

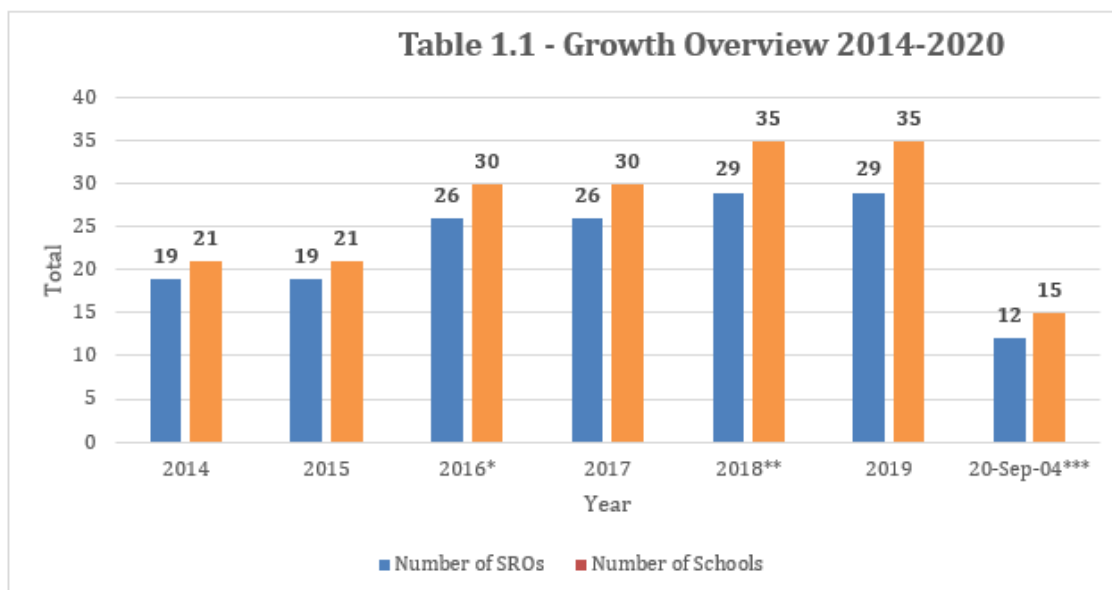


School Resource Officer (SRO) Unit

6 Year Summary Report



Table 1.1 - Growth Overview 2014-2020

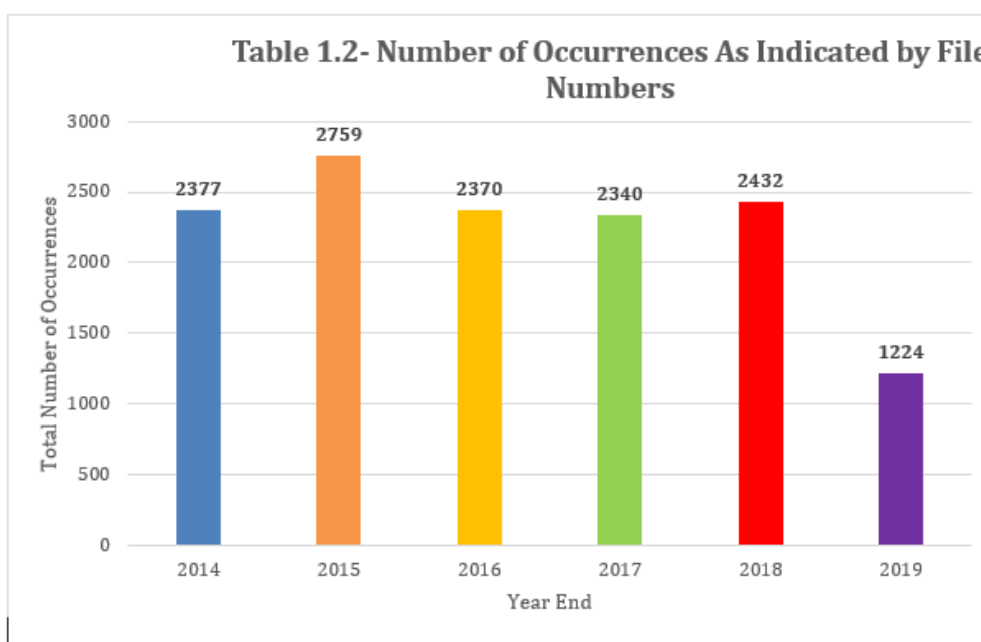


***January 2016: Aspen; summer 2016: H.E. Beriault, Ben Calf Robe, St. Elizabeth Seton, St. Nicholas, Rosslyn, Westlawn, Kate Chegwin, T.D. Baker**

****Summer 2018: St. Thomas More, Balwin, J.D. Bracco, St. Alphonsus, Edmonton Islamic Academy**

*****September 2020: EPSB SRO suspension**

Table 1.2- Number of Occurrences As Indicated by File Numbers



Introduction

This report discusses the recent history (Sept 2014 – present) of the Edmonton Police Service’s School Resource Officer Unit. The graphs and stories provide a highlight of the SRO Unit’s growth, partnerships, initiatives, successes and lessons learned; all in the spirit of assisting students in a safe and caring learning environment.

