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Edward Fitzpatrick
Roger Williams University

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RWU Partners with Providence Police as part of Smart Policing Innovation Grant

Professors Varano and Manzi will conduct research for project aimed at reducing recidivism in use of emergency services for drug, alcohol and mental health issues



The Providence Police Department and The Providence Center are partnering with RWU professors to research and formulate a Behavioral Health Response Team, working toward strategies to reduce recidivism in the use of emergency services by those suffering from alcohol or drug addiction and mental health issues.

March 28, 2018 | Edward Fitzpatrick

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Roger Williams University professors will conduct research and analysis of a three-year Providence Police Department project funded by a new \$700,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Smart Policing Innovation Grant will fund efforts by the Providence Police Department and The Providence Center to formulate a Behavioral Health Response Team, which will work to develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce recidivism in the use of emergency services by those suffering from

alcohol or drug addiction and mental health issues.

The money will be used to fund outreach services, additional clinical services, officer training and data collection in an effort to develop new strategies to help chronic users of emergency services that deplete a significant amount of already limited resources. The goal is to create methods to divert people with habitual drug, alcohol or mental health issues away from the criminal justice system whenever possible in order to more effectively stem habitual use of all types of emergency services.

“The Providence Police Department has a deep history of working in partnership with community agencies to implement innovative approaches to crime and related public health problems,” RWU Justice Studies Professor Sean Varano said. “This award, particularly in such a competitive grant environment, is a strong recognition of this history. Many officers throughout the ranks recognize the need to think more creatively about crime responses beyond arrest-only strategies. Roger Williams University is proud to be part of this partnership.”

RWU Criminal Justice Associate Professor Stephanie Manzi said, “This initiative is a great example of the continued partnership between the Providence Police Department and the School of Justice Studies. It provides an opportunity for both faculty and students to collaborate with practitioners in the field who, on a daily basis, are trying to make neighborhoods throughout Providence better places to live, work and visit. Projects such as the Smart Policing Initiative create the opportunity to translate theory and research into actionable public policy initiatives, and RWU is proud to assist in these efforts.”

Providence was one of a handful of police departments in the nation to receive such a grant for the current fiscal year. Police Captain Dean Isabella, Commanding Officer of the Special Projects Unit, serves as administrator for this program, and Jessica D. Zira, MA, QMHP of The Providence Center will serve as project coordinator.

“This grant will provide our officers the resources they need to more appropriately help those who are suffering from addiction or are undergoing a mental health crisis,” Providence Mayor Jorge O. Elorza said. “With the help of our partners, we are integrating a data-driven approach that positions the City at the forefront of this public health crisis.”

“The partnership between the Providence Police Department and The Providence Center has proven to be invaluable by providing treatment options for individuals who are suffering from drug and alcohol addiction or a mental health crisis and helping them to avoid incarceration,” Providence Public Safety Commissioner Steven M. Paré. “We look forward to continuing this work along with Roger Williams University to collect and analyze data to move forward in our efforts when dealing with situations that involve this vulnerable population within our city.”

“We are pleased to expand our existing collaboration with the Providence Police Department and start a new partnership with Roger Williams University in this important Smart Policing Initiative,” Providence Center President Deborah M. O’Brien said. “Police departments and other first responders spend an

inordinate amount of time working with individuals who have behavioral health issues. If we can provide these same individuals with timely treatment and supports, we can improve health outcomes for them and allow police to focus on issues that impact more directly on public safety.”

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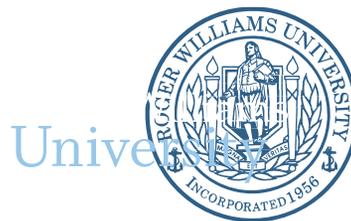
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