



PORTLAND STREET RESPONSE

SIX-MONTH EVALUATION

Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative

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Acknowledgements

- Report Co-author, Emily Leickly, MS (Portland State University)
- Tremaine Clayton, Britt Urban, Haika Mushi, Heather Middleton, Robyn Burek, and Caryn Brooks (Portland Street Response)
- Melanie Payne, Chelsea LaBar, and Kidus Yared (Bureau of Emergency Communications)
- Kristin Johnson and Karly Edwards (Office of Commissioner Hardesty)
- Street Roots Ambassadors Raven Drake, Gary Barker, Matt Perkins, Anthony Rogers, Chris Pierce, Lee Vaughn, Doug Marks, and River Reese
- Holly Brott (PSU)
- Mike Gority (ImageTrend); Lauren Brown (PPB); Justin Houk (PF&R)
- McKinsey Carroll and Jacen Greene (HRAC)
- Everyone who spoke with us about their experiences with PSR
- This work was funded by the City of Portland Bureau of Fire and Rescue

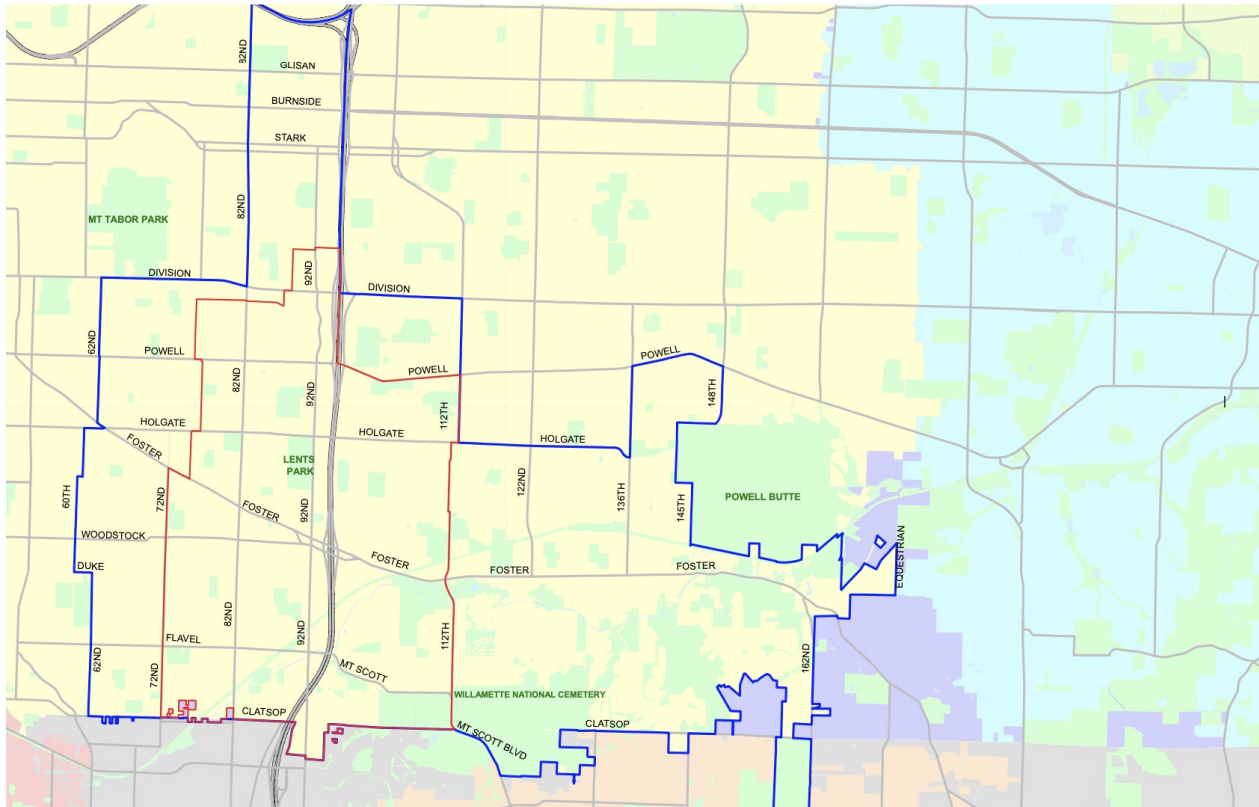
Portland Street Response

- Portland Street Response is a new first responder program for people experiencing homelessness or mental health crisis
- It launched on February 16, 2021 in the Lents neighborhood, operating 10 AM to 6 PM
- The pilot is coordinated by Portland Fire & Rescue (PF&R)



