



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



**Session 3 Write Up**

**December, 2021**



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 who participated in the many listening sessions, interviews and meetings.

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## About RENZ Consulting, LLC

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The first pillar in the **Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> 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).<sup>i</sup>*

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.*<sup>ii</sup>

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](http://www.renzconsulting.net)

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## Scope of Work & Objectives

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On the dates of December 15, 16, 17, 2021, **RENZ Consulting, LLC** provided three, day-long, scenario-based workshops to 31 officers in the Adirondacks. We conducted the workshops in two separate locations, the SUNY Potsdam campus on (Dec 15<sup>th</sup>) & the Essex County Public Safety Building (Dec. 16, 17). The interactive workshops focused on the concepts of trauma-informed policing for sworn university, town, county, and state police employees and recognizing and understanding vicarious trauma within the communities they serve. Acknowledging that often police personnel may have unresolved stressors as well as personal and professional traumas that they experience, we also spent a significant amount of time addressing self-care for police. If police officers are dealing with trauma, they may not be at their best to serve the community, so self-care is important.

The third of three workshop session was based upon our information learned or observed about the nature of policing in the Adirondacks as well as the various communities in the North Country during previous sessions and built on lessons learned and information given in the first two rounds round of workshops in May and September 2021. The agreement and scope of work between **RENZ Consulting, LLC** and the **Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI)** regarding training in response to the

## NY Executive Order 203 (New York State Police Reform and Reinvention

**Collaborative**) is set forth as follows:

### **OBJECTIVES:**

The objectives of the training included:

- Reduce racial inequities in policing,
- To modify and modernize policing strategies, policies, procedures, and practices,
- To develop practices to better address the particular needs of communities of color, including both residents and visitors, in order to promote public safety, improve community engagement, and foster trust,
- Increasing the cultural competence of police personnel in the Adirondack Park;
- Increasing police - community engagement in the Adirondack Park; and
- Decreasing negative relationships between police officers and Black & Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in the Adirondack Park.
- Heighten awareness of law enforcement officers related to perceived BIPOC and LGBTQ+ perceptions of police.

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## Methodology

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In December, 2021, we conducted three 8-hour, in-person workshops, over a three-day period and taught a total of 31 sworn officers. It is worth noting that during this week, there were several reported threats at various schools in the area, causing some officers to stay at the local schools instead of attending the workshops, or report to the schools before attending the workshops.

The departments that participated in the December, 2021 workshops were: the NY State Police, the Village of Potsdam Police, the SUNY Potsdam Campus Police, the Village of Lake Placid Police, and the Essex County Sheriff's Department. Most of the participants in session #3 were also present in sessions #1 & 2. The exception was the New York State Police. On Dec. 16 and 17, there was one new state police officer in each session who did not participate in sessions #1 or #2. The attendance in the workshops was as follows;

- 10 officers on December 15<sup>th</sup> in Potsdam
  - (1 - NY State Police, 3 - SUNY Potsdam, 6 - village of Potsdam)
- 11 officers on December 16<sup>th</sup> in Essex County,
  - (1 - NY State Police, 2 – Lake Placid, 8 Essex County)
- 10 officers on December 17<sup>th</sup> in Essex County
  - (1 - NY State Police, 1 – Lake Placid, 8 Essex County)

It appeared from officer comments in the previous two sessions that some of the officers in the workshops may have been dealing with levels of personal or professional

stress and/or trauma, and that may be indicative of their actions, behavior, or opinions.

We did not and cannot diagnose personal or professional levels of police officer trauma, but there were signs, indications, and comments that lead us to surmise that there may have been some traumatic incidents that some officers may have been dealing with.



*(Pictured: members of December 15, 2021 training at the SUNY Potsdam campus)*

The focus of this training was a deeper dive into what trauma is and its effects on community members and effective policing relationship building. The last few hours of the workshop dealt with officer wellness. We talked about the need for officers to be mentally well in order to properly serve the community. Because we spent the two previous sessions building rapport with the officers and giving them a better understanding of community issues and putting the negative history in perspective, we were able to build enough trust to breach the conversation of trauma within communities and policing.