2014-2016

This first section is an auspicious one. Being recognized by NASRO, the National Association of School Resource Officers, as having the ‘Model Agency’ in North America is an incredible recognition and testament to the work of the SROs from 1979 to 2014. Although the journey starts here, the following information captured in this report serve to illustrate that the SRO Unit did not rest on its laurels. This report provides evidence of the Edmonton Police Service’s dedication to youth-focused policing through the School Resource Officers.

In October of 2014, the SRO Unit showcased its innovative work by planning and hosting the Safety in Schools Conference at the Fantasyland Hotel and Conference Centre, to a sold-out registration of 200 attendees from across North America. SROs and EPS specialty units provided presentations on rapid response to an active shooter, lockdowns, gangs and drugs in schools, GSA supports, anti-bullying strategies, and threat assessments.

The attachments consist of the conference brochure and the EPSNet conference write-up, which is highlighted by the quote from Lieutenant Robinson proclaiming the event as “the best conference [he’s] ever attended.”

In February of 2015, the Unit was introduced to YOUCAN, a local organization “dedicated to assisting youth so they have the knowledge, support and skills to remove themselves from harm’s way.” The Relentless Youth Program, and their Verto Project, were offered to the SROs for youth referrals. This complimented the work YOUCAN was already doing in WrapEd, a collaboration between the EPS Youth Services Section, the Arica Centre, Edmonton John Howard Society and the Native Counselling Services of Alberta. In the fall of 2019, EPS took another step in cementing its partnership with YOUCAN. EPS agreed to fund two positions in YOUCAN for the support and intervention of spiking and high-risk youth. The partnership with YOUCAN is robust and ongoing.

In March of 2015, the Unit facilitated lockdown exercises at West Edmonton Mall. The lockdown was implemented during regular shopping hours with shoppers having no knowledge of the drill. Upon sounding of the alarm, SROs responded throughout the

entire mall, and provided guidance and assistance to shoppers, merchants, and mall security. The event was well-executed. Word spread across the community of the expertise of the SRO Unit around lockdown procedures. Community groups and businesses including, but not limited to, the Archdiocese of Edmonton, the WCB building, the Downtown Business Association, St. Joseph's Basilica, the City of St. Albert, NAIT, Concordia, and many local daycares and churches, began requesting SRO assistance in audits of their own lockdown procedures. Later this year, the SRO Unit was recognized with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police award for Excellence in Emergency Preparedness.

The Spring of 2015 saw the launch of the inaugural SRO created Youth Recruit Academy (YRA). This youth engagement program takes place during school spring break and offers high school students the opportunity to participate in recruit training, following in EPS training traditions. Thirty YRA participants selected from SRO high schools across Edmonton, experienced lectures and demonstrations on the history of the EPS, forensics, tactical, Air 1, K-9, traffic, hostage negotiations, recruiting and the EPS Cadets Corps. They participated in physical therapy and drill daily, cumulating to a final graduation and certificate ceremony in front of friends and family. The YRA program has become a fixture in the SRO Unit and Edmonton area high schools, with 2020 marking the 6th continuous year of the youth engagement program.

In the Spring of 2015, SRO Constable Rob Brown was presented with the 2014 Top Cop Award. The SRO received the award from the Kiwanis Club of Edmonton for his work in saving the Eastglen High School Blue Devils football team from being terminated, due to financial limitations. In addition to having poor equipment, the program was close to being cut. Brown used his alumni connections in the CFL to help. His efforts led to Nissan Canada providing funding for new uniforms and equipment, as well as renovating the team's locker room. The head coach of the football team says Brown's efforts to revive the football program has made a positive impact not only on the team, but the entire school.

May 11th of 2015 marked the official signing of the Edmonton C-TRISP (Community Threat Response and Intervention Support Protocol) agreement. This landmark signing launched the collaboration of key educational entities and community partners in reducing violence while promoting safe, caring and restorative approaches when dealing with youth who may affect the health and safety of themselves or others. Signatories included:

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- Alberta Health Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
 - Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team (ALERT)
 - Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre (I-TRAC)

- City of Edmonton
- Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No.7 & Board of Trustees
- Edmonton Fire Rescue Services
- Edmonton Police Service
- Edmonton Public School District No.7 & Board of Trustees
- Greater North Central Francophone Education Region No.2 & Board of Trustees
- Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Sergeant Em Chan of the SRO Unit was identified to sit on the C-TRISP committee as the EPS representative. The committee meets twice a year annually, to review youth interventions, discuss youth trends and looks at ways to improve service. The strength of the partnership lies in the multidisciplinary composition of the membership who all strive to share details of an identified threat promptly, to collaborate effectively, and to make use of a broad range of expertise.