The founding Portland Street Response Team, clockwise from upper left: Community Health Worker Heather Middleton, Mental Health Crisis Clinician Britt Urban, Firefighter/Paramedic Tremaine Clayton, and Community Health Worker Haika Mushi. (Photo Courtesy of City of Portland).

Portland Street Response



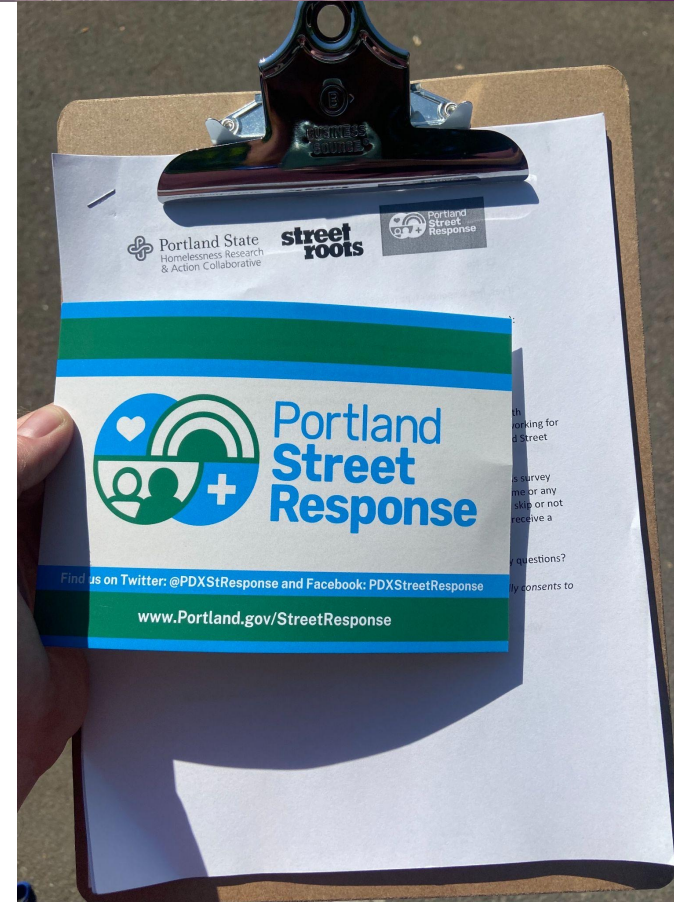
1. A person who is possibly experiencing a mental health crisis, intoxicated, and/or drug affected. This person is either outside or inside of a publicly accessible space such as a business, store, or public lobby
2. A person who is outside and down, not checked
3. A person who is outside and yelling
4. A person who needs a referral for services but does not have access to a phone

- The purpose of this program evaluation is to
 1. Determine the overall effectiveness of the PSR pilot program
 2. Provide suggestions for program refinement and adaptation throughout the pilot year
 3. Provide recommendations for scaling PSR up citywide by the end of the pilot



