Black Voices in Policing—Uniting a Community Divided by Hate Crimes

Voiceover

0:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello, everyone, this is Jennifer Donelan and welcome to *The Beat*. Joining us today is Dr. RaShall Brackney. She's a retired 30-year veteran of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, the former chief of police at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and was sworn in as the chief of the Charlottesville Police Department in Virginia in June of 2018, after being selected by the city from a pool of 169 candidates.

During her tenure as a law enforcement professional, she's been responsible for overseeing critical operations to include uniform crime reports to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, CALEA accreditation, special operations functions, including SWAT, mounted patrol, accident investigation, hostage negotiations, river rescue, special events, traffic division, tow pound, and the bomb squad, the training academy, patrol operations, and major crimes. She's also a graduate of the FBI National Academy, the United States Secret Service Dignitary Protection Course, and Redstone Arsenal's Bomb School.

Thank you, Dr. Brackney. Chief, thank you so much for joining us.

Dr. RaShall Brackney

01:21

Thank you for having me.

Donelan

01:22

Yeah, we love to have you here on *The Beat*. Your resume is amazing, amazing. I don't know how you've had time. Can you tell us some more about your path to now chief of police in Charlottesville?

Brackney

01:35

So you know what? I've been really fortunate, and everything about my career has, I think, culminated in my appointment to chief of police here. My experiences in Pittsburgh, when I think about law enforcement, we had major events all the time. There were Ku Klux Klan rallies in Pittsburgh. We're in western Pennsylvania, whether we like it or not, and the recent events in Pittsburgh tell you about the type of hate that can permeate a community.

So what got me there as I was leaving school—I have to say I was not interested in law enforcement, I was interested in the criminal justice system from the point of an attorney, prosecutor, and advocate—but fell into law enforcement because I had one of those mothers who said you will not live in her home and not be employed or in school. So they brought you every application they could for a federal government job, because that's where the benefits were. And that meant long-term security in your family, particularly for minority families, having a job that had long-term benefits, had pensions at the end of those, so there was something that you could collect.

And coming from a steel town, where jobs and benefits and pensions were often intertwined as being successful and moving yourself from poverty to at least some access to middle class.

Donelan

02:58

What is it like being chief of police in Charlottesville, in terms of leading your troops? Is the divisive event something that colors every day? Is it discussed every day? Do you… does it affect your strategy planning, policing? What's the real-world impact to you as chief of police and your agency and how you police your community?

Brackney

03:20

Every day our officers are faced with the impact of that. Where the community believes that they failed them in August of 2017. It's not unusual on a daily basis or at community meetings for residents and those who visit the greater Charlottesville area to chant, "Cops and Klan go hand in hand." That's a daily reality for these officers.

Donelan

03:43

Wow.

Brackney

03:44

Based on the events that occurred there. And that often law enforcement is associated with being very oppressive towards minority communities or vulnerable communities. That is a challenge. As an African-American woman, that is a challenge in that the community wants and expects something based on my race and my gender that would be different. That there's a sense of possibility that someone comes in that looks like the communities that they are asked to serve. But it also discounts that there are these officers in Charlottesville who were there after these events and they stayed when they could have fled and gone to other agencies, but are so committed to the community, and so committed to changing the narrative of that—the interactions that occurred of August 2017—that they stayed in spite of some of the challenges and difficulties that they faced.

Donelan

04:41

Two Virginia State Troopers lost their lives. That was felt across law enforcement in that area. I know that that hit very close to home for so many, that they're still trying to recover from that. Our thoughts and prayers go out to their families. In terms of addressing the actual needs, the emotional needs, psychological needs of your officers, is that something that you've actually had to sort of map out, or is it sort of case-by-case basis? Has there been any sort of peer support offered to the officers as they manage through that, or is it something that… we're past that and now we're focused on policing?

Brackney

05:22

Just the opposite. There has been no peer support until my arrival for the officers whatsoever. The community was heavily traumatized, and almost every resource went to the community. Not until recently, when I had an officer-involved shooting, that I instituted plans of, how do we help heal this department? And help heal the community at the same time, because these do go together, right?

If I have a police department that is a hurting police department, it becomes a challenge to police a community in a real and authentic and genuine way. So I've had to start talking about how do we have peer support in creating that? Do we have a clergy that can support us from every range of aspects? And that includes just spiritual and emotional well-being, and not just religion-specific.