Many C-TRISP activations have taken place every year since inception. The resulting success is marked by interventions that have prevented serious harm and threats to school safety or other incidents that could have led to serious harm to others or the student themselves. Success is further realized in the trust and professional reliance of the partners who work seamlessly in bringing a situation that restores calm and safety. C-TRISP is robust and flourishing and has proven itself an essential collaboration for safety of the community and support of youth.

June of 2015 saw the return of an annual event between the SRO Unit, the EPS, RCMP and the AMA School Safety Patrol. For over 80 years, generations of dedicated and hardworking AMA School Safety patrollers have been getting to school early and leaving late – come rain or shine, snow or sleet – to guide their classmates safely across school crosswalks and provide a visual reminder of traffic safety within school zones.

SROs have traditionally supported the AMA School Safety Patrol Picnic with crowd control, traffic safety and the serving of lunch to the typical gathering of 5000+ grade 5 and 6 crosswalk patrollers. The venue has changed between the Fort Edmonton Park and the Kinpark in the River Valley.

The summer of 2015 saw an opportunity to deploy the SROs in a new and innovative way. With half of the Unit working in July and the other half in August, a significant number of officers were available to provide a timelier response to calls; calls that would have traditionally sat waiting on the dispatch board for extended periods. There was an opportunity to provide an improved response time and level of service to citizens who were not typical consumers of police service. The ‘flying squads’ were created to support

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patrol during the busy summer months. The mandate was for SROs to provide back up and assistance to patrol in the divisions experiencing the heaviest call volumes. SROs requested dispatch to 'lower priority' calls like noise and traffic complaints, 'trouble with persons' complaints, 911 'trouble not known' calls, alarms, and disturbances involving intoxicated people. Chief Knecht recognized the inaugural flying squad as contributing to improved overall crime statistics.

The success of the flying squad model resulted in its deployment for the next four years, running through to the summer of 2019.

In August 2015, SRO Constable Stacy Miskolczi became the first Canadian police officer to receive the honorary NASRO (National Association of School Resource Officers) Award of Valor. Shortly after 8 a.m. on November 4, 2014, Miskolczi arrived in the main office and was alerted that a teacher had collapsed on the second floor in the school's automotive room. Miskolczi immediately responded and ran to find Mr. Bushey, the automotive class instructor, lying unconscious and unresponsive in the doorway of his office.

Miskolczi quickly responded with chest compressions and advised a staff member to call EMS, while another teacher grabbed the automated external defibrillator (AED) machine. After the AED was attached and shocks were administered Bushey regained his heartbeat but remained unconscious and unresponsive. Chest compressions and resuscitation continued until EMS arrived.

EMS transferred Mr. Bushey to hospital where his condition was deemed critical, as he had just suffered a massive heart attack.

If it wasn't for the help of Miskolczi and the other school staff, Bushey would likely not have survived.

In mid-September of 2015, the SRO Unit partnered with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters in their 'MVP Training Series on Leading Change.' SROs received 'train the trainer' instruction with the overall goal to "engage men and boys working in partnership with women and girls, to identify and respond to issues of gender-based violence in their communities."

The outcome of the training was to ensure SROs had the knowledge, skills and tools to create a climate whereby the abuse of women is seen as completely socially unacceptable. The goal was to create a shift in attitudes and related behaviours, that will over time contribute to a significant reduction in the high rates of gender-based violence. SROs wanted to increase safety for women and girls, to increase change in awareness, and attitudes with respect to gender-based violence. SROs were well placed as community leaders to continue this work.

The SROs were inspired to take action against gender-based violence issues in and out of their schools. The skills and lessons learned from this training continues to be used and has been expanded by SROs as they proactively engage students and student groups in youth topical issues like consent, bystander approach, situational awareness and sexual harassment.

Further into September of 2015, the SRO Unit reached out to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (CCCP) in response to the spike in incidents of the sharing of intimate images by teenagers. Young people were taking intimate iPhone images of themselves and sending it their boyfriend and/or girlfriends. Many of the pictures were then forwarded to others without the consent of the child in the picture. A further troubling trend was the use of the pictures as a tool for the extortion for more pictures under threat of ‘you better send me more, or else.’ The term “sextortion” was coined.

The SRO leveraged its relationship with CCCP and arranged for an education and communication campaign. CCCP members provided the SRO Unit with resource materials to arm youth on issues around online bullying, creation and sharing of intimate images, and awareness of online resources available to take pictures and videos off the internet. A school assembly at the Mother Margaret Mary High School served as the backdrop in launching the ‘NeedHelpNow.ca’ campaign to bring awareness and prevention.

The ever-increasing presence, reliance on, and influence of iPhones and social media apps emphasized the necessity for digital media literacy. SROs experienced an increasing number of investigations where computers and electronic devices were central to deviancy, but also to information and evidence. iPhones and apps were commonly used in situations like bullying, harassment, threats, drugs, robberies and various sexual offences like human trafficking, luring, extortions and child pornography. By virtue of their place in schools, and their reputation as subject matter specialists pertaining to youth trends, SROs became central to the role of investigator and educator. The SRO Unit started working more with other EPS specialty units like ICE, Cyber-Crimes and Tech-Crimes. The Unit also started looking at external organizations for training and expertise to stay cutting-edge and relevant in the complex word of technology and crimes.