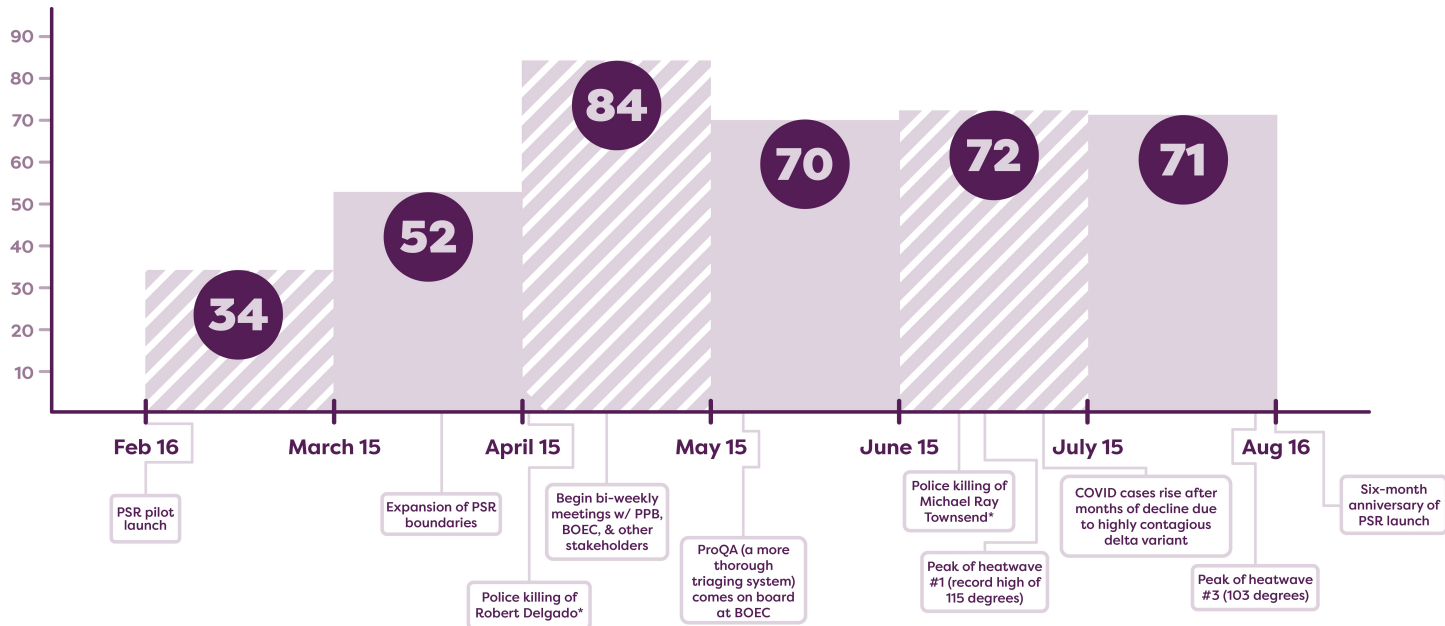
PSR Evaluation

- Mixed-methods evaluation
- Comprehensive, community centered, and includes feedback from a variety of stakeholders and sources
 - Key performance measures and operational metrics
 - Feedback from a variety of stakeholders
 - Triangulates data from multiple sources



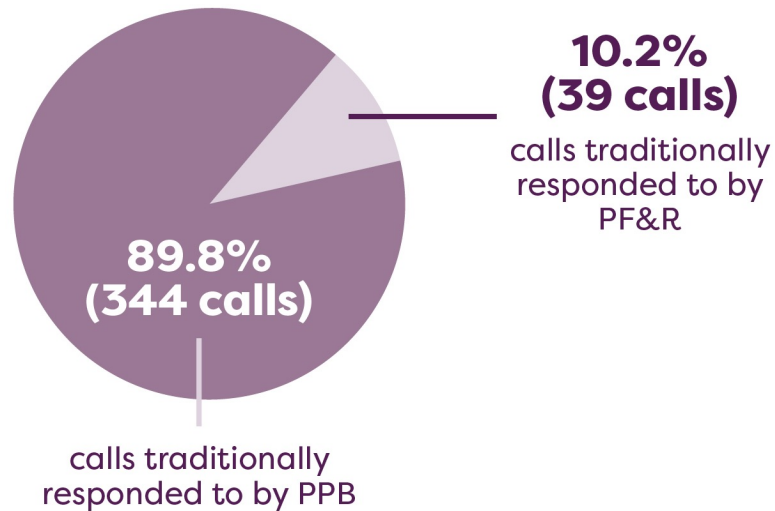
Call Characteristics

In the first six months of the PSR pilot program (Feb. 16, 2021 to Aug. 16, 2021), PSR responded to 383 incidents