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## Conclusion & Discussion

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Many of the officer comments from session #2 mentioned that it would have been helpful to provide a meal or snacks during the training to keep them focused. This time we did just that. On day one in Potsdam we provided coffee, donuts, and muffins. Potsdam had several fast food restaurants near campus, so officers could easily get lunch during the break. Because of where the breakfast materials were placed in the room, officers did not initially see them. But once I announced that we provided breakfast, the tenor of the room visibly changed, and the officers appeared more happy and open. This was really important because we were spending the day talking about trauma, so having the officers in a good head-space was extremely helpful. It was also noted that the room was cold, so the coffee helped keep the officers engaged.

On days two and three, we announced before the class started that we were paying for lunch for the group. Because Essex County is more remote, officers would have to travel a longer distance to get food, so we sent an officer to pick up pizza for the group. Before we started the sessions in Essex County, I announced that we were providing lunch, and again the happiness in the room was palpable. Again, having good head-space was crucial to having officers open up and discuss issues of trauma.

We started this workshop with a share-out session. We asked the officers to share or recount, based on the information learned in the previous sessions, a positive interaction that they had with a community member this fall. Every officer mentioned positive interactions, some were even excited to talk about increased community engagement since the last session and making a positive difference with citizens. Some officers recounted how positive interactions impacted and helped community members, but also how it made the officers feel good about the jobs they were doing.

We then moved into a review of the materials that officers were taught in sessions #1 and #2. We went over the [21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing Report](#). We talked about the six Pillars in the report and spent a significant amount of time relating the need for 'procedural justice' in the way that police interact with community members. The theme often came back to building trust and nurturing legitimacy among various members of the community. We also discussed officer safety and wellness, which is Pillar #6 of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing Report.

The bulk of the morning session focused on the concept of Trauma-Informed Policing. The May and September sessions introduced the concepts of trauma in the community and vicarious trauma, but the December session focused a deep dive into the issue. We explained that trauma-informed policing is a deliberate shift in perspective and practice from a traditional law-enforcement mentality to a mindset that

will enhance community safety, improve police-community relations, and promote officer wellness.

We defined the term *trauma* for the officers and gave statistics of how pervasive trauma is in the community and within the ranks of policing. We explained that the effects of trauma may manifest itself behaviorally not only in the actions of community members, but also in the actions and reactions of officers as well. We explained that many people who have a history of unaddressed or untreated trauma often come into contact with the Criminal Justice system because of their negative behaviors.



*(Pictured: members of December 15, 2021 training at the SUNY Potsdam campus)*

We explained that the benefits of trauma informed policing include; improved public safety by improving officers' investigative skills by teaching them to recognize trauma and to deal effectively and compassionately with traumatized community

members. Further benefits also include reduced risk of retaliation and use of force by officers - reducing the likelihood of negative reactions from the public by being aware of victims' personal space, establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries, communicating clearly, and following through on promises made.

Being aware of vicarious and officer trauma increases the likelihood of collaborative partnerships - facilitating the development of trusting relationships in victims' communities by connecting traumatized people to community services and supports. Trauma informed policing strategies enables officers to identify their own trauma history and symptoms and seek professional services.

In trying to get the officers to better understand trauma, we provided the definition from the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)*. We explained the three E's of Trauma (events, experience, or effects). It was explained that individual trauma results from either an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening, and that has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being (SAMSHA, 2014). It was from the framework of events, experiences, and effects that the information in the interactive workshop was based. This brought on lots of questions and discussion from the officers.

We introduced officers to four categories of trauma so they can better recognize issues and behaviors that they may see in the community. The four categories were; acute, chronic, complex, and systemic trauma. We explained each type of stress and stressors, and put them in context. We explored causes and warning signs. The next section of the training was an introduction to the neurobiology of trauma, the ways in which trauma affects the brain. It was incredibly obvious that in session #3, more than any other session many of the officers took copious notes and sought a deeper understanding of the issues.

We also talked about officer emotional intelligence. The focus of this section of the workshops was to help officers learn to recognize trauma responses and adapt accordingly. We wrapped the morning with information about interviewing people who have experienced trauma. We introduced and explained the cognitive interview model. We explained that the phrasing of questions during victim interviews is important. Depending on how a question is asked, it might be perceived by a victim as blaming them for their actions, or for what they may be unable to recall, causing the victim to shut down.