In January 2016, the SRO Unit received a presentation on ‘The Impact of Pre-migration Experiences and the Influence of PTSD in Refugee Families.’ The training was facilitated by the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. The Unit learned about the experience of trauma and how trauma could be manifested in an interaction with a student or new Canadian. The SROs gained an appreciation and understanding of the topic of ‘resilience,’ from the context of the ability to achieve positive adaptation despite exposure to significant adversity.

The training had an immediate impact. The SRO at Queen Elizabeth High took the initiative to meet with a class of refugees and new Edmontonians ahead of a scheduled lockdown drill at the school. Recognizing that the alarms, announcements and the associated flurry of activity during a lockdown drill could trigger a negative reaction, the SRO took the time to engage the youth and set them at ease around the purpose for this practice drill and subsequent lockdown and fire alarm drills occurring on a mandatory basis throughout the year. This type of proactive engagement has been adopted and duplicated by other SROs as immigrants continue to relocate and call Edmonton 'home.'

The presentation also opened the door to resources from Multicultural Health Brokers Coop, Catholic Social Services, Africa Centre, the Edmonton Immigrant Services Association and the ASSIST Community Services Centre.

In January 2016, EPS took another step in the growth of its partnership with the Edmonton Public School Board. The Aspen Program of EPSB provides specialized programming supports to students unable to complete their studies at school due to medical conditions, emotional or behavioral challenges, or young offender status.

Although low in student numbers, the school is high in programming supports. Elementary to high school aged students receive support from government, hospital and community partners with the goal of building academic, social and independent living skills.

One Constable with the newly created title of 'Youth Intervention Constable' will provide full time support to the Aspen Program within the supervision of the SRO Unit.

In March 2016, SRO Constables, Rob Brown and Ryan May, attended the Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, USA, for specialized tactics training. Both Constables successfully completed and received 'train the trainer' designation in 'Terrorism Response Tactics' and 'Exterior Response to Active Shooter Events.' As members of the SRO Unit's tactics training portfolio, Rob and Ryan were able to provide leading edge school safety information and scenario training to the entire SRO Unit. The SRO Unit remains committed to providing a highly trained officer with a focus on school emergency preparedness and single officer rapid response to school threats.

The province was facing an opioid crisis, and SROs were witnessing the tragic and deadly affects of opioids in their schools. At the end of May 2016, the SRO Unit received confirmation from Kathleen Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, that its application for the Proceeds of Crime – Drug Awareness and Prevention Grant had been approved. The SROs in the Drug Portfolio of the Unit partnered with AHS, EMS and the EPS Drug Section and developed a youth-focused education campaign called "Buyer Beware – the Hidden Cost of Fentanyl."

Grant money was used for awareness posters, student handouts and towards per diems for local families who volunteered to share their experiences on how the deadly drug impacted their lives. A presentation was developed, and the campaign took off. Students gathered in full assemblies in gymnasiums to learn of the dangers of the drug. They listened to family members in person or in video taped interviews of the devastating consequences of opioids. Demand for this SRO presentation came from non-SRO schools, community groups, conferences and information sessions at the Grey Nuns hospital. The Unit did not have the capacity to satisfy every community request for the presentation. The Edmonton Catholic School District realized this and video recorded a live presentation for use in classroom instruction. Estimates vary, but it has been approximated that over 29,000 students have seen this SRO developed presentation.

The Summer of 2016 saw significant expansion in the SRO program. The closing of community stations opened an opportunity for the transition of front counter employee FTEs into SRO FTEs. (Then) Chief Rod Knecht asked the Unit to pilot the assignment of 4 SROs into 8 junior highs. Edmonton Public School Board and Edmonton Catholic School Division each identified 4 junior highs.

The SRO Unit noticed an alarming number of student mental health concerns and an increasing involvement in mental health interventions. The Unit recognized that when police encounter a youth at a critical intervention point, and the right service is offered, there will be significant positive implications for that youth in need. As resources are scarce, it is only through “doing things differently” that we can accomplish this goal.

From these interventions, SRO Sergeants and AHS heard time and time again that SROs struggled with the lack of communication and direction when dealing with youth mental health concerns – noticing a gap in how to access appropriate resources. SROs were often frustrated with getting consistent medical help, advice or opinions in a timely manner. SRO Sergeants and AHS often heard from SROs that they are leaving their workday concerned for youth who are at risk and not connected to the right people for further assessment and care.

Edmonton lacked a coordinated, strategic approach to addressing youth mental health within our schools. Individual agencies are working with high-risk youth and addressing risk factors that indicate mental health problems, but our SROs are left with a gap in how to access appropriate resources.

For the start of the 2016/17 school year, the SRO Unit and the AHS Youth Mental Health Team started a pilot project that saw AHS mental health and addictions therapists being made available to SROs and dedicated to youth assessments, interventions, follow ups, and referral to support programs.