**Outside of current PSR service hours, call area, or call criteria*

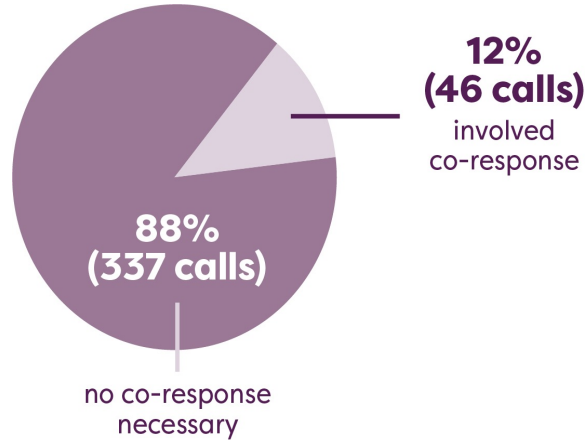
Call Characteristics



Call Characteristics

- Average response time was 12 minutes and 47 seconds
- 90th percentile response time was 21 minutes and 59 seconds
- Average on-scene time was 15 minutes and 3 seconds for all calls, 19 minutes and 20 seconds for calls involving clients

Co-Response



Responder	Responder was Requested by PSR	Responder Requested PSR
PPB	6	10
AMR	11	2
PPB and PF&R	-	1
PPB & AMR	2	-
Project Respond	4	-
Other (e.g., Street Roots Ambassadors)	4	-

Client Outcomes

Outcome	Number of calls	Percent of all calls
Client evaluated, no treatment required	95	24.8%
Client refused evaluation/treatment	62	16.2%
Client treated by PSR and released (per protocol)	21	5.5%
Client treated by PSR, transferred care to ambulance	14	3.7%
Client treated by PSR, refused transport	5	1.3%
Client evaluated, refused treatment and transport	3	0.8%
Cancelled (no client found)	94	24.5%
Cancelled (prior to arrival on scene)	23	6%
Cancelled (no client contact)	19	5%
Assist	31	8.1%
Standby- no service or support provided	3	0.8%
Unknown outcome	13	3.4%

Client Characteristics



67.1%

of client contacts involved someone experiencing homelessness



52.6%

of client contacts involved someone with suspected mental health needs

- 38.4% had suspected needs related to drug or alcohol use
- 31.2% had suspected co-occurring needs
- 56.8% had unmet basic needs
- 4.3% had acute health needs
- 3.4% had chronic health needs

- PSR initiated 24 transports to hospitals, walk-in clinics, and clients' homes
 - 14 clients transferred to AMR for transport to the hospital
 - 5 taxi transports
 - 3 PSR transports
 - 2 family member transports

14 clients (3.7% of all calls) were transported to the hospital for additional care



- Outcome 1: Reduce the number of calls traditionally responded to by police where no crime is being committed
 - The PSR call load represented a 4.6% reduction in total calls that police would have traditionally responded to in the PSR service area during the PSR pilot period and service hours
 - Applying this 4.6% figure out citywide, we estimate that PSR could have responded to 8,528 calls if the program had been operating citywide and 24/7 during the first six months of the pilot

- Outcome 2: Reduce the number of behavioral health and non-emergency calls traditionally responded to by police and fire
 - During the pilot's operating hours and in the PSR service area, we found that PSR activity represented a 22.5% reduction in PPB response on non-emergency welfare checks, unwanted persons calls, and suspicious persons calls
 - During the pilot's operating hours and in the PSR service area, we found that PSR activity represented a reduction of 11.6% in PF&R response on behavioral health calls and illegal burn calls

- Outcome 3: Reduce the number of medically non-life threatening 911 calls that are transported to the emergency department
 - PSR was able to resolve the vast majority of its calls in the field, with only 14 clients (3.7% of all PSR calls) transported to the hospital for additional care during the pilot period

