

Station Pointe Domestic Violence Reduction Plan

Summary

Station Pointe is one of the largest apartment complexes in the town of Mansfield, MA. Since it is close to a commuter train station with a direct route into Boston, the complex contains many transient people. It is well-known amongst the town's population to be a problematic place and it is a constant source of frustration for the police department employees.

Since its creation in 1986/87, Station Pointe has provided a steady, enlarged supply of calls for service. This location was chosen for this project since it was the largest generator of calls for service, in hopes that a solution could be put in place to reduce the number of calls. Prior to this project, the issues at this complex were being handled like every other call at the time- by reacting to each call separately as they come in. There was no cooperation between the police department, the apartment management team or the individuals living there. After hiring a Crime Analyst to the department in 2015, the focus turned to identifying the types of calls and their locations/times of occurrence. The data quickly confirmed that there were significantly higher concentrated calls relating to domestic disturbances, general disturbances and drugs and violence issues than any other location in town.

The POP team was given the data on Station Pointe and told to work on one problem at a time to identify the root cause of each issue/call and come up with potential solutions to prevent future recurrences. The team worked collaboratively with citizens, victims, neighbors, and the apartment management team to try to create a cooperative approach to the issues. Whenever

possible, the POP team would connect citizens with a local resource to help solve for the root cause issue at hand.

In just two years, there was a significant drop in calls for service to this location. Even now, a few years later, the lower numbers still hold true with the responses continued in place.

Description

The town of Mansfield, MA is a community of 24,000 citizens, whose population changes significantly throughout the day because of two main factors: the presence of a large industrial park that brings in approximately 20,000 more employees a day and a commuter rail station with direct access to Boston and Providence. Adjacent to the train station is a 245-unit apartment complex called Station Pointe. Since its inception in 1987, this apartment complex quickly became a place that police officers were called to support many times a week. It soon got a reputation in the community and to the police department as a place where the police needed to frequent due to increasingly escalated calls for service. No one knew this for sure, but it was assumed that Station Pointe, then known merely as Francis Ave (based on the name of the street on which the complex is located) or “The Depot” (based on the original name of the complex) was responsible for the most calls for service out of any location in the town.

In 2013, when Chief Ronald A Sellon took over the department, he immediately started to transition the operations from a reactive to a proactive model. By 2015, he established a small-

but-mighty Problem Oriented Policing (POP) unit and hired a crime analyst. One of the first projects for the analyst was to identify repeating calls for service, while determining the top 5 individuals and top 5 locations that were the highest drivers of calls for service. This analysis concluded that Station Pointe was the top location for calls, as anticipated, generating a total of 855 calls in 2015. It was immediately apparent that something needed to be done.

As Chief Sellon looked into what was being done to fix this, he was often met with “nothing can be done, what can we do except arrest them?” by a lot of the existing officers. Digging into the numbers and people a little more, it was found that in some circumstances the PD was being called out to the same unit for the exact same or relatively similar issue multiple times in a day or week. What wasn’t happening was a communication between shifts. Although each shift was aware of specific issues with a certain unit, none of them were aware of the bigger picture, that the problem was much larger than any one of them knew.

Historically, the responses to Station Pointe by the MPD ran a pattern. The MPD would respond to a 911 call or series of calls where the entire shift would flood the area in a chaotic, reactionary siren-and-light show. This would draw attention to the incident, and the actions by the shift would then be consistently critiqued by the residents as either underreacting or overreacting. The geographic makeup of the complex poses its own issues: Station Pointe is broken up into 3 phases where long driveways end in dead ends. This means that if a call for service does not originate at the front of the facility, there would be a long procession of cruisers with lights on travelling within 20- 40 feet of every street-facing window of each

building. These long roadways also run adjacent to the primary means to get to the location, meaning that individuals creating problem behaviors would have ample notice of the officers' impending arrival, giving them time to adjust or flee prior to arrival. This all led to the residents becoming numb to the police presence, reinforcing their thoughts that the police were incapable of solving the problem. In worse situations, some residents saw the response as being like an invading army and since many times the offender had ample opportunity to dispose of evidence of wrongdoing prior to arrival, residents saw the police presence as "harassment".

