

# Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

KEWAUNEE COUNTY (WISCONSIN) SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT



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## Introduction

The Kewaunee County (Wisconsin) Sheriff's Department (KCSD) is one of 15 law enforcement agencies selected to participate in the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative (SNPPI). SNPPI provides policy review, assessments, training, and technical assistance to a cohort of law enforcement agencies across the nation. The four goals of the initiative are to identify promising strategies that **reduce crime, protect officers' safety and wellness, establish productive interagency partnerships** with law enforcement and community stakeholders, and **implement innovative and effective technologies** to assist police departments to safeguard neighborhoods.

## Methodology

Each of the 15 selected departments is assigned a CNA Strategic Site Coordinator (SSC) and an operations analyst to assist with planning, implementing, coordinating, and delivering technical assistance. CNA worked with the KCSD to develop a customized strategy to capitalize on the great work already in progress across the four policing principles. To do this, CNA looked at the KCSD's policies and practices related to crime reduction efforts, policy effectiveness, technological capabilities, training structures and offerings, and officer safety and wellness philosophies. The CNA team then helped identify training and technical assistance (TTA) opportunities and additional tools and resources to enhance areas related

to the principles of precision policing. The CNA team documented these best practices and will share these initiatives with police departments nationwide to promote public safety.

## Protecting Officer Safety and Wellness

The KCSD places great importance on policies and programs supporting officer well-being, which Sheriff Matthew Joski believes are key to all other strategies. According to Joski, “If there are deficiencies in the well-being of individual officers, this will reflect in the well-being of the department, which will ultimately impact the department’s relationship with the community.”

In 2016, the KCSD created a new training program with officer input to increase the overall physical health of the force. The “Fit for Duty” program encourages employees to participate in activities related to flexibility, endurance, strength, and nutrition. Employees receive Fitbits to track progress and promote goal setting. Officers can access a training facility 24 hours a day.

In September 2017, SNPPI supported a two-day training called Breach Point. The training was meant to help officers and family members gain new perspectives about the challenges of the job and build stronger personal and professional relationships. According to Sheriff Joski, the training was a means to “build a better department and ultimately improve community relations.” KCSD deputies and representatives from other departments in the area—the Kewaunee Police Department, Door County Sheriff’s Department, Sturgeon Bay Police Department, and Algoma Police Department (APD)—attended this training.



## Establishing Productive Interagency Partnerships with Law Enforcement Agencies and Community Stakeholders

The sheriff has ingrained a “servant leadership” philosophy in his 34-deputy department to serve the small but vibrant Kewaunee community. By focusing on the growth and wellbeing of people and the community, the sheriff and his deputies have developed a strong, positive relationship with the public. Sheriff Joski was first elected in 2006, again in 2011, and most recently in 2014. While in office, the sheriff has built a team of public servants with unwavering integrity and dedication in all areas of the department, including the command staff, the Patrol Division, Emergency Communications, the Investigative Division, and the Jail Division.

Members of the community, including Kewaunee County City Council members, describe the sheriff as “approachable, connected, trusted, [and] forward thinking.” Deputies are well integrated into the county’s small, tight-knit community. In 2015, the chief of the APD retired, and the city council contracted with the KCSO to take over the leadership



and administration of the APD (located within Kewaunee County) because of challenges in unifying the community and police. As a result, the KCSD established more effective leadership, coupled with consistent communication about officer expectations. These changes resulted in a more positive relationship with the Algoma residents and furthered community policing.

The KCSD also relies on collaboration and coordination to respond to mental health calls. These calls are difficult because of the lack of mental health services in the county—including the lack of a local hospital. KCSD deputies received crisis intervention training and participated in a community training on trauma-informed care. They work closely with the Kewaunee County Department of Human Services to determine the most appropriate course of action and develop a resolution plan for individuals with mental illness. Although mental health remains a significant challenge for the Kewaunee community, the KCSD actively seeks to improve its response to mental health calls.