- PSR community health workers worked with a total of 28 clients who were referred to them by the PSR first responders
 - Over half were Black, Indigenous, or Other People of Color (BIPOC)
 - Community health workers met with clients an average of 8.25 times per client
 - Helped clients complete applications for housing and benefits; life skills training; emotional support; and accompanying clients to appointments

44 referrals

to follow-up service were made in the initial PSR contact in the field

PSR clients received



65
water bottles



30
clothing items



60
snacks or food boxes



25
tents or sleeping bags

PSR Community Health Workers worked with 28 clients in follow-up visits, making over

125 additional referrals

including housing, medical, financial, and other services

6 clients obtained permanent housing



as a result of their work with Portland Street Response

- PSR staff engaged over 350 community members in outreach and engagement activities
 - De-escalation trainings
 - Door-to-door canvassing at businesses and residences
 - Helping to lead efforts to keep unhoused and other community members safe during the record heatwaves of summer 2021



Portland Street Response Community Health Worker Haika Mushi and Portland Fire & Rescue Deputy Fire Marshal Michael Silva distribute water to unhoused individuals during a Portland heat wave. (Photo courtesy of City of Portland).

- Experience with other First Responders and 911
 - 67 unhoused community members (42.1%) reported having interacted with other first responders in the last three months, with over half of these interactions (56.7%) being with police

“Difficulty communicating with them because they just assumed it was drug related because I’m houseless. They’re supposed to be saving a life, not judging a life.”

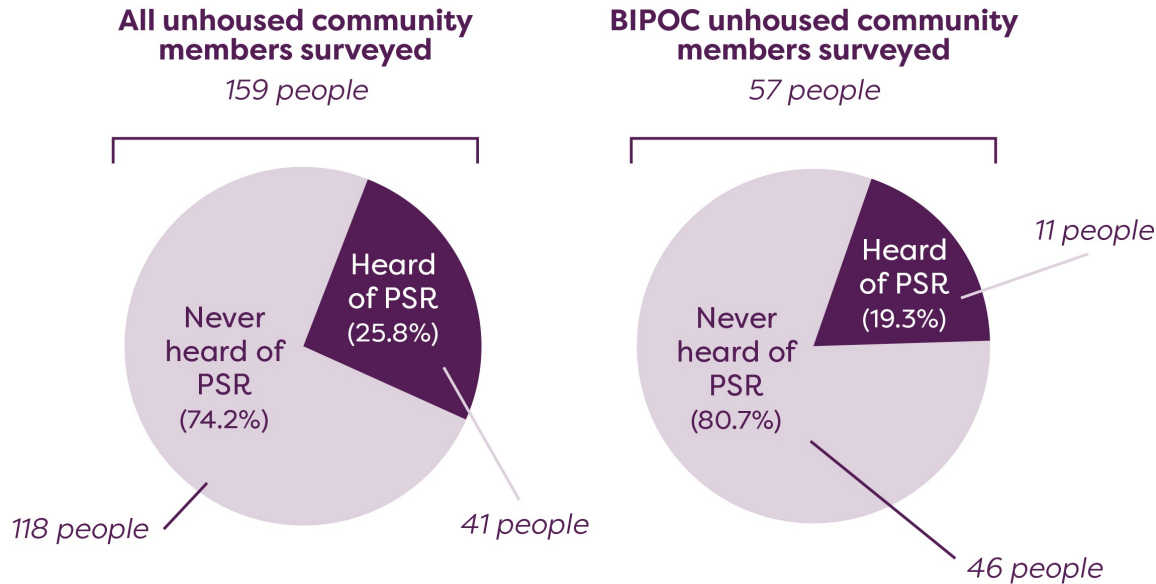
— Unhoused Community Member in Lents

- Experience with other First Responders and 911
 - Over half of those we spoke with (92 people, 57.9%) reported not feeling safe calling 911, with reasons ranging from legal concerns to not trusting police to help them
 - Rates of people feeling unsafe were higher among BIPOC unhoused community members, with rates highest among Black people (68.4% reported feeling unsafe calling 911)

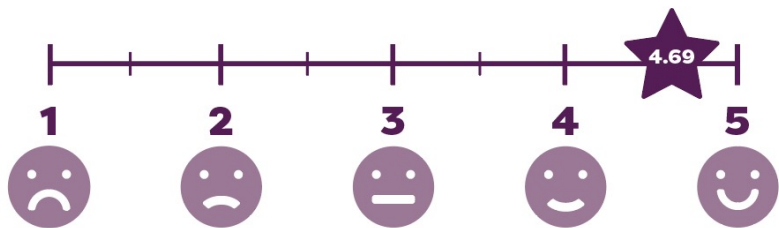
“If you call for help, they’ll turn it around and make it like you had something to do with it and it’s your fault.”