The pilot proved its worth and the AHS 'School Risk Therapist Team' became a fully funded and sustained program, supporting SROs in every SRO assigned school when dealing with a youth mental health or addictions situation.

In 2018, this initiative was recognized with the AHS 'President's Excellence Award' for 'Outstanding Achievement in Quality Improvement.'

Social media has permeated daily life, closing the physical distances between people all over the world. In the fall of 2016, people were dressing up in "creepy clown" costumes and creating creepy clown websites. This phenomenon occurred throughout North America in the weeks leading up to Halloween. Edmonton joined the list of cities with clown sightings and the associated social media threats for clowns to attend schools to conduct violent attacks, including mass gun shootings. Many Edmonton schools were targeted in these threats for deadly action. Some threat makers were from Edmonton, while it was later learned that some were from as far away as the United States. Unable to take threats lightly, many Edmonton schools were placed into 'lockdown' or 'on-alert' emergency modes. Some students stayed away from school as a precaution. Online threats and physical clown sightings all around Edmonton lead to general disruption to school processes and consumed police resources including SROs, patrol, Y50, cyber-crimes, tech-crimes and CIS staff across all divisions. Subsequent arrests, charges, a heavy communications plans in cooperation with our school partners, and the passing of Halloween eventually led to the clown craze fizzling out.

Like many EPS officers, SROs are community minded and will take advantage of their civil servant position to advance charitable causes. In December of 2016, the SRO Unit, once again, placed support behind a popular local charity, the Christmas Bureau's "Adopt-A-Teen" program. SROs used creative approaches within their schools with the goal of raising money to provide a Christmas gift for teens in need. From setting up donation boxes in schools, to arranging for hot chocolate drives, to chugging a McDonald's Big Mac smoothie, SROs collected money and raised media awareness on another youth-based charity.

2017-2019

In April of 2017, the SRO Unit collaborated again with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (CCCP). Our 2016 expansion into junior high schools revealed the pervasiveness of junior high aged children engaging in "selfie" taking and sharing of their own intimate images. SROs provided intervention and mental health referrals to young teens who suffered through their actions. Some suffered embarrassment, stress, anxiety, depression and cases of self-harm (cutting) over their sharing of pictures. Some

experienced the pressures of “sextortion.” SRO also recognized an increase in online sexual exploitation of teens in general.

CCCP provided SROs with a “train the trainer” information session, highlighting educational materials, options for youth supports and sourced tips for parents dealing with teens and devices.

The SRO Unit arranged for a school assembly presentation at the H.E. Beriault junior high. Lindsay Loob (Policing Relations Liaison, CCCP) arrived from Winnipeg to provide an impactful presentation on online safety and awareness to the entire school population packed inside the gymnasium. A well-attended media availability provided the opportunity to showcase online resources like the NeedHelpNow program, Cybertip program and Project Arachnid.

In the Spring of 2017, SROs were introduced to the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award program for youth. The program empowers young people, ages 14 to 24, to give back to their communities, explore their interests and passions, commit to their health and wellness, and gain an appreciation for the natural environment. With guidance from Award Leaders and assessors, young Canadians are given a supportive, non-competitive youth development platform that deepens self-awareness, builds confidence, and broadens skills and experience to further their growth as active, responsible citizens.

The Award is about individual challenge. The young person is encouraged to examine themselves, their interests, abilities, and ambitions, then set personal challenges in areas of community contribution, skill learning, physical fitness and overcoming an identified adventure.

On November 7, 2018, Princess Royal Princess Anne presented the Award to 25 Alberta youths in a ceremony in Edmonton.

SRO Constable Bruce McGregor, working out of Aspen School with a relatively high needs population of students, was very keen to introduce the Award to these students as he felt they could challenge themselves further. With much coaching and persistent encouragement from the SRO, two of these young men were able to individually achieve their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, one of the highest achievements a youth can receive in Canada, despite mental health barriers, addiction, justice involvement and unstable home environments.

The SRO unit participated in the planning committee responsible for the Capital Region Distracted Driving Youth Conference held at the Leduc Recreation Centre on October 3, 2017. SROs arranged for and coordinated bus transport around the City so the dozens of Edmonton high school aged students could join hundreds of youth from outside Edmonton for participation in the one-day event. The youth received presentations from

dignitaries around the dangers of distracted driving. Many of the students returned to their schools and created awareness initiatives (posters, videos, online messaging) to promote safer driving. This was a one-time event funded by a grant from the Ministry of Transportation.

In June of 2017, SRO Constable Tammy Buchberger received the Order of St. John Life-saving Award. The award-winning Constable was commended for her quick response, her calm, confident actions, and for her knowledge and use of first aid in helping to save a life. The official citation was presented by Her Honour, the Honourable Lois E. Mitchell, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

On October 20, 2016, SRO Constable Tammy Buchberger was occupied with a meeting with Strathcona High School staff. An administrative assistant interrupted the meeting, explaining that someone was having a heart attack out front of the school. Tammy and school principal Hans VanGinhoven immediately ran outside to the parking lot where their attention was drawn to a man in a car.

