

northwest

Who Ya Gonna Call?

Queer crisis response team is looking for a few good volunteers

by Malka Geffen

No one ever anticipates a traumatic event. But when they occur, we rely on our police force to respond quickly and efficiently. With the pressing details of a crime scene, can we expect officers to focus sensitively on our needs as victims?

According to Danny Rosen, a transgender member of the Sexual Minorities Crisis Response Team, the police have their hands full. "The team allows a police officer to focus on his job and allows people affected by the event to have a focus for their concerns," he said. "Sometimes it's hard for people to understand that officers are not ignoring their needs. [The team] gives community members someone who's aware of the whole process to help them through a very critical time in their life."

A former president of Northwest Gender Alliance, Rosen was active in the Sexual Minorities Roundtable, which brings community members together with law enforcement agents. He learned about the crisis response team through the roundtable.

"The police department has not had some of the best relationships with the community, which is why I got involved with the roundtable," he said. "I joined the crisis response team because, in times of trauma and stress, having people there who have an understanding of what's special to that community helps build that relationship."

Rosen completed the 40-plus hours of required crisis response training through the Portland Police Bureau in 2002. Committed to being on call for one week every three weeks, he carries a pager and will drop what he's doing or wake up in the middle of the night to arrive on the scene within 30 minutes.

"I've only been called six times in about two years," said Rosen. "It's a commitment, but it's not burdensome."

While calls might be few and far between, Rosen said there is always apprehension involved. "It's kind of a two-way street to bridge the awkward gap between parties," he said. "No one knows the proper etiquette in the situation—people are wondering what they can really talk to the police about while the police are trying to be sensitive to the community."

Rosen recalled a suicide he was summoned to involving a lesbian couple. "There was confusion over where the suicide occurred and whether it was truly a suicide. Obviously if someone walks in and is concerned about their partner, there will be a disturbance of evidence and the scene. The police were trying to sort through and figure what happened," he said. "I was able to talk with the partner and members of her community and get resources in to talk to investigators about that person's lifestyle. It's important to get the players together and get them to talk."

According to Deborah Monk, Portland Police

Bureau crisis response team senior administrative specialist, the first team was formed in July 1994 after North and Northeast

Portland community members and the bureau formed a partnership to address the high number of deaths because of gang- and drug-related violence. She said that within the first year of operation, the team responded to almost 30 calls, ranging from homicide, suicide and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome to other traumatic incidents. Because of its successful efforts, the Asian, Hispanic and Sexual Minorities Crisis Response Teams were established in 1995 and 1996. According to Monk, Portland was one of the first police departments in the nation to form partnerships with its culturally diverse communities.

"Team members are trained to support victims of traumatic events and their families and loved ones following a crisis," she said. They provide immediate on-site support and assist with coordination of additional support and services as needed. They act as a liaison between the police, the community at large and family. They notify family, friends, school, work and anyone else who might be affected by the situation. They accompany an injured person to the emergency room and assist with follow-up referrals to appropriate agencies, including victim assistance programs.

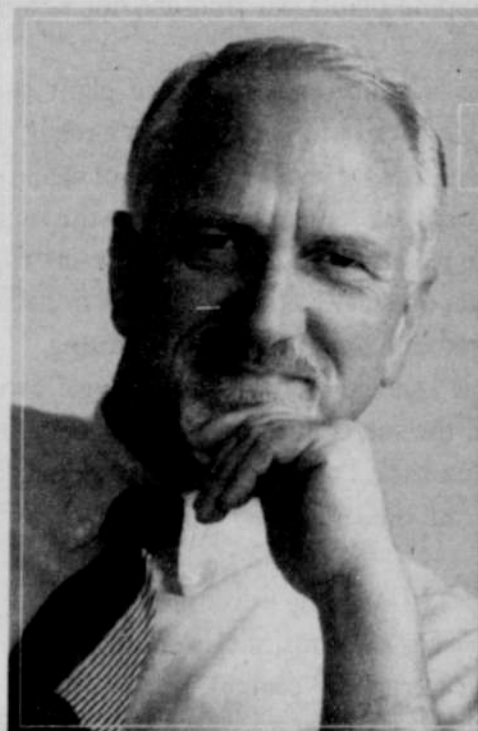


From left, Officer Marci Jackson heads up the Sexual Minorities Crisis Response Team with William Warren and Deborah Monk.

Support does not end at the crisis scene. Team members also assist with funeral arrangements and attend related services. According to Rosen, team members can be in contact with the victims for a couple of days or weeks, depending on their personal support network. "There are various things people don't think about at the time of a crisis, and we can help them realize there are resources out there," he said.

But according to Rosen, more help is needed. "Some teams have 40 or 50 members, while ours has under 10," he said. "Anybody should join who feels they want to do something for our community, who has some life experience dealing with death, trauma and other serious events. Someone who has professionalism and doesn't bring any baggage with them is ideal," Rosen said. "You can't have community policing without community involvement and commitment. We need to keep up community awareness and its relationship with the force." 10

For more information about the SEXUAL MINORITIES CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM contact Officer Marci Jackson at 503-823-2095 or mjackson@portlandpolice.org.



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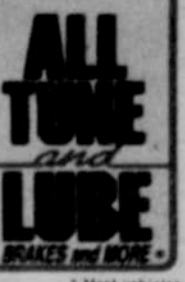
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