We demonstrated that trauma-informed interview techniques are ways to reframe questions in a manner that helps victims retrieve memories from a traumatic event while minimizing risk of re-traumatization. The goal was to get officers to become more aware of trauma and be sensitive to the needs of community members when they are

doing their jobs. Many of the officers became introspective and offered comments of what they were doing on the job and how they could better use this information in dealing with victims.



The afternoon session shifted to discussing Pillar #6 of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing: **Officer Wellness & 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 explained acute and chronic stressors and how they affect the body, often manifests itself in serious physical conditions. Chronic stress can lead to a myriad of negative consequences such as; work related injuries, illness - police officers have higher rates of specific diseases (heart disease, different cancers, diabetes); and have an increased risk of dying at an earlier age than general population; sleep disorders –

consequence associated with shift work, and is contributing factor to higher injury and illness rates, alcohol and substance abuse; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); depression and anxiety; and police officer suicide. Many officers shared info about stress on the job.

We also explained and gave examples of secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD), vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout. We allowed officers to talk about these issues and offered self-help techniques to avoid them, or at least lessen them. We explained many of the warning signs and stressed self-care and personal maintenance habits. Some officers were relieved that we talked about PTSD, and STSD experienced by first responders.

We ended the session much like we began by conducting a group share-out. Virtually all of the officers shared that this session was extremely informative and helped them better understand not only issues in the community, but also issues in policing. It is important that the officers think critically about the information and verbalize their thoughts. Having other officers also verbalize will help reinforce the information. By making the police more aware of community trauma, and how to address their own personal trauma, then they can better facilitate bridge building with members of the community. There was lots of conversations during the breaks where officers shared stories and thoughts on community and officer trauma. Many of the officers were introspective and appreciative of the new language they were given.

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## Final Thoughts On All Three Sessions

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After having spent three full sessions with the officers, we have noticed a marked change in levels of awareness. We had various thoughts about where officers might be at the end of the trainings, and for the most part, we were spot on regarding their levels of awareness. What we did not expect was the levels of openness and candor that the officers used in sharing ideas and experiences.

We, in no way believe that these workshops will serve as a panacea for police-community relations, but we have seen over the last six months how many of the officers have increased their level of awareness to the issues faced by community members. We started the initial training with officers feeling beat up by society, and noticed that they would recoil at the idea that they were part of the problem. By the time we ended the sessions, many officers were willing to admit that they also have a critical role in making relations better with community members. Many of the officers ended the session feeling empowered. Many felt that if they were better prepared to deal with the complexities of policing in the north country, then they could better serve their communities ... many officers stated that these there workshops certainly helped then get closer to achieving that goal.



As *RENZ Consulting, LLC*, we do not believe that any one training session, or series of training sessions can fix all that is wrong with police-community relations. We know that 24 total hours of training is not the complete answer to fixing 400 years of negative relations. We do, however, feel that the focused and marked approach that we take to building rapport and delivering information is a great step in the right direction. We know that this is a process.

We believe that our efforts are helping to move the needle of attitudes and experiences in the Adirondacks. We are going from; “none-to-some,” and from “some-to-more.” It is a process, and we believe that many of the officers in Essex County, Lake Placid, Potsdam, SUNY Potsdam, and the State Police were given tools to implement change in their respective communities. We look forward to future engagement with other officers who serve the Adirondack Park.

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## Participant Evaluations

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After each workshop session, all participants were given an eight-question evaluation form to communicate their thoughts and/or feelings about the workshops as well as what (if anything) they learned. Responses to the questions were completely voluntary and were anonymous. Prior to giving the surveys, we did conduct share-out sessions in order to have the officers think critically about the day's activities and lessons learned. 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 a survey, some officers did not return a survey and some did not answer all of the questions. We were informed in all sessions that some of the officers present were actively on duty and may have to leave during the day to answer calls. Other officers left and came back later due to threats at local schools, but the officers did attend as much as they were able in order to get as much of the class as they could. The vast majority of the officers attended the whole session and participated uninterrupted. A total of 28 of 31 participants returned the survey. The responses to the questions were as follows:

- |   |              |                 |
|---|--------------|-----------------|
| <b>1. The instructors' objectives were clear?</b><br>28 Agreed 0 Disagreed        | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> |
| <b>2. This session seemed useful to my daily job?</b><br>28 Agreed 0 Disagreed    | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> |
| <b>3. The presentation was clear and easy to follow?</b><br>28 Agreed 0 Disagreed | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> |
| <b>4. I learned new information in this training</b><br>28 Agreed 0 Disagreed     | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> |

