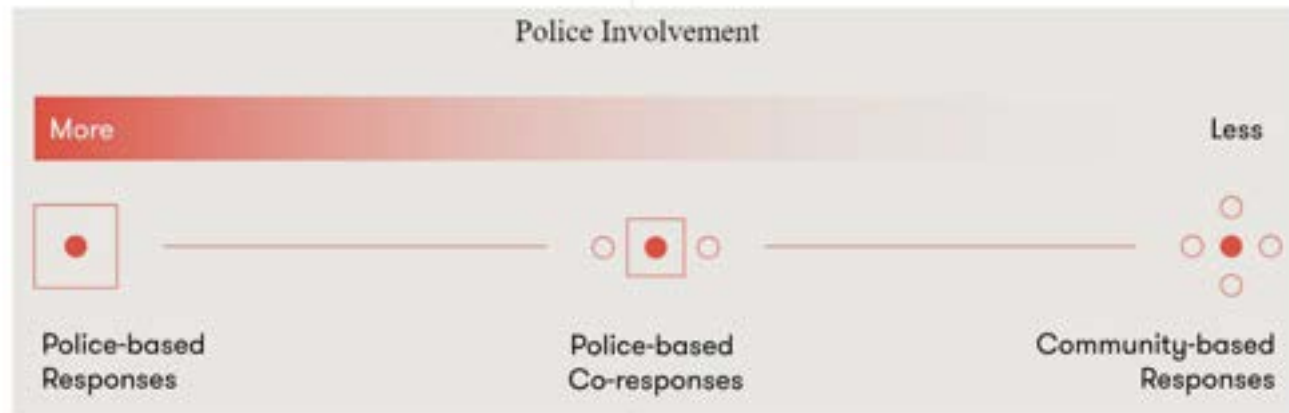
Community demands for change

- George Floyd's murder in May 2020 sparked nationwide protests that were wide-ranging in scope
- The 2020 killings of Daniel Prude and Walter Wallace Jr. amplified the risks of police responses to crisis situations
- Advocates highlighted the persistent underfunding of non-police services that promote safety
- Police had become default first responders to an increasing number of 911 crisis calls



Philadelphia, PA's Treatment Not Trauma Coalition (Photo by Amistad Law Project)

Typology of police involvement



Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) – emphasis on 40-hour training for officers that focuses on de-escalation and connecting people to services; the model also calls for strong community partnerships

Co-response teams – BH clinicians co-respond alongside officers as joint first responders or as secondary responders when requested by officers already on scene

Civilian crisis response teams – licensed clinicians, crisis workers, medics, and/or peers answer 911 and non-emergency calls as an alternative to police but can request backup as needed

A note on terminology

- There is no consensus yet around how to describe these 911-synced programs
- Common terms for non-police 911 crisis response programs include:
 - Alternative (first) response
 - Community responder
 - Civilian crisis response
 - Community crisis response
- "Mobile crisis team" is less commonly used to describe new 911-dispatched programs
 - Depending on how they're implemented, they may operate independently or parallel to these efforts

Early alternative 911 responses

- Since 1989, Eugene, Oregon's **CAHOOTS** program sent two-person teams of crisis workers and medics with police radios to 911 calls
- Following the 2017 passage of a public safety levy, **Olympia, Washington's Crisis Response Unit** and **Familiar Faces** program have offered a layered approach to crisis situations against the backdrop of a growing houseless population
- By 2020, advocacy for similar approaches in **Portland, Oregon** and **Denver, Colorado** had already been underway for some time, and Denver launched **STAR** that June



Olympia, WA's Crisis Response Unit (Photo by Justin Katigbak)

CAHOOTS (Eugene, OR)

- Units are equipped to deliver “crisis intervention, counseling, mediation, information and referral, transportation to social services, first aid, and basic-level emergency medical care”
- The City of Eugene funds CAHOOTS through Eugene Springfield Fire; contract moved from police to fire in July
- A 2019 program analysis showed that CAHOOTS handled approximately 13% of all calls to Eugene's 911 center without police
- CAHOOTS has never reported a serious injury



A growing field

An increasing number of jurisdictions are dispatching civilian responders without police to 911 crisis calls:

Eugene, OR	Olympia, WA	Albuquerque, NM
Denver, CO	Portland, OR	Amherst, MA
Rochester, NY	St. Petersburg, FL	Des Moines, IA
New York, NY	San Francisco, CA	Minneapolis, MN
Oakland, CA	Durham, NC	New Orleans, LA
Aurora, CO	Louisville, KY	Bangor, ME
Harris County, TX	Cincinnati, OH	Long Beach, CA

This is not an exhaustive list!