I've also had to work with getting a police psychologist on staff, something we do not have and have not had. So there's been really nothing intentional that we do, talking about mindfulness and being healthy. So I talk a lot about being healthy in the department so that they can be healthy outside of the agency. And all of that is a holistic approach to policing that I think we forget, that we get so caught up in the response to the crimes and the evil that's out there, that we don't realize that this impacts officers on a daily basis.

Donelan

06:49

That must've been quite the change, then, for this department. A department that had no psychologist, to be focused, to have a chief come in and say, "Hey, we need to start talking." When you start talking about mindfulness, that's not a word that you typically hear around the halls of a police agency. I know it's been since June of 2018, but have you seen any real benefits from that?

Brackney

07:12

Well, absolutely, because for the first time, the officers are saying, "You see me as a human being as well."

Donelan

07:17

Sure.

Brackney
07:18
And not just as a uniform. We talk about things like, this is Strength Finders 2.0, who does that in a policing agency, and that's what we're sending all our officers through.

Donelan
07:28
What is Strength Finders 2.0?

Brackney
07:30
It's all of those things you look at in terms of what an officer's strengths are, versus focusing on deficits, focusing on weaknesses.

Donelan
07:38
Which is pretty much the standard, right?

Brackney
07:40
And that's what everyone says. We look at your weaknesses and say, how can we improve them?

Donelan
07:44
Make you better. You had the benefit of coming in from the outside, in the sense that you could see that wound from 40,000 feet and then you land. What was it that you saw, and what did you immediately go to? We've talked about the peer support, you saw that those officers needed to actually be dealt with like they were human beings.

Brackney
08:07
So the first thing I did is start to meet with everyone, and you have to think about these things as an individual basis, right? You're taking over an agency, but this agency is composed and comprised of individuals. And there were so many people who thought they weren't heard in the agency.

But at the exact same time, I've got to try to build trust and legitimacy within the community and within the agency. So coming as an outsider, people would often think that I had not seen or felt their pain. And what I was able to do is say, I come from a place where this pain isn't new to me, based on my profession. I've been exposed to discrimination and hate and violence being a multi-ethnic female growing up in the city of Pittsburgh, which is very racialized. And grow up in a profession that is predominantly White male. So I can see your pain very easily.

Not that I experience it the same way, but I've been on that pathway with you, so I understand what it feels like to be silenced, to be marginalized, to be invisible. And have to bear the responsibilities of going out and making decisions that can impact someone's life on a daily basis.

So the 30,000 foot just allowed me the opportunity to leverage resources, being a new person, still in that "honeymoon" phase—

Donelan

09:35

Sure.

Brackney

09:36

That if I'm asking for it, and it is Charlottesville, if I'm asking for resources to help heal a place like Charlottesville, who's going to tell me no? So using that platform to get the resources we need to the community and to the officers, allows me access that probably other agencies who have similar experiences are not getting that access to resources.

Donelan

09:59

But there's a lesson learned there. There's a lesson to learn there, leveraging what you can to get done what you need to get done, really, is what it sounds like you did.

Brackney

10:08

Absolutely. And there's still so much more work to be done. We're just, I'm four months into my tenureship at Charlottesville, or in Charlottesville, but looking long-range, Charlottesville's not going to fade away from the memories of anyone anytime soon. And again, using that, that stage and that pulpit will allow me to help shape and contour the conversation around hate in the nation. And shape and contour the conversation and the narrative around police and law enforcement engagement in our nation.

So I'm going to use that platform every opportunity to get out there and say the same message over and over and over again, that the behaviors that were displayed in Charlottesville should not be tolerated anywhere. And if those behaviors somehow undermine the First Amendment rights and the ideologies of somebody else, we are going to police those behaviors, and know that those behaviors are no longer welcome in Charlottesville, you can't plant your seeds here.

Donelan

11:11

You have such an interesting task ahead of you, in front of you. Law enforcement across the country is dealing with the challenges of being law enforcement, dealing with negative attitudes towards them in the public. Now you have to deal with a police department that your public felt like failed it. And then you have this divisive event. It seems to be such a huge challenge. What have been the bright lights in that challenge?

Brackney

11:50

So one of the bright lights is I'm a very strong faith-believing, prayerful woman. I hope I don't offend people when I say that, but that is my truth and that is who I am. What I have found is that this community really does want to heal. It wants the opportunity to heal. But it also allows you as a bright light, to say that this is not the nation who we could be. There's opportunities here.