**5. If agree with the above, what specifically did you learn in this training?**

- That self-improvement is a long process and doesn't need to be drastic
- People carry different trauma, even cops
- This training was amazing – I had no idea
- I learned to be more understanding as to what the person or persons you're dealing with may be dealing with or may have dealt with in their past
- Stressors affect each and every one differently, we can observe that and learn/change that
- Trauma comes in all shapes and sizes
- I finally feel like my issues have been heard and validated
- Mental stressors
- Keep an open mind
- Relax, Breathe
- Very informative
- Trauma Focused interviewing
- About the mental health of the police. Everyone talks about PTSD in the military, but no one really speaks about PTSD and STSD
- Trauma informed policing
- I appreciated the information on cognitive/ traumatic disconnect and positive response towards the victim
- Officer wellbeing, interview strategies
- How parts of the brain react to trauma
- How to better deal with people
- Prefrontal Cortex shuts down during stress. – Pre-wired
- Trauma informed interviews
- How to help keep ourselves mentally healthy
- Review of the brain chemistry and stress process impacts. That was amazing.
- What trauma looks like after officers leave the scene, I learned that through Heather's story about her daughter

## 6. What did you like most about the training?

- 2 way conversation
- Trainers
- Free flowing conversations, very informative
- Good presentation/presenters
- Class size, I felt that I could talk more in a smaller class
- The open forum to discuss the presentations at great lengths and unreserved. It was a safe space, like Lorenzo said
- Speakers and the food. Thanks!
- Knowing that you provided lunch helped me concentrate and not have to worry about where I was going to get food.
- Clear objectives & open conversation
- Thank You? Great Information! Thanks for the breakfast, It was helpful
- Speakers and knowing that lunch was being provided
- The food really helped
- Ways to speak to people
- Really Good Instructors, food was a nice gesture, I appreciated it
- History ... and the coffee kept we awake in the cold room
- The way she presented everything
- Real life examples, the lunch was a good addition
- I've been to all 3 trainings and didn't want to attend. But now that I have I realized how much I did learn from Lorenzo, Mike and Heather. These were really good trainings. More officers should attend.
- The sharing of stories. Heather's story about her daughter made me better understand the back story of policing, once we are gone.
- Delivery was EXCELLENT, Perfect!
- The reassurance that the manner in which I have been training the next generation of officers corresponds with your training
- Wellness tips, and the coffee you brought with you
- Good/new facts and examples
- I enjoyed the conversation and relatability of the instructors. Not a Charlie Brown teacher. Not death by powerpoint, Thank you for being engaging!
- Officer wellness, and having food at the training
- Openness and approach to presenting information
- Great snacks. Seriously, thank you for this training. Seriously beneficial and helpful both to expand our understanding and to help define the terms and concepts in order to perpetuate it within the profession and the region!
- Letting us be heard. You authentically heard our voices

**7. What did you like least about the training?**

- Extended lectures at times
- Length
- N/A
- Length
- Nothing
- Location. Essex Cty is far
- Nothing
- Nothing
- N/A
- The SUNY room was too cold. All jokes aside, I wouldn't change a thing.  
Thank you both
- Cold room
- Nothing
- Lack of heat on campus.

## 8. What would you add to the training to make it better?

- More videos
- Show episodes of the TV show THE WIRE
- N/A
- More scenario based/situational training where heated issues are discussed. I learned a lot from them
- More training and info also included on a thumb drive
- More breaks – maybe?
- Nothing
- If officers had “RENTZ” T-Shirts
- We are cops, we like videos (ha ha). I know it’s hard with this topic, but it was a great day. Seriously, I loved it. Thanks for feeding us. It was helpful in showing that you cared about our wellbeing.
- Nothing
- Nothing
- Nothing
- In the other sessions it would have been nice to have handouts to follow the presentation, take notes, and build a reference library
- I probably missed this in the first 2 sessions, but I’d like to know more about your background.
- More administrators enrolled as students. They need to hear these messages too
- Can’t think of anything
- More interaction
- Why didn’t we have food at the other 2 classes that we had to attend?

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<sup>i</sup> [https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce\\_finalreport.pdf](https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf)

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