Olympia, WA's Crisis Response Unit (Photo by Justin Katigbak)

Building the 'fourth branch' for 911 response

- **Albuquerque Community Safety**
In July 2020, Mayor Keller announced first-of-its-kind public safety department for civilian responses to 911 calls involving mental health, substance use, and homelessness.
- **Durham Community Safety Department**
In June 2022, three crisis response pilots ("Holistic Empathetic Assistance Response Teams," or "HEART") launched out of the newly created Durham Community Safety Department to improve the handling of 911 calls involving "non-violent mental health crises or quality of life concerns."
- **New Orleans Mobile Crisis Intervention Unit**
In June 2023, Resources for Human Development launched what they describe as a 'fourth branch of the emergency response system.' They are currently answering 911 calls exclusively.
- **Seattle's Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) Department**
In September 2023, Mayor Harrell announced expanded charge for 911 center, with "community-focused public safety responders including behavioral health professionals."

The Washington Post

In New Mexico, a bold experiment aims to take police out of the equation for mental health calls



By Gretl Witte

October 9, 2023 at 12:09 p.m. EDT

TIME

The Overlooked, Enduring Legacy of the George Floyd Protests

BY **TAHIR DUCKETT** JULY 12, 2023 7:00 AM EDT

Duckett is an Adjunct Professor and the Executive Director of the *Center for Innovations in Community Safety* at Georgetown Law.

AP

Many big US cities now answer mental health crisis calls with civilian teams — not police

BY JENNIFER PELTZ AND JESSE BEDAYN

Updated 12:05 AM EST, August 28, 2023

Los Angeles police union proposes limits to 911 responses

BY STEFANIE DAZIO

Published 7:23 PM EST, March 1, 2023



More than a dozen cities push to minimize or even eliminate police presence at mental health calls

By Peter Nickolas, CNN

Published 9:36 AM EDT, Fri June 4, 2021

Vera INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

How do alternative 911 responses work?

Navigating 911 triage and culture change

- 911 landscape
- Program criteria and supports for call-taking

Staffing an equitable response

- A new workforce
- Training



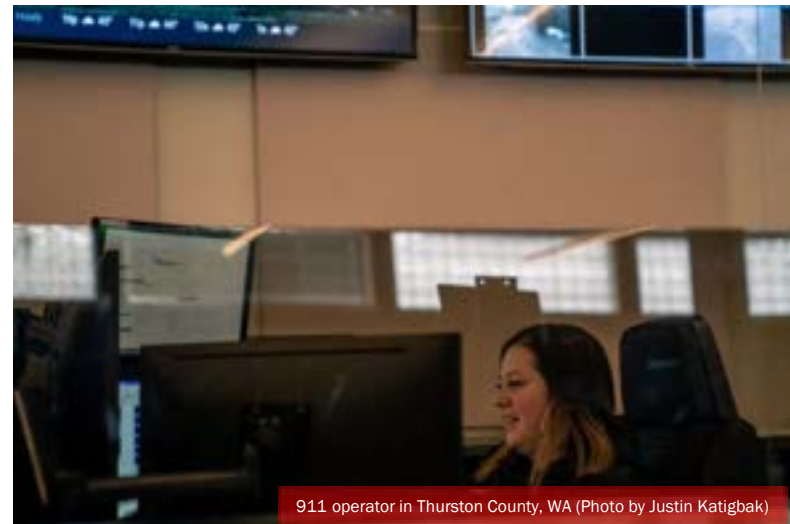
911 landscape

Staffing shortages nationwide

A [2021 Pew survey](#) suggested insufficient resources among 911 centers to effectively handle crisis situations

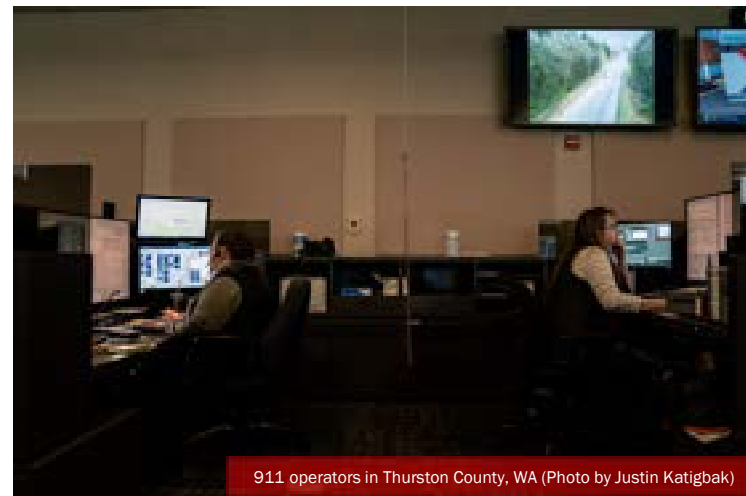
- Most centers in the study didn't use standardized tools for identifying crises
- Two-thirds of respondents indicated that operators hadn't received specialized training

