

# **2019 National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award Program: Watch Commander Program, Little Mobile Libraries and the San Bernardino County Probation External Affairs Unit**

## **Watch Commander Program**

After the December 2<sup>nd</sup> Terrorist Attack, the San Bernardino County Probation Department re-evaluated their ability to better serve the community in the event of a crisis with the below objectives identified:

- Better management response to an incident
- Improved communication with the law and justice community
- Mentor field officers for uniformity of operating procedures

The Field Services Watch Commander (WC) Pilot Program was proposed to address these objectives, with the program officially kicking off on June 25, 2018. As of December 2018, the WC had responded to approximately 200 calls ranging from routine to critical incidents like barricaded subjects. The WC group received Incident Command Systems (ICS) training to better manage incident responses. Additionally, communications were improved with many partners, particularly sheriff's dispatch. These improvements included a better understanding of each other's roles as well as upgrading technology application to help our department accomplish its mission. Finally, the WC pilot program provided another avenue of mentorship for our new generation of field officers. This mentoring had an unintended consequence of sharing the department's culture which further enhanced our ability to focus on our mission.

## **Little Mobile Libraries**

In 2016, research indicated 63% of this County's third graders did not meet the 2016 California English language arts/literacy standards and over 32 million adults nationwide could not read. Accordingly, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors enacted the Vision 2 Read Campaign, championing the importance of literacy in our community.

In support of the Vision 2 Read Campaign, the San Bernardino County Probation Department partnered with The Learning Club to develop the Little Mobile Library Program. This collaboration benefitted not only the community by offering reading opportunities but additionally, the youth in the Probation Department's Gateway Program were able to build the libraries from raw materials to gain a working knowledge of building skills and fostering creativity. Upon completion, each library was delivered by the youth to the various department lobbies as well as external locations in the community.

Little Mobile Libraries provide free, age appropriate books for the children in our communities. Once children have finished reading the book, they have two options. They can either return the book to any mobile library to be made available for other children to enjoy or they may give the book to one of their friends to read. Either option allows for numerous children to read books and pass them along for others to enjoy. The Little Mobile Libraries location encourages parents/caregivers to read with the youth, fostering an increase in literacy.

### **External Affairs Unit**

The most powerful tool in the External Affairs Unit has been our presence on social media. For more than 110 years, Probation has maintained a vision to provide for the safety, health, and social service needs of county residents by protecting the community and facilitating access to rehabilitative services. To best serve residents, it is important to provide civic education and community engagement that promotes an understanding, appreciation of, and stories about probation services and successes. In short, we promote what we do and why we do it. In recent years, however, increasing numbers of citizens have developed negative views of law enforcement and services received through law enforcement. As a result, many have disengaged from positive views of law enforcement, supporting family members involved in the justice system, or seeking assistance from probation. Another result has been, the hesitation of probationers to fully engage in the available programs provided through probation. Recognizing that individuals do not automatically become responsible probationers but must be educated for opportunities, the Probation External Affairs Unit has developed an array of civic education, community engagement and outreach strategies to capitalize on the department's services, probationer success stories, community activities and visibility.