



From response to well-being: Reflections on a decade of community safety

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INTRODUCTION

As the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* marks its 10th anniversary, it stands as evidence of how far we have come in recognizing that interdisciplinary collaboration is central to community safety.

Over the past decade, the conversation surrounding community safety has shifted in meaningful ways. What was once framed primarily through enforcement and response has evolved into a broader discussion about collaboration, well-being, mental health, leadership, and organizational culture. As someone who began her career in policing and later transitioned into post-secondary education, I have had the privilege of witnessing this evolution from both operational and academic perspectives. The *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* has both reflected and supported that transformation.

For me, this journal has been more than a publication. It has been a place where different disciplines come together and where research informs practice. It illustrates what many of us working in community safety have experienced firsthand. No single profession can do this work alone. It takes shared responsibility and collaboration.

A SHIFT TOWARD WELL-BEING

One of the most important shifts I have seen in the field is the growing understanding that safety and well-being cannot be separated. Safety is not just about responding to crime. It is also about building trust, fostering a healthy organizational culture, and creating systems that support people before they reach a crisis point.

In my early years in policing, the focus was largely on response, with much of the work centred on arriving quickly, assessing risk, and managing incidents. Although those skills remain essential, over time, it became increasingly clear that reactive approaches alone were not enough. Issues such as mental health crises, addiction, family violence, and systemic inequities demanded integrated responses. The complexity of these challenges made collaboration not just helpful, but necessary.

The journal has supported and legitimized these conversations by publishing research on collaborative models,

trauma-informed practice, mental health initiatives, and community partnerships. In doing so, it has brought forward what many of us were already seeing in practice: that sustainable safety requires prevention, empathy, and shared leadership.

FROM PRACTITIONER TO EDUCATOR

When I transitioned into teaching at Wilfrid Laurier University and other post-secondary institutions, I carried with me lessons from my policing career, lessons about leadership, accountability, and the importance of modelling the behaviour we expect from others. I also carried questions about how to prepare future public safety professionals to navigate complexity with integrity.

My teaching philosophy has always centred on helping students learn how to think rather than telling them what to think. In public safety, decisions are rarely black and white. Leaders must assess incomplete information, recognize bias, manage competing priorities, and consider the human impact of their choices. These are competencies that must be developed intentionally and with care.

Over the years, I have worked to design courses that reflect this reality. In public safety and policing, I adjusted assessments to promote deeper engagement and retention. In leadership and policy courses, I built in reflective exercises and applied analysis. More recently, I developed courses focused specifically on mental health and wellness in public safety, as well as emergency management and interoperability. These additions were responses to what the field was clearly telling us it needed.

The work being published in the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* reflects what many of us working in the field already see in practice. It shows that theory and practice are not in competition. Instead, they work best when they inform one another.

When developing my courses on emergency management and interoperability, and later mental health and wellness in public safety, I have drawn from interdisciplinary research published in this journal. Articles examining collaborative risk models, crisis response partnerships, and trauma-informed practice informed lesson design, case discussions, and applied assignments. My goal was not simply

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to reference research, but to help students understand how evidence informs real-world leadership decisions.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE AND THE HUMAN SIDE OF SAFETY

The most significant development over the past decade has been the increased recognition of trauma and mental health within public safety professions. For many years, these topics were discussed quietly, if at all. Today, fortunately, they are central to leadership conversations.

Through both my academic work and consulting practice, I have focused extensively on trauma-informed interviewing and organizational wellness. Understanding how trauma affects memory, perception, and behaviour changes how we conduct investigations, supervise teams, and respond to victims, witnesses, and colleagues. It also changes how we lead. A trauma-informed lens does not diminish accountability. Instead, it strengthens fairness and effectiveness. It requires us to acknowledge bias, understand stress responses, and create environments where individuals feel psychologically safe. When professionals are supported internally, they are better equipped to serve externally. The journal has played an important role in legitimizing this perspective. By publishing research and commentary on trauma exposure, mental health stigma, and collaborative crisis response, it has reinforced that caring for public safety professionals is directly connected to caring for communities.

In both my online and face-to-face classes, these conversations matter to students. They want to understand how leadership decisions affect workplace culture and the well-being of the people around them. Many recognize that real courage in public safety hinges upon talking openly about mental health and questioning practices that may no longer be working.

LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN HUMILITY

Leadership has been a consistent theme throughout my career. In policing, I observed leadership styles that inspired growth and others that limited it. As an educator, I quickly realized that the classroom, both virtually and face-to-face, is a leadership environment.

I believe effective leaders practice humility. We cannot pretend to know everything, and we must remain open to learning. Communication, listening, and reflection are not secondary skills. They are foundational leadership practices. The journal, in many ways, demonstrates this posture. It creates space for reflection, debate, and collaboration. It acknowledges that no single discipline holds all the answers. That willingness to engage in dialogue, even when perspectives differ, is essential if we are to address complex community safety challenges.

In my teaching, I aim to model the behaviours I hope students will carry into their careers, including respect, accountability, integrity, and openness to feedback. Detailed feedback, reflective assignments, and meaningful discussion are not simply pedagogical tools. They are leadership practices in action.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST DECADE

Looking back over the past decade, I see several lessons that stand out, shaped both by my own career and by the evolution of the field itself.

Collaboration requires intentional effort, shared language, and trust built over time.

Research also needs to be accessible if it is going to influence practice. When practitioners can see themselves in the work and understand how it applies to their realities, it becomes a tool for change rather than something that sits unread.

I have also learned that organizational culture ultimately determines whether reform takes hold. Policies alone do not shift culture; leadership does. Leaders set the tone by modelling ethical behaviour and creating environments where people feel respected and supported.

Mental health must remain central to community safety. Ignoring the psychological impact of this work weakens both organizations and the communities they serve.

Finally, education remains one of the most sustainable forms of reform. Preparing thoughtful, ethical leaders takes time and persistence, but it is essential to lasting change.

LOOKING FORWARD

The next decade will bring continued complexity. Technological advancements, including artificial intelligence and data-driven decision-making, will shape public safety operations. Ethical questions around privacy, bias, and accountability will require careful and thoughtful leadership. Communities will continue to expect transparency and meaningful engagement.

At the same time, some challenges have not disappeared. Mental health crises, systemic inequities, and the need for meaningful organizational reform are still very real. These are not issues any one sector can solve alone.

As we look ahead, collaboration between practitioners and researchers will continue to matter. We also need to take the time to understand what is working, where adjustments are needed, and how new initiatives are actually experienced on the ground. Public safety education must remain responsive, drawing from emerging research while continuing to emphasize ethical leadership and humility.

In my role as an educator, I am reminded that our responsibility is not only to prepare students for what they will encounter today, but also for challenges that will evolve. We need to equip them with the ability to think critically, remain culturally aware, adapt to change, and ask thoughtful questions. Leadership, in this context, is less about authority and more about responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, it has become increasingly clear that community safety is about more than responding to incidents. It is about relationships, well-being, and shared leadership. The *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* has reflected and supported that shift by encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue and evidence-informed thinking in practice.

For me, its influence is visible in my online teaching. It informs discussions about trauma, mental health, collabo-

ration, and ethical leadership. It supports the development of future professionals who understand that safety and well-being are interconnected.

As the journal moves into its next decade, continued commitment to humility, collaboration, and thoughtful research will allow the field of community safety to grow not only in effectiveness but also in compassion and resilience.

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