Insufficient technology to address access barriers (e.g., hearing or speech disabilities, non-English speakers)



Program criteria and supports for call-taking

- Programs can address not only non-violent "mental health" calls but rather a range of behavioral health, conflict-based, and quality of life concerns
 - Also: third party callers
- Jurisdictions should develop and routinely update protocols and training through program piloting and expansion
- Co-located crisis staff can support appropriate dispatching and ultimately culture change





Community Assistance and Life Liaison navigators Bill Li, left, and Heather Loychik respond to a call in St. Petersburg, FL, on Thursday, March 4, 2022. Loychik likes this job because she gets to be "proactive" to prevent reactive situations.

911 Analysis: How Civilian Crisis Responders Can Divert Behavioral Health Calls from Police

April 2022

A new workforce

- Programs are striving to recruit responders who reflect the communities they serve
- Rather than formal qualifications, these teams are typically focusing on skills, experiences, and passion for serving people with unmet needs
- Supported by NAMI, researchers Amy Watson, Leah Pope, and Michael Compton are interviewing programs nationwide to identify key competencies for this workforce



Training

- Emphasis on safety, including situational awareness, use of police radios, and coordinating with service partners
- Joint training helps multidisciplinary teams (e.g., clinicians, medics, peers) learn to work with one another effectively
- Some programs providing training on topics related to implicit bias, racial equity



The Latest from Vera

SPECIAL REPORT

The People Responding to 911 Calls Instead of Police

Read Now →



vera.org/the-people-responding-to-911-calls-instead-of-police



911 and 988 Coordination

Key resource: NASMHPD playbooks



Transferring callers to crisis lines

When appropriate, can 911 operators connect callers via warm transfer to 988 for phone-based crisis support?

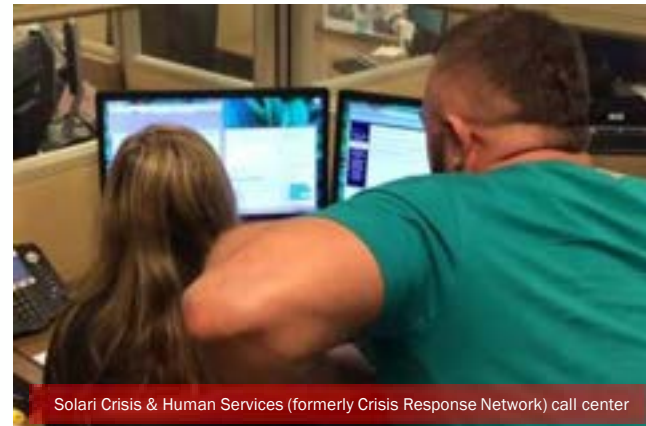
- Warm transfer = prioritizing continuity of care
- A recent NAMI-Ipsos poll found that most Americans remain unaware of 988
- Critically, not all 911 callers need in-person responses

Playbooks weigh pros and cons of transfer options:

- PSAP dials 988 number
- Warm transfer to designated 800 number provided by Lifeline for PSAPs
- Providing PSAPs with directory of all 988 centers and back door numbers

Vera 2020 case study: Phoenix, AZ

- PPD 911 operator survey found that liability concerns may discourage diversion to crisis line, which dispatches MCTs when appropriate
- Phoenix rolled out new training, put dispatch supervisor in 911 center, and created a policy directing operators to transfer eligible calls
- A 2021 analysis from Arizona State University later found a 300% increase in calls identified as having MH nexus and 166% increase in calls transferred



Solari Crisis & Human Services (formerly Crisis Response Network) call center

Ensuring 'no wrong door' for the right response

When appropriate, can callers to 911 or 988 receive civilian responses regardless of which number they call?