And I've met so many people as I've been in Charlottesville. I spent the first literally almost four months working non-straight, including weekends and nights, to get to know the community. And not the community that was portrayed in the news media and outlets—because that is part of that community whether we like it or not—but to see those persons whose voices were not heard about the events and how they impacted them, and what we could do on a personal level to support communities. But also what we could do at state and national level to support other communities who have experienced similar events since those of August of 2017 for us.

So the bright lights for me are the people who were just wanting to heal, and wanting to be engaged, and are more than willing to put their resources beyond the "I'm in your thoughts and prayers," to help a nation change how it is and how it's perceived.

Donelan

13:13

You're in a situation where it's not lip service, you actually have a motivated community. Which I know many law enforcement agencies spend a lot of time and resources in trying to motivate a community into wanting to participate. And now you have a community that actually wants to do something. So that must be an interesting difference. Have you noticed a difference between say, when you were policing in Pittsburgh, or when you were at George Washington University, to have this community that's like, "Hey, we had this bad thing happen, and we want to change." Do they seem more amenable to participating with law enforcement and joining you in that effort?

Brackney

13:53

Well, yeah, they are. And the reason is because we both need each other at this time, right? We cannot exist without the other group.

Donelan

14:01

So what are your—I'm sorry, and I jumped on you—but what do your community meetings look like? For instance, you know, most law enforcement agencies will hold a local community meeting and it might be those usual 10-12 people who show up. Do you have a more engaged community as a result of this event?

Brackney

14:18

Yes. There are the same 10-12 that go to every community meeting, but there's also a different approach to it. One, you very seldom see me in uniform. If I'm in uniform it's intentional, that means I need you to pay attention to the message that I'm about to give. But the reason my community meetings look different is because I drop some of the barriers to us being able to engage. And a uniform can be a barrier to us having an honest conversation. You don't have to submit to my authority, but we still have to be respectful. And there's the ability to dialogue.

So ours are very different. And it's also me owning when we've not been… when we've not lived up to the expectations of the community. I start out the conversation saying, "I understand that law enforcement and the view on law enforcement across the nation is that we have failed many communities. And that we have broken that social contract where you have allowed us to police your agency, or your community, as long as we did that fairly and equitably."

And when contracts are broken under any other circumstances, someone wants some sort of remedy to whatever that contract is, and the remedy is that we have to be transparent, we have to engage the community, and we have to restore the legitimacy by restoring the trust in the communities that we've been called to serve.

Donelan

15:37

So, you know, I love news you can use. I say it all the time. I want people to walk away from *The Beat* and have information that they can take back to their home agencies and do something with. And while it may seem simple, taking off the uniform, wearing plain clothes, is that something that you did not do in Pittsburgh and you're now doing, and you're seeing a difference in when you do that, you're dropping that barrier? Is that something that you would recommend to others?

Brackney

16:05

Absolutely would recommend it. And I did it in Pittsburgh and I did it at George Washington's campus when I was there as well. But another thing they can use is—I know people are afraid of data—I put our data out on our websites, because then I can be transparent. You get to see it, I own it, and here's what it looks like. So when we're looking at the possibilities of disproportionate minority stops, if you have to constantly be FOIA'd or someone's requesting that information, then there's always a level of distrust. But if I put it out there first, and that's what I'm working towards, vetting how we put that out there.

I did a presentation in front of city council, of how we want to collect our data and put that out on the websites, and is there any gaps in that that the community wants to see us gather? That they want the information on? And as soon as we were able to do that, immediately we were able to dispel a lot of the conversations around that we were covering up data, or we were changing data.

Donelan

17:05

I'm going to have you repeat that last point, because that's really important. So as soon as you put that data, when you started presenting that data to the public, what did that do for you?

Brackney

17:15

So it takes out the transparency clause, where people think that you're not being transparent. Or that you're changing your data, or that you're cooking your data, right? So we put it out there before we're asked for the data. I always equate it to Eminem in the 8-Mile, I tell you everything there is to tell you about me that isn't necessarily flattering, so that you can't use that as a weapon against me. I already own what we're doing.

And it also allows me, too, to see if we are participating in disproportionate minority contacts. Are we stopping people and searching them disproportionately based on race or gender in communities? And if I can put that data out there beforehand, then we can have the honest and genuine conversations—is it if I have a training issue? If I have a trust issue? But it allows me to build trust and legitimacy in a community where there is an absence of it currently.

Donelan

18:10

I always tend to think that media's a good gauge of that. How has local media sort of welcomed you and these changes that you've been making?