— Unhoused
Community Member in
Lents

- Knowledge of and interactions with PSR



- Knowledge of and interactions with PSR
 - 16 of 159 unhoused community members (10.1%) reported specific interactions with PSR



“They treated us like humans. They were friendly and didn’t come in with the attitude.”

“He didn’t have to get transported to the emergency room. They helped him right where he was at.”

— Unhoused Community Members in Lents

- Value of PSR

- Alternative to police

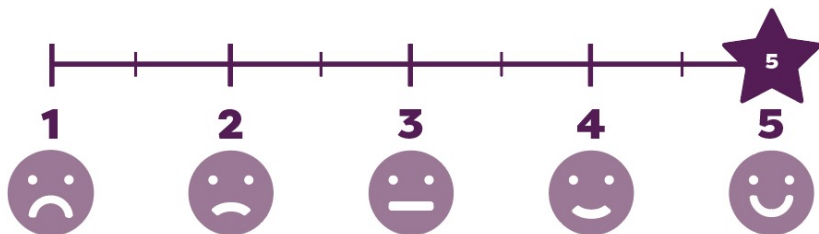
“It’s a buffer between people and police—a way for people to feel safe about calling for help.”

- Increases safety and reduces arrests

“This program has a high value—reduce crime and prison over-crowding. Connecting people to services is so important.”

- Kind, compassionate care

“Less conflict, less victimization, more peaceful.”



“She’s exactly what I needed... She’s been making appointments for me, and I’m getting into housing. She treated me as an individual and with dignity. She’s been a real life-saver.”

— PSR Client

“I don’t worry anymore. I can say I need Portland Street Response, and I know it won’t be the police showing up.”

— PSR Client

- The team discussed a willingness to innovate, take risks, and lead with their vast professional experience in the field
- They discussed wanting to have more flexibility to respond to calls inside residences and calls involving suicide

“It would be nice to be able to go into residences without having to get the police union approval. I was kind of anticipating having a lot more choice in that, and so it is a little frustrating to be told, ‘You have to do it this way,’ because there were plenty of times where some of us on the team have gone into homes in previous jobs without always knowing the full situation. We still recognize the need to gather a lot of information about safety, and weapons, and history of violence, and all that kind of stuff, to know whether we should go in or not.

So, I think we feel more comfortable going into homes or going on certain types of calls because of our past experience than I think maybe the public or police might realize.”

— PSR Team Member

- The team noted feeling supported in their roles, but some team members wanted more individual supervision and opportunities to practice with charting and data entry
- Above all, the team demonstrates deep care for the people they serve and excitement to be able to help shape a program like PSR

“Just remembering that these are people behind these crises, behind these stories. That it’s about connecting with a human to really make those changes, and it takes time, but it’s worthwhile. And they have the best of the best working on this team, and we’re worth it.”

— PSR Team Member

- Both PPB and PF&R suggested that expanded coverage and call types could help increase PSR's impact on their work load

"We would love to have so many more calls go to Portland Street Response so we don't have to deal with them. I think that most officers I work with recognize that a lot of calls we go to, it's like, 'This isn't a police call. Why are we here?'"

— PPB Staff Member

"They have to trust them and their instinct on what they can handle. This whole mention of a weapon—my engine isn't going in until police get there anyway. So why would Tremaine and Britt go in without police? They're perfectly safe staging until police get there and then doing their job."

— PF&R Staff Member

- While staff from PF&R were all supportive of co-response, PPB staff were mixed, with some supportive and some opposed, primarily because they worried this would add to their call load

“If we were on the same page at the start, co-response I think could work for slightly risky things.”

