



**Adirondack Diversity Initiative
Police Cultural Competence EO 203 Workshops**



Year 4 - Session Write Up

May 2024



Thank you for engaging RENZ Consulting, LLC to complete this important project.

Many thanks to the members of the Adirondack Park and the North Country community and the law enforcement agencies who participated in the training sessions.

About RENZ Consulting, LLC

The first pillar in the **Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century**

Policing is: "building trust & legitimacy".

People are more likely to obey the law when they believe that those who are enforcing it have the legitimate authority to tell them what to do . . . The public confers legitimacy only on those they believe are acting in procedurally just ways (page 9).ⁱ

It is from this perspective that RENZ Consulting, LLC enters into agreements with organizations, universities, and police agencies. Our plan is to bridge the gap between the police and the community ... particularly communities of color. Our motto is: SERVE. PROTECT. RESPECT.

RENZ Consulting, LLC specializes in strengthening police-community relations at the state and local level including within urban, suburban and rural settings. We address police/community issues head on, through assessment, and workshops supported by empirically-sound, evidence-based research, in order to bridge the gap between police and the communities they serve.

Whether in urban or rural environments, our goal is to help stimulate attitudinal and behavioral change through academically sound research, progressive public policy, and improved community interactions, particularly between police and the Black &

Indigenous (and other) People of Color (BIPOC) community. Our intention is both **diagnostic** and **prescriptive** in nature. The diagnostic piece is in recognizing the problem and addressing it, the prescriptive part is acknowledging the pain and beginning the process of healing.

Our team members leverage their collective experience in policing, law, and government in order to build trust among participants while facilitating group conversations about criminal justice problems and workable solutions. Our goal is to shape the conversation in such a way that all participants understand that their voices matter and that there are sensible steps that can be taken to build trust between the community and the police.

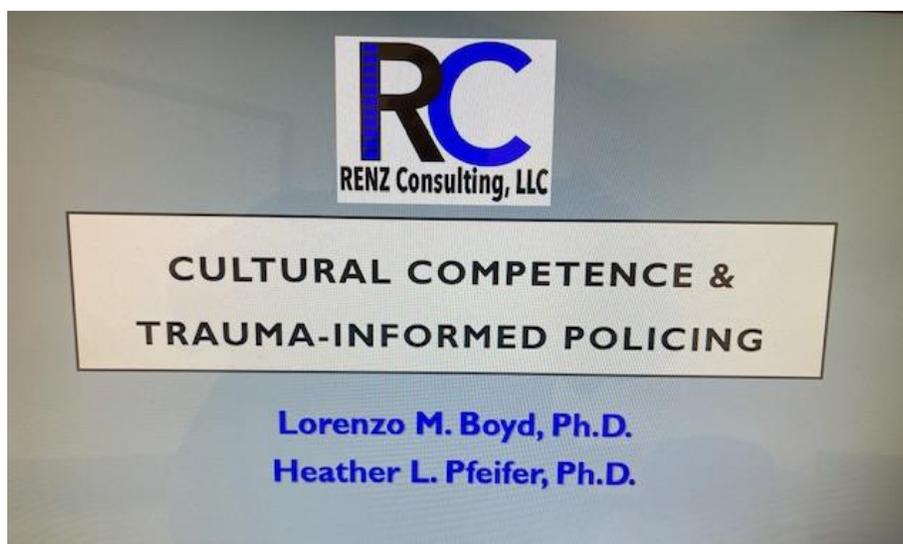
We design trainings based upon the needs and issues presented. Our trainings are rooted in the **contact hypothesis** - *the idea that controlled contact between members of two groups can promote tolerance and acceptance and tends to reduce tensions between them.*ⁱⁱ By engaging both police officers and stakeholders in joint training sessions, we help to build bridges between them, which is a fundamental first step to reimagining policing. We also provide scenario-based training sessions, which include introspective evaluation and cultural competence for sworn and non-sworn police employees as well as community members. For more information please see our website:

www.renzconsulting.net

Scope of Work & Objectives

On the dates of May 30 & 31, 2024, team members from **RENZ Consulting, LLC** started year four of the police training sessions for the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) and conducted several in-depth, face-to-face interviews with participants with officers from, SUNY Plattsburgh, City of Plattsburgh, and the Essex County Sheriff's Office. We also conducted two days of training with a new group of officers in Plattsburgh and Essex County.