Brackney

18:19

So local media actually has been very helpful for me in that messaging, because I stay on message as well. That's the one thing I love about branding and marketing, your agency and who you are is staying on message. And by staying on message at every community meeting, every opportunity, I ask the same three questions, so that the community starts to think about who we are.

And the first question I ask of every community meeting is: Have we defined what a healthy relationship looks like between law enforcement professions and the communities we serve? The second question I ask is: Then how do we define a pathway to get there? And then finally is: What is our metrics of success? How will we know when we've reached that?

And every time, I force people to think about things more concretely than saying "I want to build trust and legitimacy." So every time I say that over and over, it allows us to rethink and constantly keep in our minds, what does a healthy relationship look like? And as we start to grapple with what that looks like in your community, it really does allow the platform for us to move forward, whereas otherwise we're just continuing to recount those incidents in which we didn't have a healthy encounter. So the moving forward always allows us to continue to look forward, learning from the past, but not being stuck there.

Donelan

19:49

If this is coloring day-to-day work of the agency, how are you dealing with the stuff everybody else is, how are you dealing, how is it affecting community-orienting policing?

Brackney

20:03

So, for me, my philosophy in how it affects community-oriented policing, I don't call community-oriented policing a project or a program, it's a process in which we infuse it into every aspect of every engagement that we have. So what I mean by that is, understanding that the way I engage the community on a daily basis, not based on some program, all helps us to restore our legitimacy, and it also helps us to move forward. And the way that we do that is very intentional and very strategic.

We don't participate in one-offs anymore—these Coffee with a Cop, or these Ice Cream with a Cop, or some Charlottesville Night Out, or National Night Out. Those are all now part of strategic plans and not one-offs to engage the community.

Donelan

20:57

So, take me deeper into that. What does that look like for you, in real terms? Does that mean you're—I'm sorry—does that mean you're doing nightly events out in the community on a more routine basis, or does that just mean, when my officers who are currently working right now, they are currently out there engaging in some purposeful, intentional way? What does it mean?

Brackney

21:21

All of those, plus one more: that we now infuse that into every 911 call. We infuse that into every time we engage a person. We seem to think that community policing is event-oriented, or walking a beat. Everyone says, "I knew my beat cop back in the day, and you need to know the neighbors."

Community policing is part of every single interaction I have. Whether it's a 911 call, or whether I'm just stopping for lunch that day. I spend a lot of time out in the streets. The joke is, I can't make it from one end of—if you're familiar with UVA—the pedestrian mall to the other. It takes me about two hours, because I'm stopping, talking, constantly engaging, getting feedback, and then running that back through the department as to what I'm seeing and hearing.

And they're doing the exact same as well, so our strategic policing unit is doing all of those sorts of things, of how do we engage on a daily basis, whether we're writing a traffic ticket, or whether it's our school resource officers engaging with our young folks and our parents, so that we become humanized in every interaction as a human interaction, and not a policing interaction.

Donelan

22:38

That's a big change. You know, people don't necessarily welcome change with open arms all the time. And quite frankly, it seems pretty difficult in the law enforcement world. So when you walk into a police department and you have your officers, is this something where you have literally met with command staff and said, "This is now the way we're going to do things," are you retraining through in-service programs and training programs with the officers, or is it, "Now, go tell your supervisors, now go tell the boots on the ground that this is what you're going to do when you respond to a 911 call, or this is what you're going to do when you're walking down the sidewalk." What's the real world application of that change in philosophy?

Brackney

23:19

So there is some resistance on every level. Change is not something that most people embrace, right? Unless you're losing weight. They're really happy with that change. But for the most part, we are not accepting of change, right? And in law enforcement, whether we like it or not, there's still the, "Oh, this is another Hug a Thug program, or this is another type of program in which they're not permitted to police."

But if you really look at the concept of policing in general, it's something that law enforcement professionals do that every one of us in society should be doing, policing our communities so that we all are aligned and have those same social values. It's not enough for me to talk to the command staff and then make them push it down. I have to be talking to the community, I talk to the officers, I go to these roll calls, I spend lots of time out there so that my message is not misconstrued, that they hear directly from my mouth what the expectations are. And that the culture starts to change so that people who are not aligned with your vision and aligned with your values, they'll leave on their own.

People do not stay where they don’t feel welcome, and if this is not a vision that they're interested in, they'll leave quickly. And we've had people, once I've said, "This is what your new assignment and your new vision is," have handed their resignation in that day.

Donelan

24:38

And how did that grab you?

Brackney

24:40

It makes room and opportunity for the next person who can be value and vision aligned.