— PPB Staff Member

“I don’t feel interested in it. I feel like the point of Street Response is to get calls away from us that we don’t need to have a role in. If I’m there anyway, I want to just handle the call myself.”

— PPB Staff Member

- Staff from both agencies expressed wanting more information about PSR call criteria and seeing a need for greater communication between teams

“I think helping us immediately would be getting some kind of written document outlining what PSR is now responding to—this is acceptable, this is not—just a lot more clarity on our part... as to what they’re expected to go on, or what they think they can go on. Because we really, truly, or at least I feel like we don’t know.”

— PF&R Staff Member

“You know, they kind of stayed aside while we were talking with them, and then they just drove away. The feeling was left with police that they don’t want to be seen near police. I don’t know if that’s true, but that was kind of the feeling of the group, was like they don’t even want the public to see them interacting with police at all.”

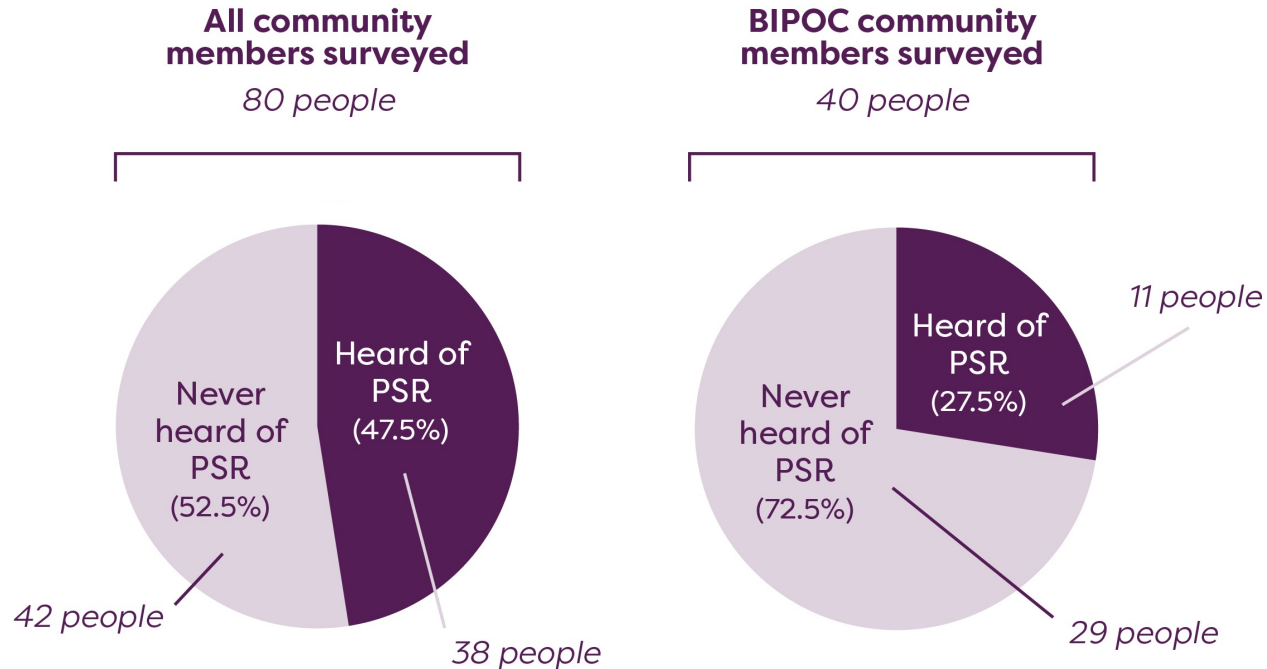
— PPB Staff Member

- Experience with other First Responders and 911
 - Almost half of those we spoke with (37 people, 46.3%) reported not feeling safe calling 911, with many people discussing concerns about delayed service or non-response, and others being concerned about how calling 911 might negatively impact other community members
 - Rates of feeling unsafe calling 911 were higher among BIPOC community members