Training sessions in May 2024 consisted of two, day-long, scenario-based, interactive workshops presented to a total of **15** officers in Plattsburgh and Lewis, NY. We introduced the concept of trauma to these new officers so we could get a baseline of their level of understanding before we delved deeper into the concepts.



Session number one is modified every year based on information learned from the previous year and is built on information gained and issues observed in talking to officers and community members. Session-one introduces the concepts of community trauma, vicarious trauma, and trauma-informed policing. We found that by addressing trauma issues early in the training, we believe that the officers are better prepared receive the information from the training sessions and to also talk introspectively about the experiences of people in the North Country as well as the concept of community empathy while being introduced to the concept of cultural competence.

We also acknowledge that based on which department the officers are in, the level of experienced and/or perceived trauma would differ. We discussed the differences in trauma for the officers in Plattsburgh who patrol in a relatively urban environment verses the rangers are are extremely remote and often are on search and rescue OR search and recovery missions. We contrasted that with the experiences of the troopers who conduct car stops on remote highways knowing that if something goes wrong, their closest backup could be 20 or 30 minutes away.

After many training sessions, we expect that if officers better understood and could more effectively recognize the types of trauma that many in the community have - some trauma which may be triggered by the presence of uniformed officers - then the individual officers would have a better opportunity to serve the community and their concerns as they police from a place of empathy and compassion.

OBJECTIVES – Week One Sessions (May 30, 31):

The objectives of the training included:

- Understand community & vicarious trauma
- Identify trauma responses of community members
- Understand the effects of trauma on citizens interactions with police
- Understanding Cultural Narratives
- Understand the effects trauma has on individual officers



(Pictured: Dr. Heather demonstrating community approaches in Essex May 31, 2024)

Methodology

On May 29th, 2024, team members from **RENZ Consulting, LLC** conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with officers who participated in previous training sessions. On May 30 and 31, 2024, we provided two day-long, scenario-based workshops to 15 officers in two locations. The sessions were in the following locations with the following officers:

- On May 30 in Plattsburgh at the SUNY campus, we had five officers in class. Two from the Plattsburg city police and three NY State Troopers.
- On May 31, we had 10 officers in class in the Essex County Public Safety Building. Six Essex deputies, one Lake Placid Officer and three NY State Troopers.

These training classes represent session one of three in which we introduce and cover issues of trauma. Before we could expect the officers to be able to address issues of trauma, we first spent a significant amount of time explaining and defining what trauma is, and its effects on the brain and the human body. We built a safe space in the classroom because we wanted the officers to be able to speak freely and share their experiences. In a perfect scenario, officers would be willing to become vulnerable and freely express their thoughts and feelings.

The sessions for week 1 focused on the concepts of being trauma-informed with the interactions that officers have when addressing service calls for service in various communities. We wanted officers to be able to better recognize and understand both acute and long-term (post) trauma as well as vicarious (secondary) traumas within the communities they serve. As expected, it became obvious that when started talking about trauma, officers were willing to be self-reflective and open about their own personal and professional experiences. The officers present were also more receptive to the lessons we were teaching that day. Some mentioned that others in their department talked more about trauma after attending our sessions in 2023. So, it is clear to us that the message is resonating with officers, and they are comfortable enough with the material to breach the conversations back at work with other officers.



(Pictured: Dr. Heather Pfeifer and officers in the Plattsburgh training May 30, 2024)

We noted that some officers were willing to talk about situations that may have stemmed from traumatic events that they witnessed, experienced, or were a part in the

course of their jobs. Because we know that officers who have unresolved, or unrecognized trauma tend to have psychological effects such as compassion fatigue or burnout at work (Papazoglou & Henry, 2018;ⁱⁱⁱ Henry, 2004;^{iv} Alexander, 1999^v), we were cautious and spent more time addressing these issues.