Donelan
24:45
It's bold.

Brackney
24:48
It's a challenge.

Donelan
24:49
It's bold, but I hear you saying it's necessary.

Brackney
31:09
It's absolutely necessary. And if we are courageous when there are bullets being fired at us, we need to be courageous and moral with the same kind of convictions when it comes to doing the right thing about how we treat and interact with our communities.

Donelan
24:53
The changes that you are in the process of making, which fundamentally is a change in thinking, fundamentally it's a change in thinking and approach that is so different, so new, has that… what kind of challenge has that been within itself? Because it's daring. You're talking about, you're trying to take a department from… It almost sounds like you're changing every aspect of policing for the Charlottesville Police Department. And would I be right in that?

Brackney
25:46
Absolutely. It is a challenge, and it is daring. And the thing that I welcome is the fact that it is different, right? That it does take courage—and oftentimes singular, heroic courage—to do some of the things that we should've been doing a long time ago in law enforcement. And that we need to be bold when we step out there and make these changes, knowing that we're doing it for all the right reasons.

We say in law enforcement that we want to go into this profession because we want to help somebody, we want to make a difference. But when we're given that opportunity as leaders of our agencies to do that, we often tamp back to old strategies and traditional ways of thinking, because that's where our own comfort level is.

I think the reason that we're often looking for diversity in law enforcement is because people who are or feel different, or who feel othered, have the ability to see from another person's perspective, and then you can implement strategies and programs. You can implement processes. You can implement a culture of what you would have liked to have felt welcomed.

As a minority female in law enforcement that is 80 percent White male, oftentimes I did not feel welcomed. So I can't imagine what my communities feel like who are policed by persons that don't necessarily reflect their values, don't reflect their gender, don't reflect their beliefs, don't reflect their language, culture, or even identity. So implementing that in my agency in some ways is easier because of being marginalized and feeling different and feeling like an outsider myself.

Donelan

27:40

So you've got to do that, but you also need, as you said, you need the buy in from the community too. So you are revamping the way the Charlottesville Police Department polices, you're implementing new strategies within the department, but then you also need a buy in from the community, who also has set in their mind that the police failed us, or in general, police are racist and they treat me badly, they're going to treat me badly because of the color of my skin.

I mean, you're up against all of those stereotypes and implicit bias, quite frankly, against law enforcement. How do you get the community to buy into what you're talking about, or has that been… What's been easier—is it getting the buy in from the officers, or is it getting the buy in from the community?

Brackney

28:20

So, it's actually been the buy in from the officers, right, who really do want to do the right thing. So I'm building on the fact that they're there because they want to be part of a helping community. So that's easier. The Charlottesville community, some of them are so injured and so vulnerable, that they still cannot see regardless of who's sitting in that space. They don't care that I'm a Black female sitting there. As a matter of fact, they're going to hold me to a higher standard, immediately, by saying "You should know better in this community because you are a Black female. You are a minority female."

And they want change immediately, because they feel like they've been waiting for 400 years for change. So I should be able to walk through the door and make that difference immediately. But the officers really want their stories to be told. So if there's another way for you to see the work that they're genuinely doing out there, and there's another avenue or venue for them to be seen, to say, "We're really here, really to protect and serve. To make a difference, to change, and to help." They're willing to hear that. And if there's a voice that can get that message out for them, they're willing to follow that.

Donelan

29:35

Again, we are discussing policing in the aftermath of hate and divisive incidents with Dr. RaShall Brackney, chief of the Charlottesville Police Department in Virginia. One thing I did want to ask, just so that our listeners who aren't familiar with Charlottesville, what's the population breakdown and race breakdown in Charlottesville?

Brackney

30:03

So Charlottesville's about 47,000 residents. It feels a lot bigger because of UVA and the hospitals, and the populations that come there. And now that it's unfortunately a destination location based on the events of 2017, the racial composition—and I may not have this 100 percent correctly—is lower in terms of approximately 10 percent or so African American.

It's very middle-class in that, middle-class and probably more wealthy within Charlottesville, so that the low-wealth public housing communities feel very marginalized and often feel preyed upon by systems, systems of hate and treatment of that nature. So that the events of August 2017 probably felt very familiar to them and what they feel they believe, and know they believe, is their existence every day.