Tammy conducted a first aid assessment of the occupant of the driver seat. The man was not responsive or conscious. His eyes were open and locked forward. Tammy and Principal VanGinhoven lifted the man out of the vehicle and lay him down on the ground. They could not detect a pulse or breathing. They immediately began chest compressions. Tammy persisted even after feeling ribs break in the process. Several minutes passed before another school staff member, EFD and EMS arrived on scene to continue medical treatment. The man was rushed off to the emergency room.

Hours later, Tammy received news that doctors credited the quick and decisive actions of Tammy and Principal VanGinhoven in saving the man's life. This was great news for not only Tammy and the Principal, but for this man's loved ones, including the man's daughter, a Strathcona high school student he dropped off for school that morning of the heart attack, two other children and a large extended family.

On August 31, 2017, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) voted in favour of temporarily removing officers from secondary schools. The TDSB Board of Trustees decided they would suspend the program until completion of the review in November. The program was almost suspended this past May, with critics citing that an independent academic study had never been done in the nearly decade-old program. Further, teachers and school workers addressed the negative impacts of police presence in schools, such as racialized students feeling harassed, undocumented students being asked for citizenship status and situations becoming unnecessarily criminalized. The program has never been reinstated.

In response to the decision by the TDSB, Joan Carr, the Superintendent of Edmonton Catholic Schools provided EPS with an unsolicited email on August 31, 2017:

The EPS School Resource Officer (SRO) program has truly become an essential component in our District. It is 'community policing' in its purest form. For the past 38 years, our District has been part of the SRO program as officers connect with junior and senior high students every day.

Last year, the SRO program was expanded to include four of our junior high schools and this school year the program will be expanded and support SROs at eight Catholic high schools.

We are extremely blessed to have this valuable program in our schools....

In October of 2017, the SROs attended the EPS Joint Bureau Meeting to provide a review and discussion of the school emergency protocols known as 'lockdown' and 'on alert.' The SRO Unit recognized occasional misuse of the terminology by front line officers. The misuse often caused confusion in schools and occasionally resulted in schools subjecting both staff and students to a more elevated emergency response than was required.

The SRO Unit took the initiative to bring awareness at the Bureau level. The Unit worked with EPS Corporate Communications to devise an infographic, a quick and colorful reference guide to assist members in making the correct choice (attached via the link below). The Unit created a 'Service Directive' to provide further clarity and ensure a mandatory review of the information by all officers.

This triggered the SROs to conduct a project to update school floor plans. A group of SROs were assigned the responsibility of updating the EPS records management system to ensure all school floor plans were available and current. Furthermore, this working group of SROs provided an updated list of the names and addresses of businesses, day cares, group homes, places of worship and other locations of interest in and around schools (known as a 'Location of Interest' report) in the event a police operation necessitated contact with these places.

The 'Pink Shirt Day' initiative is an annual event in Canada that brings awareness of the negative and often violent ramifications of bullying. Bullying comes in many forms, including covert and overt discrimination that's often based on racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, and/or anti-Semitism, among others. These create systemic barriers, harassment, and hate, and can lead to violence.

February 28 was the official Pink Shirt day in 2018. The SRO Unit championed the sale of Pink Shirt pins for proceeds in support of the development and operation of Big Brothers Big Sisters Anti-Bullying Programs. SRO Constable Joshua Maeda and his

school (M.E. LaZerte) took Pink Shirt Day awareness to great heights, inspiring his school to set up a carnival-like day of celebrations with music, art, bake sale, information booths and most students sporting pink bright pink clothing. SRO involvement was further distinguished by being the only EPS officers allowed to wear the Pink Shirt pin on our uniforms. In 2019, the campaign earned \$22,000 to help kids impacted by bullying

In September of 2018, the SRO Unit met with the planning team for EPS's emerging 'DiversionFirst' Unit. DiversionFirst recognized the work of the SRO Unit in diverting youth away from the criminal justice system. They also recognized the SROs as the creator of the robust PAYOFF program, where youth in SRO schools were given the opportunity to avoid fines by spending time with the SROs in a school sanctioned engagement activity. The SRO Unit agreed to pilot the DiversionFirst program as SROs had close and consistent contact with youth in their schools. The piloting of the program through SRO referrals has led to the realization of DiversionFirst as a permanent full-scale, full-time Unit with a Sergeant, a Youth Programs Coordinator and soon to include 5 Constables before the end of 2020.

On October 17, 2018, Cannabis was formally declared legalized in Canada. This was impactful not only for police in Canada, but significant for SROs. SROs and school staff regularly come across small amounts of cannabis and cannabis products in the possession students.

To bring awareness to youth, Health Canada launched the Pursue Your Passion interactive engagement tour. The Government is taking a public health approach to legalizing and strictly regulating cannabis to keep it out of the hands of youth and to keep profits out of the hands of criminals and organized crime. To support the new legislation, the Government has an ongoing robust public education campaign to inform Canadians, especially youth, about the health risks associated with cannabis use.