Allowing officers to talk about their experiences early in the session gave them a safe space to share their experiences with others. This was a crucial point in the class because we needed officers to know that they were not alone. It also served as a beacon light for newer officers so that they can brace for the traumas that they may experience and for them to know that it was ok to talk about them. The full day is dedicated to these issues and offered officers a deeper understanding of trauma and some strategies to help address their own trauma responses.

We felt that once officers had a better understanding of trauma, and traumatic events, then we had a good foundation to introduce the concept of compassionate policing. We demonstrated in great detail that many people who have a history of unaddressed or untreated trauma often encounter the Criminal Justice system because of their coping mechanisms which are often interpreted as negative behaviors.

We then addressed the issues of compassionate policing, empathy, burnout, and compassion fatigue. From the perspective of compassionate policing, officers can better relate to the issues happening in their communities. Many officers admit that they suffer from physical manifestations of stress or trauma that they are dealing with as

they are doing their jobs that hinders them from being effective and efficient service providers. This will also negatively affect their relationship with local communities.



(Pictured: Dr. Heather Pfeifer and officers in the Essex training May 31, 2024)

We also used a group activity to show how prevalent trauma is with people. We asked the officers to stand at the table. We read a series of events that people may construe as being traumatic (*car accident, serious illness, hospitalization, fire, natural disaster, death of a loved one, homelessness, etc.*) each time the officer self-identified as having personally experienced that trauma we gave them one type of candy. If they reported that someone close to them experienced that type of trauma, or they became aware of (vicariously) that or a similar trauma we gave them another piece of candy. We also asked about trauma that they witnessed or experienced in their work role in policing and gave them a piece of candy. By the end of the exercise, the officers saw how prevalent trauma is ... not just in the abstract, but also on a personal level. This

activity was used to normalize the idea of trauma and help officers tap into a new level of empathy when dealing with community members. On a funny note, officers playfully refer to the candy (jolly ranchers, life savers, etc.) that we gave them as “trauma candy.”



(Pictured: a group exercise explaining how prevalent trauma is using candy May 30, 2024)

We started the day reflecting on positive police-community relations. As an ice breaker, I asked each officers to share a recent **positive** interaction they had with a community member. We do this so that officers can reframe the narrative and concentrate on positive relationships with the community. It also helps when officers hear the positive experience that others have. This will serve as a status check so officers can focus of community building. We were pleased that all officers were able to recount a positive interaction quickly without hesitation. Many shared several positive

experiences and said these connections with the community helps their job approval and their feeling like they are making a difference.

To set the stage for the materials outlines later, we started by discussing the word “culture.” I asked each participant to give me a working definition of the word culture. We went around the room and allowed each participant to offer their own definition of the word (which varied greatly). Then we presented an operational definition that we would refer to throughout the class. We moved officers from a narrative that culture is just race or ethnicity. We introduced various other examples. We wanted the officers to have a broad understanding of the concept of culture and allow them to claim some level of ownership of the term before we moved forward to discuss the next step of cultural competence and empathy.



(Pictured: Dr. Heather Pfeifer and officers in the Plattsburgh training May 30, 2024)

We explained that shared experiences and trauma exposure that people experience are also part of a person’s culture. We also explained that traumatic

experiences have a negative effect on people maturation process. We wanted the officers to realize and acknowledge that cultural competence is not an attack on any race nor is it an attack on the police. We framed it as an inclusive term and tool to help them understand and build bridges with the community. We wanted the officers to feel good about our verbiage, how it applies to their jobs and could be used as a tool to connect with community members.



(Pictured: Plattsburgh officers contemplating the prevalence of trauma May 30, 2024)

In this training we spent a considerable amount of time exploring the concepts and usefulness of the [President's Task Force's Final Report On 21st Century Policing](#). We highlighted all six pillars of the report, paying particular attention to officer wellness.

The six pillars are:

- **Pillar 1 - Building Trust & Legitimacy**
- **Pillar 2 - Policy & Oversight**
- **Pillar 3 - Technology & Social Media**
- **Pillar 4 - Community Policing & Crime Reduction**
- **Pillar 5 - Training & Education**
- **Pillar 6 - Officer Wellness & Safety**

We took great care in elaborating on pillar #6 - officer wellness and safety.