Donelan

30:56

You are a chief of police, but you are a former chief of police on a campus, George Washington University. You are now chief of police of a city that has a very large university within it, and its own policing agency. But you also have thousands and thousands of students who aren't all from Charlottesville. Very few of which are from Charlottesville. So you have residents living in Charlottesville vis-à-vis UVA, who are from all over the country and all over the world, who don't just stay on campus. Has that presented any particular challenges, or issues, or anything that you've faced as chief of police in light of this divisive event?

Brackney

31:41

Absolutely, because the campus is very politically active around this issue. And it doesn't stay on the campus boundaries or borders. If you look at the events of August of 2018, the campus, the students have their own rallies and march through the city streets in protest to the events of 2017, in saying that we are in solidarity against hate.

And it was also very strained in its relationships because of the law enforcement's presence that was there. So attempting to create a safe space with law enforcement's presence can often be perceived as over policing. So we heard a lot of chanting from the UVA students that you know, “Why are you in riot gear? We don't see no riot here.” And then now to balance out, where they thought the failures of 2017 were, with what they believed was a large policing presence in 2018, became a very tense situation. But also just very challenging to balance safety and security with access and convenience.

So in campus, students across the nation are very much into expressing their freedoms, and their voices are being heard all across the nation. And UVA is no exception. And they do not stay on grounds as they say. They will do… They make their way out into the community.

Donelan

33:12

I'd like to wrap things up by talking about the kind of support that officers of a department may need in the aftermath of a divisive incident. We know that so many officers pursue a career in law enforcement because they want to help people, they want to prevent crime and reduce victimization. What do you think—again, talking, keeping with news you can use—what do you think for a chief, commander or a supervisor, what do you think that they should be focusing on when it comes to leading officers and supporting their wellness and motivation after a divisive incident?

Brackney

33:36

Understanding that their concerns are real too. We often just dismiss their concerns, because we're in this profession that when we're screening you, we're screening to make sure that you have a certain mental toughness and mindset, right? We build into you a combination of a warrior and guardian mentality. So that we forget also, that our officers are human, and we need to be, again, mindful and intentional about the services and support we give them.

I would even recommend that there be a need for a national repository of being able to send support to these different agencies. Portland has been overrun recently with these type of events, where they're coming into the community filled with hate. Pittsburgh, its officers are going to be reeling from these type of events that are spawned. Seattle, I mean, we could go on and on and on where these events are occurring.

And my suggestion would be is, remember although these individuals wear a uniform and they look alike, they don't respond alike, they don't feel alike. And there's that emotional support that they are going to need when they get back. I would also recommend, I just came from a conference, a four-hour presentation from Dr. Kevin Gilmartin, on emotional survival for law enforcement professionals. To read the book, to get in there and talk about how these kinds of things emotionally impact our personnel and what we can do to support them.

Donelan

35:20

This is a profession where you're supposed to be tough, right? You see the worst of the worst. You see people in their most critical times. So you're supposed to be, you're supposed to survive all of that and be okay. Rare is it for an officer to feel that they can, you know, sort of like, let loose and let go and let the emotions take over. So even a simple question like, "How are you doing? Are you okay?" Of course the answer is "Yes, I'm fine." Because that's the answer it's supposed to be.

But what I'm hearing you say is, we've got to get past that. We've got to start dealing with the emotional wellbeing of these officers so they can do their job every day whether there's a divisive event or not. They're dealing with these events on smaller scales every day.

Brackney

36:05

Exactly right. Every event technically an officer's going to is a divisive event. Whether it's a domestic violence call, whether there's a crime that's been committed, it's something that's going to create a wedge between that community, and a suspect, or a victim as well.

And we don't think about the fact that every crime scene is processed by the same person, and they are taking in violence and images that they probably can never let go of. So when I think about supporting our personnel, it's the same kind of support that we would give any community that is, or person who's been victimized. We might need to think about moving some of those resources so that it becomes part of a routine process, and not something that we only do when we believe an officer may need help.

If we make it part of the process, and part of the DNA of supporting officers, then they don't feel like there's something wrong with them. As a matter of fact, we normalize that response. We don't want them to become desensitized. We don't want them to compartmentalize it to the point that they're no longer functioning at a healthy level when they're off duty and they're off work.

Donelan

37:16

And therefore improve their work-life balance.

Brackney

37:18

Absolutely.

Donelan

37:19

Dr. Brackney, Chief, I cannot thank you enough for this amazing discussion. We wish you the greatest of success as you continue to lead the Charlottesville Police Department. And thank you all to our listeners for joining us and spending this valuable time here on *The Beat*.

Brackney

37:38

And thank you to *The Beat* for having me. Appreciate it.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

37:42

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

38:40

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