Tour organizers had requests from cities across the country to be the first to have the tour. The EPS SRO Unit was able to convince the organizers and managed to secure the first ever presentation. Adding to the significance was the fact the launch date in Edmonton matched the date of legalization. Jasper Place high school students enjoyed the inaugural show and the two day run was met with enthusiasm by students and organizers.

In February of 2019, multiple Edmonton schools received school shooting and bomb threats by way of phone calls to the main office. Some schools went into full lockdown or on alert mode. It was soon evident that similar phone threats were being received in Calgary. In the case of one Calgary school, a full-scale evacuation forced terrified and crying elementary kids trudging through -20 Celsius temperatures to the evacuation site several minutes away.

Prompt information sharing between the SRO Unit and EPS Cyber Crimes Unit made it clear that a large-scale ‘swatting’ hoax was at play. The Edmonton police investigators determined the calls had come from the U.K. and connected with law enforcement agencies across Europe and North American, including the FBI, RCMP, National Crime Agency (United Kingdom), Europol and the Scotland Police.

EPS spearheaded ‘Project Gigabyte’ a six-month long investigation leading to charges of three suspects in Scotland. They were linked to more than 80 hoax calls and in many instances, created fear and a disruption to schools and critical infrastructure around North America and Europe.

The quick cooperation between the SRO Unit, the Edmonton school boards and the EPS Cyber Crimes Unit, provided the opportunity to bring calm and assurances for students and families in Edmonton. The reciprocal trust between EPS and the school boards avoided unnecessary panic, while maintaining vigilance. Focus instead was put into evidence gathering, education, a review of school emergency procedures, and ultimately, the successful identification and charges of those responsible.

EPS SRO Constable Christine Debienne is a member of the EPS LGBTQ2S+ Employee Resource group. Group members provide other EPS staff with a formal mechanism to enable lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified and queer staff to come together to share information and support.

In June 2019, Constable Debienne attended the 2nd World LGBTQ Conference for Criminal Justice Professionals in Toronto, Ontario. Constable Debienne is valued in the SRO Unit as a youth referral resource for LGBTQ2S+ youth. She has a role in educating the SRO Unit for a better understanding of the LGBTQ2S+ community by discussing queer history and its impact on shared historical trauma. She provided an appreciation of some of the current challenges that queer people face daily, how it impacts their overall wellbeing, and why this affects how they react to police and other first responders.

In August of 2019, the SRO Unit reconvened for SRO Orientation Week training. Training is arranged prior to the start of the school year by the SRO Sergeants with the goal to provide information, awareness and discussion in line with societal and youth trends. This year’s training was highlighted with a full day with Dr. Farha Shariff. Dr. Shariff is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Secondary Education, and Academic Colleague in the Educational Policy Studies Department at the University of Alberta. Her main role is to work with pre-service teachers in their understanding of culture, race, schooling and curriculum.

The workshop provided SROs with an introduction to some of the contemporary issues facing educational contexts with regards to race, culture and school. Notions of what it

means to help provide a “safe” and “caring” environment were explored in different contexts from sociological, philosophical, and ethical perspectives and what it means to be a compassionate, ethical and proactive community ally for students.

SROs became aware our understandings and assumptions about schools and students from diverse backgrounds and developed skills related to critical social justice and anti-racist pedagogy. The workshop elevated our skills to proactively identify and address school concerns or problems related to race, culture and schools.

SROs explored ways in which to effect change within the school and community by implementing strategies that elevated capacity to continue to be a visible presence through our work in counselling, structured class presentations, lectures, continual interaction, mentoring and distribution of educational resource materials.

The summer of 2019 saw a significant step in the SRO program and within EPS as an organization. The Edmonton Islamic Academy entered into the EPS SRO partnership. This represented the first expansion into a school board outside of Edmonton Public and Catholic schools. The Academy will have the services of a full time SRO.

The kindergarten to grade twelve school of 700+ students is further unique. Owned by the Arabian Muslim Association (Canadian Islamic Center), the Academy houses an atrium, gymnasium, cafeteria and prayer space that can open and accommodate over 10,000 worshippers at once. Worship ceremonies regularly overlap with school hours.

Chief McFee, (then) Deputy Chief Chad Tawfik and the SRO supervisory team have experienced great hospitality as the school regularly includes EPS in school celebrations, presentations showing appreciation to community partners and tours of the beautiful facility.

At the end of the first year of the partnership, Principal Abraham Abougouche offered the following comment on his SRO Constable Brian Rutherford:

Brian is a true gentleman and exceptional police officer. We are privileged to have him as a part of our team. I look forward to continuing to work with Brian and making our school as safe as possible. We thank the EPS, including Chief McFee, for the opportunity to host an SRO. Brian is a perfect match for our school and context.