The wellness and safety of law enforcement officers is critical not only to themselves, their colleagues, and their agencies but also to public safety... The 'bulletproof cop' does not exist. The officers who protect us must also be protected—against incapacitating physical, mental, and emotional health problems as well as against the hazards of their job.

We then explored various forms and types of trauma and explained the consequences of untreated trauma (officers' and community members'), and how trauma-informed-policing practices can help to improve criminal justice outcomes. We explained in detail that trauma is real, it's pervasive and can be debilitating. We described how trauma affects the body.

We wanted the officers to have a deeper understanding of the origins of trauma, and how and where it manifests in the body. It was shown that individual trauma results from an **event, a series of events, or set of circumstances** that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. We further explained that trauma often has lasting adverse effects on an individual's daily functioning as well as their mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.



(Pictured: Dr. Heather Pfeifer and officers in the Essex training May 31, 2024)

We offered the classroom as a safe space for officers to speak freely, and we let them know that this class is a judgment free zone. We outlined the often-debilitating effects of trauma. The instructors were transparent in our traumas as we asked the class to be introspective. We told the officers that chronic stress can lead to serious negative consequences for officers such as work-related injuries, increased stressors, or illness. We explained that police officers have higher rates of specific diseases than the general population. Those diseases include heart disease, various forms of cancer and higher rates of diabetes than civilians. We explained that with increased stress, first responders have an increased risk of dying at an earlier age; sleep disorders, which are consequence associated with shift work. These things are contributing factors to higher injury and illness rates, alcohol and substance abuse; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); depression and anxiety; and police officer suicide.



(Pictured, Dr. Pheifer demonstrating stress relieving exercises in Essex, May 31, 2024)

We again talked about and gave examples of secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD), vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and officer burnout on the job. We gave

officers space to talk about these issues and we offered self-help techniques to avoid these issues, or at the very least lessen their effects.

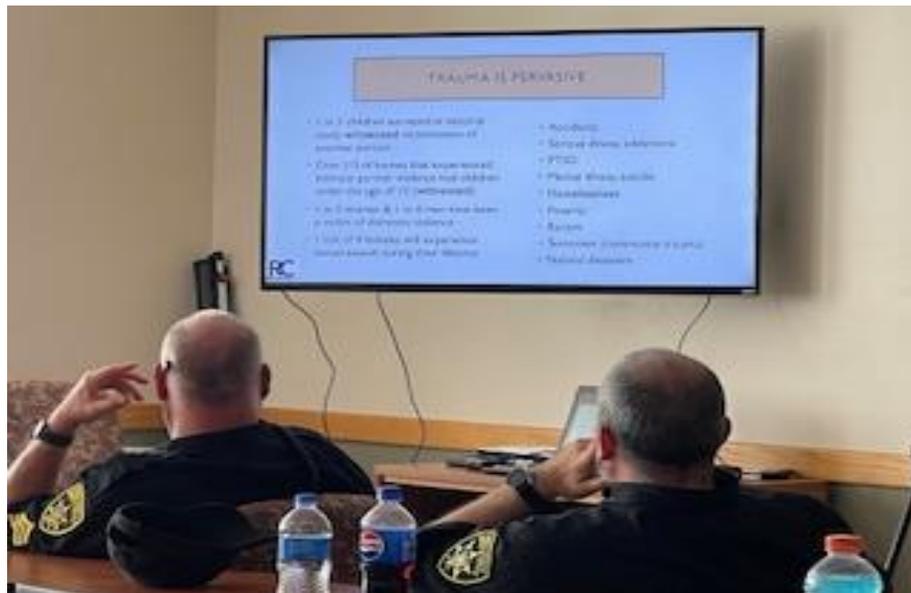
We explained many of the warning signs of stress and trauma and we talked about officer self-care and personal maintenance habits. The officers really appreciated not only that their traumas were acknowledged, but we also thought through the issue and offered self-help guides.



