

There's Already an Alternative to Calling the Police *continued from page 6*

last year; less than 1% of them needed assistance from police, and no one has ever been seriously injured. "That type of mentality really contributes to the othering that has permitted oppression and marginalization to persist," Black said. "By and large, folks who are unhoused, who are experiencing behavioral health issues, are much more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators."

CAHOOTS differs from other mental health partnerships with the police in important ways: Staff employ "unconditional positive regard," a phrase from psychology that means complete support and acceptance for the people they encounter, and the organization is run as a "consensus collective," rather than a hierarchy. Every employee's voice carries equal weight.

Each crisis worker completes 500 hours of training in areas including medical care, conflict resolution and crisis counseling. Around 60% of CAHOOTS' patients are homeless, and about 30% have severe or persistent mental illness. "The patient that we're serving is the expert in their situation," Black said. "They know that we're a voluntary resource and that we're not going to take their rights away just because we've shown up on scene."

Dorothy Siemens, an artist who grew up in Eugene and still lives there, said that she, her family and her friends all call CAHOOTS, rather than the police, when they see someone in distress. The option makes her feel like a more responsible community member. When Siemens managed a downtown cafe, she used the service often. "I really don't have the tools, and I think the police in our community also don't have the tools" for people in crisis, she said. "There really shouldn't be one group of people who is expected to cover all of those bases, especially a group of people who are weaponized and militarized. ... Their training shows them 'that's something I have to respond to with force.'"

INCREASINGLY, COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS ARE reaching out to CAHOOTS, hoping to develop similar programs. Since 2013, the city of Portland, Oregon, just a couple hours north of Eugene, has seen a 60% increase of "unwanted person" calls to 911, according to a *Willamette Week* analysis of Portland Police Bureau data. In 2017, an *Oregonian* analysis found that 52% of arrests involved homeless individuals, even though they comprise less than 3% of Portland's population.

In 2019, Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty and Street Roots, a homeless advocacy publication, introduced Portland Street Response, a police alternative based on the CAHOOTS model.

The pilot program, which was officially approved and funded by the city last November, focused on a southeast Portland neighborhood where 911 calls were on the rise. The program is now on hold because of the coronavirus, but Hardesty hopes to get on the ground soon. As the city considers cutting its police budget, Hardesty is pushing for \$4.8 million to go towards Portland Street Response instead. "We are long overdue for investments in police alternatives, including



Ashley Barnhill Hubbard, center, and Christian Hawks, left, speak with the parents of a young man having a mental health crisis at the University of Oregon, in Eugene, Oregon. Each CAHOOTS crisis worker completes 500 hours of training in areas including medical care, conflict resolution, and crisis counseling. Thomas Patterson

Portland Street Response," Hardesty, the first Black woman elected to Portland's city council, said in a statement to *High Country News*. "There's no doubt we need to reimagine what it looks like to get the right responder to the right situation at the right time."

Nationwide protests have spurred renewed urgency for programs like these, which show a stark contrast to the typical police response. This month, the Coalition for Police Accountability in Oakland presented a final report to the city council to begin its own pilot program, MACRO, this summer. In Denver, in May, Vinnie Cervantes worked as a medic with the Denver Alliance for Street Health Response, which he also directs. It's part of a mutual aid nexus that emerged during protests in the city over the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Cervantes and others treated protesters who were left bleeding and bruised after police fired off tear gas, rubber bullets and flash-bangs and pummeled them with batons. To Cervantes and others, it was yet another example of how quickly police resort to excessive force. "Our community stepped up to collaborate and create a network of support to solve a larger public safety crisis," Cervantes said. "That's something we can take beyond protest."

Policing and jails account for 30% of Denver's overall budget. The repurposing of those funds would be a huge opportunity for collective efforts

like Denver Alliance, which resembles the CAHOOTS model. But no single model will work for every city, said

Cervantes. Each program needs to be adaptive and reflect its community; Eugene, after all, is much smaller and has a whiter population than Denver, Oakland or Portland. "It's really important that it is community-based, by people that look like us and that have our shared experience," said Cervantes, who is Latino. Otherwise, the program will only replicate the same systemic problems.

In June, Cervantes' organization helped start a pilot program in partnership with the city of Denver, called Support Team Assisted Response. Cervantes hopes to develop a full-fledged program by 2021. But, for now, on the streets, "we're literally seeing our own proof of concept of how we can take ownership of crisis ourselves, and have solutions," he said. "We don't have to view everyone as a threat."

This article was originally published in the June 2020 issue of High Country News. Anna V. Smith is an assistant editor for High Country News.

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

REVISED NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

In the Matter of the Rate Adjustments for the Columbia County Transfer Station

The Notice of Public Hearing for this matter has been revised to provide information regarding virtual public participation information and clarify the applicability of the proposed special handling fee.

1. The Board of County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on Wednesday, August 12, 2020, at or after 10:00 a.m. in the Commissioners' Meeting Room, Room 310, at the Columbia County Courthouse, 230 Strand Street, St. Helens, Oregon.
2. The purpose of this hearing is to consider the following proposed rate adjustments effective August 14, 2020:
 - The Columbia County Solid Waste Advisory Committee is recommending no change the Transfer Station disposal rate as provided in Section 5.01(A) of the Columbia County Solid Waste Ordinance due to COVID19. The rates for FY 2021 will remain the same as FY 2020.
 - Due to the need for special handling of a variety of boats and recreational vehicles (RVs) for disposal at the transfer station, Columbia County staff and the management team at the transfer station are requesting approval of a special handling fee of \$80 per vehicle, except for all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, scooters and personal watercraft, to be charged at the time of payment. This will be in addition to all current fees.
3. This is a public hearing. Interested parties may appear and be heard. Columbia County does not discriminate on the basis of disability and will provide reasonable accommodations in accordance with the County's ADA Policy. To request accommodations or to review the County's ADA Policy, please contact the Board of Commissioners' Office at 503-397-4322.
4. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interested parties may participate in this hearing virtually via phone or electronic means using the phone number or link below.

Call-in phone: 646-749-3112 One-touch dial-in:
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Access Code: 367-944-893

Click link from your computer, tablet or smartphone:
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5. The hearing will be held according to the procedures established in the Columbia County Solid Waste Ordinance.
6. For additional information regarding the proposed rate adjustments, please contact Kathy Boutin-Pasterz, Solid Waste Program Coordinator, at 503-397-7259 or by visiting the County's website at <https://www.columbiacountyor.gov/departments/SolidWaste>

Dated this 24th day of July, 2020
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY,
OREGON
Alex Tardif, Chair

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