## Community Partnership during a Crisis

Communities nationwide have experienced critical incidents that have tested the relationships between police and communities. Some incidents resulted in strengthened relationships while others fractured the bond between the police and community, leaving community members with a heightened distrust for the police. An officer-involved shooting in Kewaunee County provides an excellent example of how small law enforcement agencies can prepare for and effectively respond to such incidents in rural areas.

The first officer-involved shooting in Kewaunee County occurred the evening of August 21, 2017. Officers responded to a disturbance and found a 22-year-old man threatening a woman and other community members with a knife. According to the Kewaunee County District Attorney, the assailant and the woman were walking in the neighborhood, under the influence of drugs. The assailant then broke into a house, stole a 5-inch knife, and used it as his weapon to threaten the community and officers. The officers tried to talk to the man as he approached them. Dashboard video shows the man suddenly running toward an officer with the knife raised and another officer fatally shooting the man.

Per state statute, the Wisconsin Department of Criminal Investigations conducted an independent investigation of the incident. Based on the evidence presented, the Kewaunee County District Attorney found the officer's use of deadly force justified and did not charge the officer with misconduct.<sup>1</sup>

According to Sheriff Joski, the Kewaunee community rallied behind the police department during the entire incident, from investigation to outcome. From social media posts and emails to feedback from press conferences, the support from the community during this incident was unprecedented. Joski attributes the community's unity to years of positive contact with the department, the sheriff's open-door policy, and the way the department is embedded in the community. Many deputies participate in programs sponsored by businesses and churches, coach sporting teams, and mentor youth in their spare time. Joski recognizes that these efforts contribute to a productive community relationship, strong community support, and a high level of trust. The community's response to the shooting proved to the department the importance and significance of its overall philosophy and approach to law enforcement.

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1. Samantha Hernandez, "Kewaunee Sheriff's Deputy Will Not Be Charged in Shooting Death," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, October 10, 2017, <http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/news/2017/10/10/kewaunee-sheriffs-deputy-not-charged-shooting-death/747182001/>.

## Lessons learned from SNPPI TTA

Working with the KCSD, the CNA team identified two main areas for TTA: officer safety and wellness, and external and internal communications. CNA supported a training program for KCSD deputies and their family members focused on the culture of law enforcement and its long-term effect on individual officers and their families.

The department's well-established relationship with the community and its new focus on social media allowed the KCSD to respond effectively to the officer-involved shooting. The day after it occurred, the KCSD was scheduled to receive SNPPI-supported training from a social media and community outreach expert. Given the gravity of the situation, the technical advisor quickly revised the training to incorporate best practices for communicating with the public during critical incidents. This "Tell Your Agency's Story through Social Media" training helped the KCSD establish a more active presence on Facebook, laid the groundwork to expand its social media presence, and established new methods of generating proactive news coverage of the department's efforts to keep its community safe.

The outreach training led to the development of a new protocol that enabled the KCSD to immediately monitor social media—a crucial step for establishing the agency as the source of accurate information during a high-profile event and preventing a false narrative from shaping public opinion. Sheriff Joski stated that social media "is both a method of building community trust as well as a weapon to misinform and distort realities." By capturing public comments through several social media tools, the advisor provided the agency with a broad understanding of the public's opinion which could then be factored into the department's communications decision making. Through the SNPPI-supported TTA, the KCSD strengthened its social media presence and connection with the community.

## Conclusion

Community policing is the cornerstone of KCSD policing practices. The department's deputies are well integrated into the community and participate in a wide range of local activities and programs. But what stands out in Kewaunee County is the philosophy of law enforcement's leadership: devotion to others by identifying and helping meet the needs of the community. The community-focused and collaborative practices of the KCSD ensure high levels of police legitimacy and community trust. Training and technical assistance helped the KCSD focus further on officer well-being and extend its community outreach to benefit from social media. These practices are just as important to effective rural policing as to policing in larger urban jurisdictions. KCSD hopes to serve as an example and inspiration for small, rural agencies across the nation and other sheriffs' departments that are interested in developing, maintaining, and benefiting from a positive and productive working relationship with the public.



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