(Pictured: Dr. Heather Pfeifer and officers in the Essex training May 31, 2024)

Conclusion & Discussion

The training sessions were extremely positive. We believe that starting with addressing issues of trauma was the right way to start the sessions, which allowed us to move seamlessly into cultural competence and then ethical policing in the subsequent sessions. Once we gave the officers space to address their own trauma, they were more willing to address community trauma. Many officers felt like they were given a voice and that we honestly listened to them and because of that, they were more likely to open-up about their thoughts and actions. Many officers, when we told them that they successfully completed all three sessions, then asked if there could be a fourth session.



(Pictured: officers in the Essex training May 31, 2024)

We ended the session like we do all sessions by conducting a group share-out. This allows the officers to recount the information and activities of the day and reflect on them as they go back to work. It is extremely important that the officers think critically about the information and verbalize their thoughts openly. Listening to other officers also verbalize their thoughts will help reinforce the information shared during the sessions.

By helping police officers become more aware of community trauma and how it leads to social movements, they can better understand the underlying issues and not take things personally. When officers can better address their own personal trauma, they can better facilitate bridge building with members of the community. Many of the officers were introspective and appreciative of the new language and insight they were given in these sessions and are willing to engage the community with new awareness.

Participant Evaluations

After each workshop session, all participants were given an eight-question evaluation in order to communicate their thoughts, agreements, and/or feelings about the workshops as well as what (if anything) they learned or would change. Responses to the questions were completely voluntary and were anonymous. Prior to giving the surveys, we conducted share-out sessions in order to have the officers think critically about the day's activities and lessons learned. We wanted the officers to be able to express their thoughts openly in hopes of building synergy with other officers as we completed the session. We tried to make the sessions a safe space where officers can ask hard questions, answer truthfully without judgement and be their authentic selves throughout the process.

The evaluation consisted of eight total questions: four fixed response and four open ended questions. Although all participants were provided with an electronic survey via QR code and time to complete it, some officers did not complete a survey, and some did not answer all of the questions. The officers attended the whole session and participated fully. A total of 13 of 15 participants completed the survey.

The responses to the questions were as follows:

- The instructors' objectives were clear
13 yes, 0 no
- This session seemed useful to my daily job
13 yes, 0 no
- The presentation was clear and easy to follow
13 yes, 0 no
- I learned new information in this training
12 yes, 1 no

What specifically did you learn in this training?

Plattsburgh:

- Interview techniques
- Officer Wellness, police community relations
- Rem cycle
- The importance of self care

Essex County:

- How to talk to people better
- Breathing exercises
- Officer health
- Training principles
- Trauma and association with the types of trauma.
- How to see signs of trauma victims
- The interview techniques in how to speak to trauma victims.
- How to better listen to people and be more empathetic.

What did you like most about the training?

Plattsburgh:

- Interview techniques
- Officer Wellness portion bc I've kinda forgotten to take care of myself
- The instructions
- How the instructors were able to relate to us

Essex County

- Very interactive
- Different ways of stress relief
- Officer well being
- Overall information
- Interactive
- Interactive learning
- Stretching and breathing techniques. The "RENZ" putty

- The instructors made it very up best and engaging

What did you like least about the training?

Plattsburgh:

- It was only a single day
- N/A
- More breaks
- Maybe there should be a few more breaks throughout.

Essex County:

- Nothing
- Can't say . It was a good course
- Nothing
- Nothing
- N/A
- Nothing. Everything was relevant and well discussed
- Nothing really.

What would you add to the training to make it better?

Plattsburgh:

- Extending it to a 2 day course.
- Another Day would be great because this class was amazing for officer wellness and assisting in interviewing victims
- Additional information would be helpful

Essex County:

- N/A
- Nothing
- Nothing
- Maybe add some videos depending on what suits the training
- More interactive activities would be cool
- More self care techniques and ideas
- Nothing really.

ⁱ https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/nov01/contact>

ⁱⁱⁱ Papazoglou, K., Tuttle, B. M. (2018). Fighting Police Trauma: Practical Approaches to Addressing Psychological Needs of Officers. Sage Open Monographs. Volume: 8 issue: 3

^{iv} Henry, V. (2004). Death work. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

^v Alexander, C. (1999). Police psychological burnout and trauma. *Police trauma: Psychological aftermath of civilian combat*, 54-64.