

Seabrook Police Department



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Brett J. Walker
Chief of Police

Kevin M. Gelineau
Deputy Chief of Police

MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Manager
FROM: Chief of Police
DATE: 14 August 2024
RE: Victim-Witness Advocate/ACERT position at the PD

OVERVIEW

The Police Department has been exploring the possibility of implementing a Victim-Witness Advocate/ACERT (Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team) Coordinator for approximately one year. It is our intent to utilize a social worker to act as both a Victim-Witness Advocate and ACERT Coordinator as we implement an ACERT¹ program. While a background in social work should be the foundation for the position, this does not mean that the Police Department will be providing mental health services. Rather, this position would serve as a coordinator connecting people to needed services as well as a liaison between victims and the police.

The Police Department recognizes the impact that being the victim of a crime can have on the lives of the victims. Victim-Witness Advocates serve as a liaison between victims/witnesses and investigators, attorneys, the Seabrook PD, and other organizations. They provide information, support, and advocacy services to victims, witnesses and their families throughout the criminal justice process to include updating victims on the status of their case, accompanying victims to court, crisis intervention for victims, and assessing and evaluating victim needs and helping to coordinate referrals.² Most importantly, Victim-Witness Advocates work to ensure that the victim's rights are protected in accordance with the Victim Bill of Rights RSA 21-m:8-k.

¹ <https://www.amoskeaghealth.org/childhood-response-team-acert>

² <https://www.middlesexda.com/careers/pages/victim-witness-advocate>

In June 2023 I attended an ACERT presentation at the Seabrook Fire Department along with members of the school administration and various other social services in the community. I knew nothing about the program but by the end of the presentation I was convinced that ACERT added another layer to early intervention and actually addressed far more issues than I realized existed in children exposed to trauma.

In our ongoing efforts to reduce crime and improve the quality of life in our community we often focus solely on the law enforcement aspect of this. We facilitate drug education in the schools through the School Resource Officer as a means of educating our children at a young age and hopefully helping them make good decisions in their lives. However, in reality, we encounter several opportunities during our duties as law enforcement officers to have a positive impact on people's lives that fall outside the services of what we are able to provide. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) resulting from traumas including abuse, neglect, bullying, dating violence, witnessing violence, and more "may put children at risk for chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use in adulthood."³ "ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adolescence and adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential. However, ACEs can be prevented."⁴

Examples of ACEs⁵:

- Emotional abuse or neglect
- Physical abuse or neglect
- Verbal abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce, death or abandonment
- Incarcerated household member

PURPOSE

In hiring a social worker for the Police Department we will combine the coordination of services through ACERT with those offered by a Victim/Witness Advocate in order to provide the highest level of service to our victims of crimes and address events that may lead to chronic health and/or behavioral issues in the future.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

The Police Social Worker is a civilian position that provides crisis intervention, short-term counseling, advocacy, community outreach and education as well as other social service assistance to individuals and families in the Town of Seabrook.

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/riskprotectivefactors.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>

⁵ chrome-

extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://nhchildrenshealthfoundation.org/assets/2019/10/2019-ACERT-Case-Study.pdf

The Applicant should have a master's degree in social work (preferred), Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) or Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) (preferred), previous experience in crisis intervention and providing mental health services to individuals and families. They must be at least 21 years of age, a U.S. Citizen and hold a valid driver's license.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

In order to perform the above duties, the Social Worker must possess the following knowledge, skills, and abilities:

- Be able to read, write, speak, and communicate fluently in the English language.
- Be mentally and physically able to read, remember, interpret, and understand statutes and court decisions.
- Be mentally and physically able to take comprehensive written notes, organize and generate internal reports.
- Be able to speak publicly to a wide variety of individuals including members of the police and fire departments as well as members of the public.
- Have extensive knowledge of the local social service agencies and other support systems available to the public in Seabrook and surrounding areas.
- Must possess sufficient computer skills to perform the documentary functions of the position.
- Must be able to maintain complete and total professional confidentiality regarding their role and their access to confidential documents and situations.
- Travel outside of the police department when necessary to meet in person with other service providers, members of the public, persons in need, and or any other person when safe and necessary to do so.
- Must have a general understanding of the criminal justice system in New Hampshire and privacy and confidentiality laws in regard to HIPPA and medical information.

CHARACTERISTIC DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Provides a broad range of support duties to reduce the emotional, financial and physical impact of criminal victimization, and assist victims and witnesses with problems that result from their victimization. Provides support services to victims, victims' families, and witnesses to include crisis intervention, education, and assistance throughout the criminal justice process system. Assure that the Victims' Bill of Rights is adhered to.
- The Social Worker position performs the following duties, functions, and responsibilities:

