

# AASCEND and SFPD CIT

AUTISM ASPERGER SPECTRUM COALITION FOR  
EDUCATION, NETWORKING & DEVELOPMENT

AND

THE SAN FRANCISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT  
CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM

---

SB882 ADVISORY COMMITTEE, JANUARY 2025



Mike Bernick, Former EDD Director,  
Counsel Duane Morris, LLP  
Camilla Bixler, AASCEND Co-Chair



# AASCEND

---

- All-volunteer non-profit
- Adult support, advocacy and action
- Established in 1999-one of the oldest adult autism groups in U.S  
the largest in CA
- Many founding members still with us-have become a community



# Who We Are

---

- Adults on the autism spectrum, friends, family & autism professionals
  - 20% members on the spectrum are Regional Center clients
- Many of our members fall through the cracks
  - Don't qualify for services such as regional center or SSI
  - Have difficulty with competitive employment & independent living
- Our governing board is 50% on the autism spectrum and 50% Neurotypical
- Multi-generational
- Encourage replication of our model



# What We Do

---

- Monthly general meetings-now on Zoom  
speakers, book discussions, social events, media presentations
- Monthly Job Club in-person Job Club meeting-now on Zoom  
speakers, networking, problem solving
- Weekly Online Job Club meetings-individual support
- Monthly TV program–Life on the Autism Spectrum



# What We Do

---

- Spectrum Employment Community on LinkedIn  
Please join!
- Social events
- Conferences
- Collaboration with SFPD



# Why SFPD?

---

Motivation twofold:

- Fears as a Parent
- Experience of AASCEND members



# Personal fears as a parent

---

- Early meltdowns-later dissipated
- What I didn't realize then

Being atypical is a significant risk factor for police interaction  
Spatial difficulties—real source of problems on public transportation and standing in line

“How can I do direction and space at the same time?”





# AASCEND Member Experience

---

Higher rate of interaction with law enforcement than typical peers

- Victims of crimes
- Victims of public misunderstanding
- Victims of police misunderstanding



# Victims of Crimes

---

- Sexual Assault
  - Just a glass of water
- Fraud
  - Just helping them cash a check for \$5,000
- Needed help/support reporting the crime



# Victims of misunderstanding by public— police called

---

- Looking in car windows
- Sitting or standing too close on public transportation or in stores, bumping into people or stepping on toes
- Thought to be “on something”



# Victims of police misinterpreting autistic traits

---

- Physically grabbed by TSA agent at airport and thrown into a plexiglass box
- Our anecdotal experiences of high interaction with law enforcement align with national data



# Educating and Protecting Ourselves

---

- Sharing experiences-discussion
- Watching *Be Safe the Movie*
- Role Play
- Autism identification cards in wallet
  - Cannot reach for cards
  - Disclosure an issue for some
- Support person information card in wallet



# Educating the Police

---

- Commander Moser watched the movie with us
- Gave advice for interacting with police
- Greatest risk to adults with autism: failure to comply to commands
- Suggested developing an autism training video for officers
- Television report about the training video project



# The Video

---

- High interest in collaboration-many officers have family members with I/DD and autism
- Autistic people involved in writing the role play and identifying the traits of autistic adults that could be misinterpreted with tragic outcome
- Variety of autistic voices speaking for themselves
- Fathers of autistic girls were the police officers in the video
- Became involved with CIT



# Crisis Intervention Team-CIT

---

- National movement
- Train officers to work more effectively with people in behavioral health crisis and with behavioral differences-to avert tragedy
- Time, distance, de-escalation vs. command and control-heart of CIT
- Everything that establishes command and control-lights, siren, shouted commands- makes situation worse for autistics





# SF CIT Stakeholders Group

---

- Law enforcement, Office of Police Accountability, District Attorney's Office, Department of Public Health, Mental Health organizations, Community members
  - monthly meetings
  - meets quarterly with Chief William Scott



# SF CIT Stakeholders Group

---

- Review data monthly
  - Number and kind of behavioral health calls
  - Use of force and injuries
  - Ethnicity
  - Gender
  - Age
- Considering adding I/DD and autism data



# AASCEND and CIT Training

---

- Presentation on I/DD and autism
- Command, compliance, command stressed
- Panel of spectrum adults



# AASCEND and CIT Training

---

- Presentation on I/DD and autism
- Command, compliance, command stressed
- Panel of spectrum adults
  - High impact for officers-high interest even though it was past lunchtime
- Take away: in-person interaction with adults on the spectrum is powerful and essential for law enforcement training



# SFPD CIT

---

- Established in 2011-law enforcement, mental health and legal professionals, community members
- SF is a CIT leader-caliber of training, robust data collection
- Participation voluntary
- 1,200 officers trained of approximately 2,000
- 40 hours of classroom instruction, including role play + 10 hour tactical training



# SFPD CIT

---

- Refresher course being planned
  - SF Police culture has changed
    - Robust data collection on behavioral health calls
    - Downward trend in use of force in behavioral health calls
- Problems with defund the police-police need more training not less



# Arc Dance

---

- Cadets from Police Academy were invited to the monthly dance
  - have pizza
  - listen to a presentation about I/DD and Autism
  - get tips for interacting with the community
  - Q & A
  - join the dance for an hour
  - mutually beneficial project



# New Trends in Crisis Response

---

- CIT and Department of Public Health partnering on some mental health calls-2 psychologists currently working with CIT
- Street Crisis Response Team-Department of Public Health and Fire Department respond to non-violent mental health calls-no police
- Virtual Reality-new training tool

For autistic individuals-how to interact with law enforcement

For law enforcement-responding to calls for service

Developed by Axon, the maker of Tasers





# Confusing and difficult time for law enforcement

---

- Continued proliferation of guns in society-increases police anxiety
- Need for increased police CIT training
- Calls for defunding police could lead to reduced CIT training and reduced staffing
- Fewer police officers make the core principals of time, distance & de-escalation harder to adhere to



# Calling 911 for a Loved One in Crisis

---

- The more information, the better prepared officers are to respond safely
- Be prepared to answer all who, what, when, where questions by dispatch
- Give diagnosis and characteristics clearly
- Are there triggers? If sensory issues, no siren or lights for example.
- Is the person afraid of police?
- Does the individual have access to weapons? Very important



# Smart 911 May be Coming to SF

---

- National data service
- Displays your profile including a photo from a registered phone number to first responders
- SF not ready yet-but working towards it
- Program takes a lot of screen real estate-dispatchers will need new monitors
- Needs to be encrypted so public can't access information



# Conclusions

---

- Potential for misunderstandings of autistic individuals by the police and the general public remains high
- Need for on-going education in the autistic community and law enforcement
  - May be appropriate for IEP or IPP goals
- Need national, state and local initiatives
- In-person interaction with law enforcement a powerful educational opportunity

