

# PETITION TO TACOMA CITY COUNCIL

November 10, 2015

On behalf of The Conversation, an all-volunteer social justice community organization in Tacoma, we, the undersigned, wish to petition to the Tacoma City Council for the following:

We call for the formation of a Community Trauma Response Team that can be deployed when acts of violence such as the recent shootings that have taken place in the city traumatize the people in our neighborhoods. We call on the Tacoma City Council and the Tacoma Police Department to work alongside community members who have been directly impacted by recent acts of violence to develop a policy and practice for treating these events with the same concern as those that occur in other community settings in which citizens are victimized by indiscriminate acts of violence. This Trauma Response Team should be organized with the input of marginalized communities and operated independently of the Tacoma Police Department.

In every instance where there has been a school shooting, for example, we recognize that the violence took place in the context of a community and that the violence caused trauma to that community. We respond not just by sending the police, but also by sending a grief counseling team as soon as the scene has been "secured" by police. We recognize that, in order to perform their function, police officers may need to compartmentalize their own emotional response to events. This means they may not be able to respond in the most empathetic manner to community members they encounter in these tense, emotionally charged circumstances. For this reason, the immediate trauma experienced by community members requires the presence of people who are trained to deal with the immediate and ongoing effects of a violent event.

We believe that implementing a policy for a Community Trauma Response Team will:

- 1) Allow police to carry out their duties efficiently;
- 2) Create a space for members of the community who are on the scene to experience the calm presence of people who can attend to the grief and shock experienced by those who are present when the event occurred;
- 3) Mitigate the grief, confusion, and anger experienced especially by children and youth;
- 4) Reduce hearsay, by establishing a clear process for disseminating information at the scene from police to the community members who, quite understandably, are seeking information about the event; and
- 5) Over time, help to improve the negative perception held by many in the City's marginalized communities of the way the police handle investigations in these communities.

Most important, we believe that having a Community Trauma Response Team would recognize that violence, such as the recent shootings in the Tacoma, is NOT "normal" in our community. We do not wish to become desensitized to or to normalize these events by watching the police do their job and then be expected to continue on as if a nothing has happened. Additionally, we do not want entire communities treated as suspects rather than as victims of violence.

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Hastily organized prayer and meditation vigils are not enough to do the work that must be done to help traumatized residents of our City heal when these events occur. While faith and community organizations play an important part in this process of healing, a more intentional and coordinated program could make these organizations' involvement more immediate and significant. We also realize that many in our communities, particularly many of our youth, are not connected to these organizations. We believe that a response team is necessary to help bridge the gap between the immediacy of the event and ongoing efforts to keep community members connected to each other over the days and weeks as more information about episodes of violence becomes available.

The Conversation will continue its efforts to do outreach. We look forward to a timely response from the City Council and the Tacoma Police Department on this request. We have forwarded this request to other elected officials and to other community members to gain support for this petition.

Thank you for your consideration.

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