- Provide referral services to members of the public. This includes but is not limited to referring people for assistance in three main categories, housing, substance misuse and mental health needs.
- Connect members of the public in need to meet with and get services from organizations that can provide aid. These organizations will include local community mental health agencies, the local recovery centers, Town Welfare Department, homeless shelters, the school department, child services, and any other agencies that can help assist with getting people help and or resources.
- Review police incidents and identify cases in which people could benefit from follow up from a social worker. Maintain connections to area resources and help the individuals get connected and stay connected to these resources. Educate individuals and police personnel on what resources might be appropriate for their needs.
- Communicate with Command Staff and the School Resource Officers about incidents that happen outside of the school that have affected students and their family. Then follow up to make sure their services and needs are being addressed.
- Serve as an advocate when appropriate; assists clients in developing the skills and expertise to advocate on their own behalf; helps clients develop skills leading to long-term success.
- Help members of the community enroll in any available vital emergency information programs which help identify residents who have special circumstances or mental health conditions. These programs allows families to provide confidential medical information and other information about loved ones who may have underlying medical conditions such as dementia, Alzheimer's, or other conditions that may make them unable to understand or communicate when police arrive at a scene or crisis.
- Provide updated information/training to Police Department members, sworn and non-sworn, that will help strengthen the skills, the recognition of people in crisis and laws in regard to mental health.
- Network, identify, and work with all local resources to provide information about this position and how best to connect people in need to their services.
- Be able to respond to community meetings, networking sessions, trainings and to situations in which police were called when safety allows and is applicable for a social worker to assist.
- Perform all other duties as prescribed by the Chief of Police.

EXAMPLES OF ESSENTIAL JOB FUNCTIONS

- Serves as liaison between victims/witnesses, investigators, attorneys, prosecutors, the Seabrook Police Department, and community organizations. This position is meant to build on-going positive relationships and trust with the victims/witnesses.
- Provides crisis intervention to victims and witnesses to meet their urgent emotional and/or physical needs. This may include accompanying investigators to meet and provide support and referrals to the victims and/or referring victims to area crisis centers or applicable community resources.
- Interviews or participates in interviews of victims including those involved in domestic violence and sexual assault cases.
- Meets with victims/witnesses prior to indictment of case.
- Explains judicial process to victims, witnesses, and their families to ensure they are informed regarding the judicial system.
- Advises victims and their families of their rights and the availability of the Prosecutor to assist in exercising their rights.
- Ascertains the whereabouts and immediate availability of all parties at all times.
- Contacts victims/witnesses for scheduled depositions, hearings, etc., and advises all prosecution participants of any court dates and/or changes in scheduled proceedings.
- Prepares witnesses for court testimony, including coordination of schedules with court system, and assists in the preparation of victim impact statements to be used at sentencing, as required.
- Attends depositions, court hearings and trials to provide support and information to victims, witnesses and their families, as required.
- Keeps victims/witnesses notified of case status, to include hearings and trial dates, continuances, pre-trial releases, plea discussions, dispositions and sentencing.
- Advises victims/witnesses of the outcome of any hearing and explains its portent.
- Draws up subpoenas in certain instances (ex: domestic violence cases).
- Assists detectives with victim/witness follow-up on cases.
- Assists in the development of policies and procedures concerning services provided to victims, information sharing, and the handling of complaints.
- Provides consultation and training to PD staff, other local agencies, and partners.

- Establishes and updates a client database and services provided to meet agency and federal/state grant requirements.

EXAMPLES OF OTHER JOB FUNCTIONS

- Performs all other duties where needed and as assigned in all things incidental to the prosecution efforts of the office.
- Maintains a comprehensive database of community services and agencies for victim referrals.
- Training in victimology, crisis intervention, counseling techniques, sexual assault, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, homicide and grieving issues.

PROPOSED SALARY RANGE

In order to remain competitive in the current marketplace, a salary range of \$70,720.00 to \$93,932.80 (\$34.00 - \$45.16/hr) will be used for the contracted position. These numbers result in an annual overall employee cost ranging from \$133,198.50 to \$159,609.01 for the position.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- While several funding options exist, the Opioid Abatement grant received by the Police Department in 2023 is considered the last resort for funding.
 - Use of this funding mechanism would not impact the police budget but could support the position for approximately six (6) years.
- We will explore the possibility of other grants to fund the program on a long-term basis.
- This position is intended to be a contract position subject to funding availability.
- Long-term goal is to add this civilian position to the Police Department budget to ensure the longevity of the program. This would be done at Town Meeting requiring approval by voters.

FAQ's

- Is it really an issue here?
 - Yes. Examples include calls reported as domestic violence. In 2023 we responded to approximately 171 DV-related calls and YTD 2024 we have responded to approximately 69 DV-related calls.
- Doesn't the county attorney's office have victim advocates already?
 - Yes. While the County Attorney's Office has victim/witness advocates on staff, they only service felony-level cases. Combine this with the move away from "Felonies First" and local police departments are handling felony-level cases through preliminary hearings at the District Courts prior to being transferred to the County. This creates an increased need for this position at the local level.

- "Can't people just reach out to these agencies themselves?"
 - Yes but they are far more likely to talk to someone about assistance if they are put in contact with them via someone else, as opposed to having to search out the information themselves.

SUMMARY

The Seabrook Police Department continuously strives to better serve our community and one way to do this is by improving the services we provide to victims of crimes as well as early intervention strategies associated with ACEs. Implementing a Victim-Witness Advocate/ACERT Coordinator at the Police Department provides us with the ability to identify and help coordinate needs for services for those effected by crime or traumatic events which may lead to chronic health and/or behavioral issues in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Walker", with the number "200" written to the right of the signature.

Brett J. Walker, Chief of Police

