



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER  
Nicole Sykes and her son, Maral, keeping it cool at Peninsula Park in north Portland.

# City Reacts to Use of Force Report

## Trends draw praise, alarm

BY JAKE THOMAS  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A city auditor report on the use of force by police has drawn mixed reactions from city officials.

The report analyzes data from 2007 through 2008 to provide a snapshot of police use of force in Portland, revealing trends that have garnered praise as well as alarm.

Complaints concerning the use of force by police are down substantially, from 118 in 2004 to 50 in 2008. The report also showed that Portland police use force in less than one percent of all calls for service and less than five percent of arrests.

However, the report also revealed more disturbing trends.

It revealed that 29 percent of people who are the receiving end of force from a police officer are African American. Thirty four percent of people

who have a gun pointed at them by a police officer are also black, according to the report.

The report also concluded that while police are using force on fewer mentally ill suspects overall, their use of Tasers on this population has risen, with 26.4 percent more reports. It notes that people with mental illness tend to be armed more frequently, and more combative.

It also showed disparities in where police use force. Twenty nine percent of all use of force reports were generated in the police bureau's East Precinct, while only 10 percent came from North Precinct.

Forty one percent of all use of force reports were generated by just 15 percent of all officers who submitted more than five use of force reports.

Police Chief Rosie Sizer received a sanguine reception when presenting the report to Portland's Citizen Review Committee, a nine-member panel that helps improve police accountability. The committee was so pleased with the drop in po-

lice use of force that there was talking of breaking out champagne glasses, and barely touched on the more negative findings in the report.

"I think this whole effort has been extraordinarily good for the Police Bureau, and it's been extraordinarily good for our relationship with our community," said Sizer, who attributed the drop in use of force to the implementation of recommendations made by a task force in 2007 that called for better training for officers.

The only criticism came from Dan Handelman of Portland Copwatch who pointed out that the bureau had no new recommendations to further improve the Police Bureau's use of force numbers. He also complained that the figures don't count the pointing of a Taser weapon toward a suspect as a police use of force.

Sizer also presented the report to City Council last week.

Mayor Sam Adams raised the issue of the African Americans being disproportionately on the receiving end of force by police, which Sizer said the bureau would continue to look into, which was reinforced by Michael Bingham, the chair of

the Citizen Review Committee.

"This is a continuing process," noted Bingham. Commissioner Amanda Fritz questioned Sizer on how the report notes that one of the driving reasons why the police use of force has dropped 35 percent is because of change in reporting requirements. Officers are only required to make a report when the use of force causes injury.

"You can presume there is some level of control and some level of pain compliance in this move to get someone into handcuffs," said Fritz, who also asked why force is used so disproportionately in East Precinct.

Sizer said that the report still shows that police use of force is down, but couldn't explain the disparity in use of force between precincts, speculating that it might be because of problems in the area or the "culture of the precinct."

"There are neighborhoods that I think are feeling under siege," she said.

Also present was recently-elected City Auditor LaVonne Griffin-Valade, who said that her office was looking into police use of Tasers.



Rosie Sizer

# Hot! Hot! Hot!

continued ▲ from Front

with a pink visor before scurrying into the spray of the fountain.

Sara Ryan found herself in the unenviable position of not having air conditioning. She tried going into the mountains for a hike in hopes of cooling down. She eventually made her way to the park with her son, Lochlan, to cool off by the fountain.

Christina Thompson has air conditioning at home, but wanted to get outdoors, and brought her 20-month-old

son, Hayden, to the park to try and cool off.

"It was really tempting to stay in the house," she said.

Her friend Nicole Sykes brought her 19-month-old son, Maral, to the park as well. Both of them sip Gatorade and water while their children run through the fountain.

High temperatures in Portland were expected to lower into the 90s by the end of the week with temperatures cooling to the mid 80s by the weekend.

continued ▲ from Front

like a light going out."

Before going to prison, Big Back said she was heavily into street life and substance abuse. After going to Coffee Creek and using Red Lodge Transition Services she anchored herself in her culture, which was instrumental in getting her life back on track.

"I just got lost," she said. "It brought me back to myself."

Now, thanks to Red Lodge, she's gotten her 19-year-old daughter back in her custody and is starting school at Mt. Hood Community College, hop-

ing to work with teenagers one day.

In prison Red Lodge provides a number of services to Native American women. Once a year they have a sacred foods feast where huckleberries, salmon, and venison is served. Women sing traditional songs and use native methods of conflict resolution during sweat lodges and talking circles. They also perform a "smudging" ritual, where a trained person uses smoke and ash to purify participants.

For many women, reestablishing this cultural connection is vital in their recovery.

Myrna Taylor began drinking heavily after losing her husband nearly a decade ago. Family members and friends came out of the woodwork to exploit her vulnerable situation, leaving her with little resources. Her low point came when she badly injured someone while driving drunk, which landed her at Coffee Creek.

She felt lost and alone. But Red Lodge helped her connect to her roots, and gave her the social support to transition back to normal life.

"It really helped me do the healing I needed to do," she said. "I would have come out

angry."

Red Lodge has plans to expand. The organization has gotten a number of grants, and has regular art shows across the state featuring the work of current and former inmates the sales of which go into its coffers.

Eventually Red Lodge wants to set up an agricultural cooperative in rural Clackamas County where inmates can develop job skills. The details are still being hashed out, but it will likely have something to do with traditional native medicines with sustainability element attached to it.



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