- 988 centers must coordinate with PSAPs to direct callers to most appropriate responses, including civilian crisis responses housed under public safety
- **Cincinnati, OH** – dispatching ARC teams to some 911 callers, transferring others to 988
- **Albuquerque, NM** – created "back door" number within 911 so 988 can transfer callers for Albuquerque Community Safety responses



Community Collaboration

Community advocacy and learning

There's no one-size-fits-all program design, but communities in the planning phase now have more places to study

Advocates are helping operational stakeholders identify civilian-only approaches that might work locally

Cleveland, OH

- Policy Matters Ohio, REACH, Magnolia Clubhouse, NEOCH, and others have elevated "care response" in conversations with key public safety partners
- Cross-site learning conversations with St. Petersburg's CALL program, Cincinnati's ARC
- Community surveys



Consult and design with community stakeholders

Portland Street Response

- Community partnership: [Street Roots](#), an organization for people experiencing houselessness and poverty
- Resources and support from city: budget and staff for program planning, work groups focused on community engagement and operations/model for PSR pilot

Toronto, Canada's Community Crisis Support Service

- Engagement of 800+ community members who were "most likely to be impacted by current and future crisis services"
- Town halls, surveys, interviews led by [Reach Out Response Network](#) and other BIPOC and LGBTQ+ organizations, culminating in a final report and proposal for the city

New Orleans MCIU Community Advisory Board

- The Mobile Crisis Intervention Unit (MCIU) launched in June with plans to convene a Community Advisory Board (CAB)
- The CAB aims to promote ongoing oversight and collaboration to help ensure that program activities reflect the insights of directly impacted New Orleanians

Meeting topics will include:

- programmatic updates (e.g., 911 triage, training, collaboration with other responders)
- community education
- coordination with other community resources
- transparency and data-informed implementation



Measuring Success

Tracking success

Priority program goals may vary across stakeholder groups (police/CLS, BH, community)

Key metrics to monitor for successes and areas of improvement:

- Calls: volume; type; #/% eligible for response and #/% receiving response
- Responses: response time; time on scene; supports/referrals provided; police involvement and/or involuntary mental health holds
- *Collect and analyze client information to identify gaps in access and outcomes*

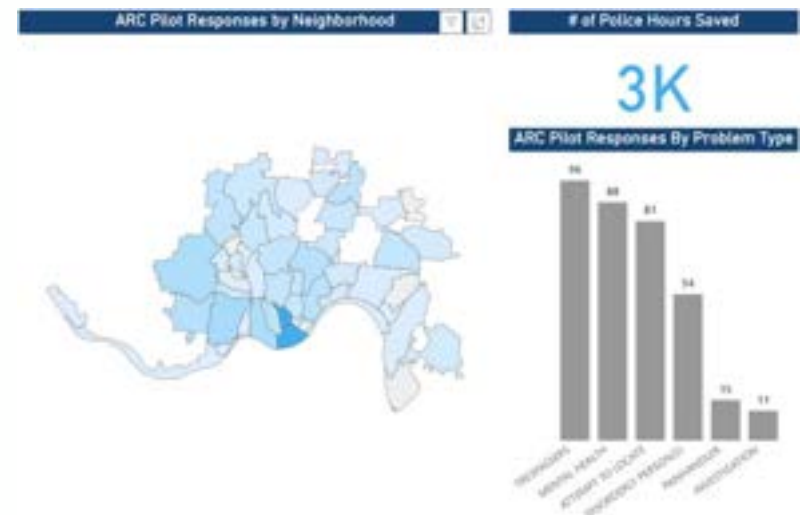


Olympia, WA's Crisis Response Unit (Photo by Justin Katigbak)

Data sharing for performance management and transparency

Routinely share program data to support operational decision-making, community education, and data-informed feedback

- Dashboards to publicly share near real-time data
- Monthly or quarterly summary reports, and longer-term program evaluations
- <https://justmentalhealth.ca/evaluations>



Cincinnati OH's Alternative Response to Crisis (ARC)
<https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/ecc/arc/>

Durham HEART dashboard



Durham NC's Holistic Empathetic Assistance Response Teams (HEART)

<https://www.durhamnc.gov/4576/Community-Safety>

New Orleans MCIU data strategy

Vera is partnering with the New Orleans Health Department and Resources for Human Development to:

- Establish a foundation for ongoing data transparency and data-informed decision-making
- Evaluate participant and community experiences with MCIU, as well as barriers and facilitators for system change



For crisis providers, a transformed public safety landscape to navigate

- Civilian crisis responses for 911 callers are answering community demands for change in policing and public safety
- As communities strive to build out their 988 systems, crisis providers who also partner with public safety will further expand their reach
- Public safety and behavioral health stakeholders can partner in innovative ways to support more people and address a wider range of unmet health and safety needs



Discussion and Q&A

Jackson Beck
Senior Program Associate
Redefining Public Safety

jbeck@vera.org