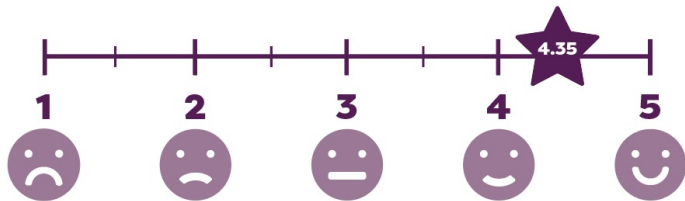
“I’ve multiple times asked people in distress in my yard if they need help. I wish there was someone I could call to give them help, but I worry that something bad will happen... that the person would be in danger more if I call 911 than if I don’t. I also worry about how the police would react to me as a Black woman even though this is my house.”

— General Community Member in Lents

- Knowledge of and interactions with PSR



- Knowledge of and interactions with PSR
 - 20 of 80 general community members (25%) reported specific interactions with PSR

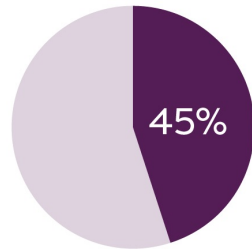


“I think what was really helpful is that the team, Tremaine and Britt, even hearing them through the wall, were just very grounded and non-reactive and able to just be, I think, very compassionate and not threatening either... Tremaine had crouched down next to the guy on the bench to really be at eye level. I feel like their whole vibe was very welcoming and non-threatening.”

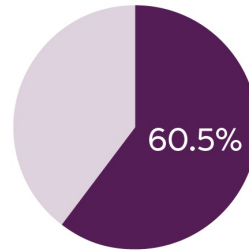
— General Community Member in Lents

- Preference for first responders

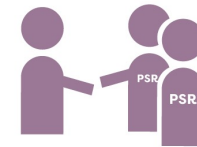
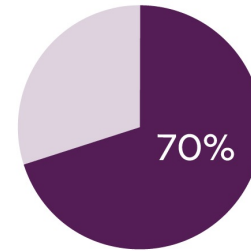
■ Preference for PSR as first responders
■ Preference for other first responders



**Full
Sample**



**Heard
of PSR**



**Interacted
with PSR**

General Community Members



Portland State
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“Just seeing an officer sometimes is enough to scare them. And then they’re going to act differently than if it’s someone that they see more of a, someone here to help. Like, I’m a doctor, or I’m a counselor... So they could see somebody as more of a friend coming to help with certain situations rather than seeing the officer.”

— General Community Member in Lents

General Community Members



Portland State
Homelessness Research
& Action Collaborative

“I like the fact that the Street Response folks don’t have weapons. They’re relying on peaceful means to try to resolve the situation. And that’s the only means that they have. So, while I can’t say for sure that no cop would have resolved in an equally humane way, I can say for sure that with the Street Response, there’s no way that they would end up killing the guy.”

— General Community Member in Lents

General Community Members



Portland State
Homelessness Research
& Action Collaborative

“Any kind of extra resource for someone who is houseless, or who is experiencing a mental health crisis, is a good thing. No matter on which side of the political spectrum you are, or what your views are on our houseless neighbors, or how it should be handled, everyone agrees that more services are needed.”

— General Community Member in Lents

Recommendations

1. Expand Portland Street Response
2. Trust the team to lead, but provide them with ample support
3. Increase community outreach and education
4. Address 911 capacity issues and provide PSR-specific support to dispatchers
5. Educate first responders on co-response and collaboration
6. Keep Portland Street Response housed within PF&R
7. Address gaps that prevent PSR from connecting clients to resources
8. Refine data procedures and revisit outcome measures
9. Advance racial equity

- Optimism about the future of Portland Street Response
- Patience but persistence
- Staying true to the original vision

“I think it’s just, honestly, this is the first time in a really long time that we felt any system was trying to work for Lents or any neighborhood who’s walking through poverty, and it feels like something is coming for us rather than fighting against us. And that gives people hope, which leads to restoration and reconciliation. I think PSR has been a huge light of hope for our community.”

— Lents Community Member