

Each coming day I am reminded more and more of how puzzling life can be. Like a puzzle, it seems as though the pieces no longer fit with one another; as if the community and the police are from two different puzzle sets. With communities growing further and further away from their local police department, it has become clear to me just how much we have lost sight of our puzzle's intended picture. As law enforcement, it is the department's job to do just that—enforce the law. Yet, as my father has taught me, this simplistic approach is exactly where we have lost touch with the potential of the police force. It does not just stop at enforcing right and wrong. Instead, after watching my own father's work within his department, I strongly believe that meaningful change *begins* with building intentional relationships between law enforcement and the people within each community.

Having worked as a Narcotics Detective for over ten years, my father became accustomed to the life of long-term investigations and high-risk cases. While being immensely rewarding as he successfully removed numerous drug dealers and operations from the Fresno community, he later realized his true potential in bridging the gap between the youth in our city and the police force. This work was done whilst working as a Student Resource Officer at Duncan Polytechnical High School where every day my father made it a point in his routine to build strong connections with students by disproving the stereotype police officers are typically given. Instead of cold and malignant, my father sought to show these young, impressionable minds the warm side of law enforcement. He gifts them with small treats and meaningful lessons to show these

students just how much he truly cares for each and every one of them. He proves to them that he is not on their campus to seek out those to punish but rather to help guide every student to a path of success—one that will lead them away from any future run-ins with the police.

Acting as role models for the community, refocusing on the bond between the city and their department allows for officers to reflect on their impact amongst the people they serve. I often wonder what action can be done to close this growing rift between the community and law enforcement. I have found that public outreach through special events reminds the community that behind each badge is a person just as human as the rest of us. These events make it possible to expose the kind, friendly side of officers that has become so easily forgotten. With my father, I volunteer at block parties for neighborhoods or work with youth groups that teach lessons of self-worth and confidence. Teaching integrity, justice, and leadership, these events are key ways to remind the community of the values of our department. Establishing a clear intent to connect with the community and building a positive relationship between people of all ages, genders, and interests, allows us to finally catch sight of our puzzle's original, intended picture.

This mindset of taking action to reconnect what has been lost goes beyond my understanding of law enforcement's role in communities and even guides me in my own life's endeavors. I know firsthand that in order for positive change to occur, it must start

within. Watching my father grow within his own department and seeing him become the first Cambodian sergeant the Fresno Police Department has ever had, has only furthered my own desire to bring positive change to the community.

In February of 2020, I formed Giving Growth, a group whose mission is to uplift others and spread positivity to the people of our community. Each month, Giving Growth purchases flowers and attaches handwritten messages of encouragement and support. We then go out to public places to hand these flowers to strangers in the community. In the midst of their everyday lives, we serve as a unique reminder to strangers that no matter how alone or invisible they feel, there will always be someone to reassure them that their efforts do not go unnoticed. In the few seconds that transpire between myself and the stranger I gift the flower to, I am able to build lifelong memories that bring the entire community closer together as we remind one another of the power of seemingly simple acts of kindness.

A puzzle always seems to be a daunting task at first. However, with patience and determination to connect those pieces together, each one seems to fall into place. Each person, business, and facility is a unique piece of our puzzle. We are all special; we are all needed; we are all important. Only when we bring together our different curves and edges does the picture become clear again and we realize that we are all part of the same goal: to make each community a safe and welcoming space for every person with the knowledge that everyone has their rightful place within our puzzle.