

Police department program opens pathways for diverse candidates

Pathways to Policing

Around much of the country, police departments are struggling to maintain adequate staffing levels and attract diverse candidates. In many cases, qualified candidates are held back simply due to a lack of time or resources to attend the required schooling.

In 2017, the St. Louis Park and Bloomington police departments teamed up to address this issue. They created a program to draw a more diverse pool of candidates, including people of color, women, veterans and those who have a career or education background outside of law enforcement who could bring fresh perspectives to the job.

The resulting Pathways to Policing program was designed to remove barriers for candidates interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement but who may not have the means to pay for or availability to attend a two-year public safety program while continuing their current careers. The one prerequisite is candidates must have at least a two-year associate's degree in any field.

Selected candidates are paid a full-time wage while they attend an accelerated, four-month training. Their tuition and other costs are covered, allowing them to better focus on their new career path and education, as well as their current roles and responsibilities outside of work.

After completing training and passing the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) exam, candidates are sworn in as St. Louis Park Police Department police officers. Traditionally, candidates are required to complete their two-year degree, peace officer and public safety training and POST exam before applying to become an officer. This program cuts that process nearly in half.

Program successes

The program received the League of Minnesota Cities City of Excellence Award in 2018 and the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association Excellence in Innovation Award in 2018. One of the city's first program participants was named the department's Robert Linnell Officer of the Year in 2019.

Since the program started in 2017, 11 officers have been hired with nine fully completing field training.

Take the path, apply now!

The St. Louis Park Police Department looks for new candidates to join the Pathways program every spring. For more information or to apply, visit www.stlouisparkmn.gov/pathways-to-policing.

This year, the State of Minnesota developed a similar initiative: The Intensive Comprehensive Peace Officer Education and Training Program. Keep an eye on the website listed above for how this program might influence or involve Pathways to Policing.



Q and A with three of our Pathways graduates

Officer Maurice Smith

Years of service with the St. Louis Park Police Department: six

College degrees: corrections, sociology minor

What made you interested in a career in public safety?

I grew up in the inner city of Chicago and didn't have a great relationship with law enforcement then. I saw friends and a lot of young people choosing bad paths and ending up in the system. I felt like if I could connect with the youth early, I could be almost like a saving grace and a role model. That is what started my career path in corrections and then eventually policing. I also wanted to give back to the community to help bridge the gap between the Black community and law enforcement. I wanted to do something bigger than just me.

What interested you about the Pathways to Policing program?

Not having to pay for additional schooling. After graduating college with a corrections degree, I already had a lot of student loans. Knowing I could have my schooling paid for, get paid while going to school and have a guaranteed placement with the department was a no-brainer. I don't think I would be in this career position if not for this program.

How do you see this program benefiting the community?

It will continue to allow the department to diversify its staffing. As our population grows, we will grow to look more like the community we serve — and they do notice it. The kids, our future workforce, notice it as well. They will see more and more officers who look like them. We will also have staff to better assist those who may be more comfortable speaking with a woman officer, someone of color or someone whose first language may not be English.



Officer Callie Anderson

Years of service with the St. Louis Park Police Department: four

College degrees: liberal arts, psychology minor

When did you become interested in a career in public safety?

I first knew it in high school. It was always a gut feeling, but I also wanted to gain experience and decided to go to college first. After college, I enrolled in the Army National Guard and was deployed overseas. This is where I met fellow St. Louis Park Police Officer Derek Imsande, who told me about the Pathways program, which increased my desire to become a police officer.

What drew you to the Pathways to Policing program?

At that time in my life, being selected for the program was the only way I could securely make the transition into law enforcement. Financially, it would not have been possible for me to go to school again without having to work extra jobs at the same time.

How do you see this program benefiting the community?

The program fosters stronger community relations by prioritizing candidates with cultural competency skills, leading to increased understanding and trust between law enforcement and the diverse populations we serve. The emphasis on aligning police values with community expectations also ensures officers are better attuned to the needs and concerns of the community.



Officer Isaiah Moore

Years of service with the St. Louis Park Police Department: one

College degree: psychology

When did you become interested in a career in public safety?

When I was young, I wanted to become a detective. As time went on, some of that drive faded until I started a job as a hospital security guard after graduating. While working at the hospital, I had many interactions with law enforcement for various reasons, and that passion began to grow again. I saw the similarities between what I was doing and their police work, in de-escalating situations and connecting with people. I wanted to continue to help people as a police officer.

What interested you about the Pathways to Policing program?

It's not always feasible for someone to just quit their job, lose that income and attend school full time for a couple of years. The program allowed me to continue my life without having to make significant changes or incur additional debt.

How has your psychology degree helped you in your role?

It has helped me tremendously. With what I learned then, I can better recognize certain psychological, mood and behavior disorders. I know the signs, which helps me better evaluate and address situations. Most officers learn to do that on the job, but I came into the job already having that experience.



Police department launches behavioral health unit with full-time social worker in 2024

The St. Louis Park Police Department launched its new behavioral health unit Jan. 1. This unit includes two police officers and a department-embedded social worker. Visit www.stlouisparkmn.gov/police to learn more about the program and its assigned officers. More information will also be shared in the next *Park Perspective*. To contact the unit, email slpbhu@stlouisparkmn.gov or call 952.924.2119.