SROs recognized a spike in vaping in schools. School partners reported vaping as being very disruptive to the school environment and a leading reason for school suspensions. Also troubling was the lack of long-term research on the risks of vaping. An early selling feature of vapes was its alleged value in harm reduction and its contribution to the

cessation of cigarette smoking. The flashy advertisement and wide range of flavors proved very appealing to youth. A spike in use by youth was obvious.

In September 2019, the University of Alberta Faculty of Nursing collaborated with the SRO Unit in the Youth V.A.P.E. (Vaping Awareness Prevention and Empowerment) program. Third and fourth-year community nursing students are given an assignment to design an education and awareness project directed at junior high and high school students. Nursing students then incorporate an SRO created presentation into their own; with the intention of providing the audience a dual messaging that touches on health and legal awareness.

The students involved in the Edmonton-based project use clinical community health hours to canvass local schools alongside the SROs and educate youth on the health risks and consequences of vaping through presentations and resource materials.

A U of A student applied and was approved for a grant from Health Canada under its Substance Use and Addiction Program. U of A and SROs are hopeful for a continuation of this collaboration when the pandemic allows.

2020 – present

March of 2020 saw the unprecedented closure of schools due to the pandemic. The SRO Unit recognized that service to youth would take on a different form. With the support of EPS Senior Management, the Unit planned and transitioned into the Youth Enhanced Deployment.

SROs recognized the loss of community support and community surveillance of students in schools could lead to new struggles and challenges for youth. For many, schools provided structure, mental health supports, normalcy, an escape from challenges at home, and a place youth could count on for a nutritious meal or two.

In the following months, SROs checked in regularly with their school partners. Any identified concerns could now be followed up by the SRO through a ‘check on welfare’ home visit. SROs arranged for community supports and follow up services as required.

SROs monitored the list of calls available for dispatch and responded as a youth-focused officer who was comfortable and proficient with the service of youth. SROs assisted with youth ‘hot spot’ policing, going to areas of the city identified as ‘spiking’ in terms of youth related concerns. SROs assisted with missing youth calls and assisted through professional referrals; recognizing that ‘running away’ was often an indicator of a greater challenge in the life of a young person.

The pandemic also provided an opportunity to reach out with a very humanitarian approach. With the transition to online learning, SROs assisted schools with Chromebook deliveries, and partnered with the Edmonton Food Bank to deliver countless food hampers to families in need. Several food drop-offs resulted in the realization that some children were struggling with mental health issues, exposure to domestic violence, or the need for intervention with Children's Services.

On September 04, 2020, the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) Board of Trustees endorsed the decision to suspend the Edmonton Police Service's (EPS) School Resource Officer (SRO) program for the 2020-21 school year while an independent review of the SRO program is conducted.

Current EPSB SRO members will no longer be referred to as 'SROs' and will be deemed 'Youth Enhanced Deployment (YED) Constables.' YED Constables will continue to work within the Youth Support Branch under the existing YED model, with a city-wide focus on youth and their families.

Some of the YED Constables will be loaned to the Navigation & Coordination Branch to support two initiatives with Alberta Health Services; the YPACT pilot and the Community Treatment Order pilot.

The YED model will incorporate the following levels of service:

1. Mobile Workstation (MWS) dispatched calls, particularly ones involving youth complainants (inclusive of calls from EPSB).
2. Attending to 'spiking' at-risk and high-risk youth according to EPS analytics.
3. Following up with vulnerable youth identified through reviewed FYI reports, the HELP Team or other Community partners involved with youth.
4. Assisting with the Assertive Community Outreach Team - 'ACOT' initiative (collaborating with AHS on interventions for youth struggling with mental health or addictions issues during regular school hours).
5. Attending schools for positive youth engagement opportunities in consultation with CPB Crime Suppression Branch – Community Engagement Teams and Community Relations Section.
6. Assisting SROs in the Edmonton Catholic School Division or the Edmonton Islamic Academy.
7. Responding to identified youth 'hot spot' geographical areas.

The SRO Unit Today

8 SROs in 8 full time ECSD high schools	17 FTE position for the YED program
3 SROs in 6 shared ECSD jr. high schools	1 Staff Sergeant
1 full-time SRO in the Edmonton Islamic	3 Sergeants

Academy	
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Partners

- Africa Centre
- Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta Solicitor General
- Alberta Works
- ALERT
- BGS Enterprises
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton
- Braided Journeys
- Canadian Centre for Child Protection
- Catholic Social Services
- Children's Services
- Christmas Bureau
- City of Edmonton
- Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord
- Crime Stoppers
- Edmonton Blood Donor Clinic
- Edmonton Catholic School Division
- Edmonton Fire Cadets
- Edmonton Fire Rescue Services
- Edmonton Islamic Academy
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Public School Board
- Edmonton's Food Bank
- EMS Edmonton
- Homeward Trust
- Kids Upfront
- MacEwan College Leadership Course for Cadets
- Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- No Stone Left Alone
- Oilers Group
- RCMP
- Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton
- Sports Central
- The Family Centre
- University of Alberta Faculty of Nursing
- YMCA Edmonton

- YOUCAN
- Youth Empowerment and Support Services
- Zebra Centre