

2013/2014

Okaloosa Sheriff's Office Youth Services



THIS
WE WILL
DEFEND



Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Youth Services



The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) traces the origins of its commitment to the School Resource Officer program to 1997, the year it first partnered with the Okaloosa County School Board to place deputies in local middle and high schools. Since that time, the dedication to that concept, along with the ongoing professional development and training of its participants, has deepened and expanded dramatically.

After the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary in December 2012, Sheriff Larry Ashley made the decision to place SROs in every Okaloosa public elementary school, more than tripling the size of the agency's SRO unit. Currently, the OCSO Youth Services Division is a 41-person Unit and has SROs in all 37 public schools, serving a student population of more than 30,000 students and an additional 2500 faculty and School District personnel. Added to their extensive school day coverage, it is the policy of the OCSO that middle and high school SROs also provide safety and planned security at ALL sporting events and school-related activities. They are required to develop an operational, tactical plan for events with significant attendance. Additionally, CPTED-certified SROs are involved in school crisis security assessments as part of the Okaloosa County School District Safety Board.

Okaloosa County is very diverse. It encompasses a total area of 1082 square miles stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the Alabama state line. It is home to several military bases that serve many missions, primarily Special Operations. Military units based out of Okaloosa County perform high profile missions around the world that have a global impact. This increases the potential for assets within Okaloosa County to become targets of retaliation. With that in mind, it is essential that Okaloosa SROs stay on top of their game to ensure the safety of children in our unique community is met.

“Unless they defund the entire Sheriff’s Office, the first forty positions we fund are going to be our School Resource Officers,” said Sheriff Larry Ashley in outlining his law enforcement priorities.

The enhanced capabilities and training methodologies of Okaloosa SROs are wide-ranging and impressive. In conjunction with being the frontline of protection for Okaloosa schoolchildren, they are responsible for sexual offender/predator



verifications and investigations, enabling each officer to be familiar with the home locations, faces, and backgrounds of all offenders or predators living or working in proximity to schools and related student activities. SROs also oversee Gang Identification Tracking and

Intelligence for the agency. (Due to these expanded tasks, the SRO Unit was placed under the purview of the Criminal Investigations Division, enhancing communications and SRO access to expanded expertise for cases ranging from sexting to cyber bullying.) The push to enhance the capabilities of the Okaloosa SRO Program also has led to the Unit having its own tactical training officer, as

well as a designated K9 Team, and a Critical Incident Response Team or CIRT. Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) Certification is mandatory for Okaloosa SROs.

In addition, they have implemented and received training in Random Anti-Terrorism Measures (RAM).

To ensure they remain physically capable of responding to any and all challenges, Okaloosa SROs are required to complete the agency's physical fitness or PAT Test (Physical Abilities Testing) twice a year.

Internally, the agency stresses the value of advanced education within the SRO ranks. The "OCSO Career Deputy Program" is also emphasized, providing opportunities to further enhance professionalism and competence. In addition, Youth Services has begun an SRO Field Training Officer program.



To be as effective as possible on the student education front inside Okaloosa schools, the Okaloosa SRO Unit has implemented an Educational Classroom Instruction focus. A designated SRO for Curriculum and Professional Development designs programs on current trends and topics. Examples include: Cyber Safety, Bullying Prevention, Anti-Alcohol and Drug Abuse Experimentation, the Dangers and Consequences of Sexting, Proper Use of Social Media and Internet Safety (including the dangers of being "lured" by sexual predators).

Because a top-notch SRO program must be multi-faceted, a key objective is Youth Relations/Mentoring/Leadership Development. Utilizing a team approach, OCSO SROs are encouraged to explore and implement ideas to constantly create a school atmosphere that cultivates good citizenship and respect for people, property, and the community. The SRO Unit embraces a unified approach to provide mutual support and share ideas designed to help achieve the highest levels of proficiency.

In Elementary Schools, Okaloosa SROs have implemented a highly successful “Books to Badges” Community Service and Leadership Program. It provides a punch card of good deeds for students to work towards. Once successful, they are rewarded with one-on-one time spent shadowing their SRO, lunch with their SRO, and public acknowledgment of their outstanding accomplishments.

Elementary level Safety Patrols are also designed as a mechanism to develop good citizens. This program transitions into a Middle School Junior Explorer/Safety Patrol Program. The progression ultimately takes students into the Sheriff’s Senior Explorer program at the High School level.



The Sheriff’s Senior Explorer Program emphasizes community service and leadership skills, making “Tomorrow’s Leaders Today”. Energetic recruitment efforts are the norm and Sheriff Larry Ashley provided two scholarships for Senior Explorers to attend the Police Academy. Leadership

promotion skills are also encouraged through an SRO-sponsored Peer Mediation Program which allows students to help other students experiencing difficulties.

In working to cultivate positive traits, the SROs themselves lead by example. Community Service is a primary tenet and each individual SRO takes the concept to heart with numerous projects. As a team, we organize and oversee “OCSO Youth Week” each June, giving students ages 10 - 15 an opportunity to attend an SRO led summer camp. They watch law enforcement demonstrations, learn about the law enforcement mission, and boost personal interactions with SROs in a fun and relaxed educational atmosphere. Okaloosa SROs also serve year-round as instructors for the agency’s Teen Driver Challenge (TDC), a classroom and driving range course designed to boost the driving skills of our young drivers. 145 students attended the free course in 2013. The Sheriff provided the TDC with a “No Texting and Driving” simulator to educate High School students on the dangers. Members of the Okaloosa SRO Unit work each summer at the Florida

Sheriff's Association Youth Ranch Caruth Camp. They raised money to provide 26 bicycles for the participants in the summer of 2013. Their current initiative is "Cram the Canoe", a fundraiser which will provide canoes, sporting equipment, and other needed items for the campers. Along with OCSO Chaplains, SROs oversee the organization, collection, and distribution of gifts for students under the "Sheriff's Star Angel Tree" program. Last year they collected an estimated \$10,000 in donated gifts.



Public support for the success of the Okaloosa SRO program was demonstrated in August 2013 when the Young Lawyers Division of the Okaloosa/Walton Bar Association contacted the agency and asked to launch a community fundraiser to provide financial support for school safety. A community concert was held and the one night event raised more than \$17,000. The donations and attendance were testament to the public's recognition and appreciation of the Unit's comprehensive efforts to protect students and serve as positive role models to create productive citizens.

With the unshakable commitment of the Sheriff, agency, and community the Okaloosa SRO Unit's goals are straightforward: No opportunity to educate, mentor, and build leadership skills will be overlooked, however the safety and security of Okaloosa students and staff will always be the primary mission. It is the directive of Sheriff Ashley that no school will go unprotected, no matter the cost. The Youth Services Division of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office is ready to stand as that shield of protection. As the Okaloosa SRO Unit coin proudly states: **"This We Will Defend."**