The POP team was put into action, tasked with digging deeper into the numbers. Looking at the statistics from the analyst, the team broke down the total calls for service into two categories: those listed as reactive vs those were coded as proactive. Since their goal was to reduce calls for service, it seemed more appropriate to focus in on the 336 of the 855 calls that were reactionary in nature. In addition, they looked at the top 10 types of calls that necessitated an incident report. They found that the top 10 incidents coming out of this location were identified as (in order from highest occurrences to least): Verbal Domestic, Malicious Destruction, Larceny, Harassment, Child Neglect, Fraud, Suspicious Activity, Hit & Run, Simple Assault, and Disturbance. In that same year, there were a total of 22 arrests from that location alone, out of the 1065 for the entire town, which represented 2.06% of all arrests.

Their first step was to set up communications with the management team at Station Pointe to better understand their perspective of the problems in the complex. In this same timeframe, the complex was going through changes at the management level. Beacon Properties had taken

over management of the complex in 2013 and in 2015 began a rebranding process in an attempt to correct what they saw as a negative community perception. Initial conversations with the team were slow going and the POP team immediately realized that they needed to really build a true rapport with apartment management if they were going to be able to get any information (and then ultimately propose and implement a solution). As trust was built between them, the management team came to realize that helping the POP team could be beneficial, as providing them with information could result in solving a mutual problem they both have: reducing crime in the area. Through conversations with management they were able to determine that the population of the complex is consistently comprised of a lower financial demographic than the community as a whole. Additionally, it has historically seen a higher degree of public housing assistance and higher percentage of minority residents than is found in the rest of Mansfield. The proximity to the train station helped to contribute to a small but consistent transient gang problem as families moved to Mansfield, but due to the presence of the train, the gang ties of certain residents remained strong. This corroborated what the police had known, from having dealt with a series of homicides at that location in 1990, 2008 and 2011.

After meeting with management, the POP team then took the crime data and went directly to victims, offenders and immediate family members and neighbors in the complex to obtain additional details about specific calls and call types. In an attempt to get to the root cause of the calls, the team found that the data showed that not all calls of a certain type were caused by the same issue. For example, it was found that among a cross section of domestic calls, some

were the result of financial issues in the home, while others were due to drug use. This data showed that while root causes amongst calls were not necessarily the same, there was a trend in root causes across multiple call types.

The Police Chief brought the perceived problems (later confirmed by the analyst) to the command staff and directed them to begin taking steps to correct the matter. The initial reaction from command was to initiate Directed Patrols to flood the area with patrol officers during Friday and Saturday evenings. At first, officers rarely got out of their cars, merely driving continuously by the complex. This resulted in an initial suppression of calls for service.

However, as a result of the tactic, two issues arose:

- The suppression was only temporary
- A displacement effect seemed to occur, since the call for service numbers only seemed to be suppressed during the timeframe while the Directed Patrol cars were present

The Directed Patrol had the effect of pushing the drug dealing underground, while doing little to dispel the disconnect between residents at Station Pointe and the Police Department.

In the timeframe where the Police Chief created the POP unit, he also began a reeducation process that included the command staff and patrol officers to learn a new way of approaching the problems the department was facing. From 2015 to 2017, the police department would also see a significant turnover of command staff as retirements accelerated and newer, more capable individuals were promoted to help facilitate change in the organization.

As the team set out to create a solution to the problems at Station Pointe, they set a preliminary goal to reduce calls for service by 10% in four years. The POP team knew that band-aid fixes weren't going to create a long-term solution for either the victims/offenders and their families, or the police department. Therefore, in early 2016, the POP team, with support from the command staff, began the process of building trust, rapport, and relationships with the on-site management staff and residents. Using the top 5 list of offenders in Station Pointe compiled by the analyst, the Chief suggested that the POP team start with their biggest offenders. For each offender, the POP team took a very strategic approach of trying to fully understand the problem. They would conduct interviews with the offender, victim, neighbors and family members to try to obtain a complete picture of the situation. With the information, they would craft a plan based on a scaled response model that needed to understand:

- Was the offender involved in a singular incident/crime and if not, did the incidents have connected circumstances in any way?
- Was there violence involved?
- Was the offender arrested (and if so, how many times prior to that and for what)?
- Was there an underlying issue causing the actual call for service? For example, if the call for service was a domestic dispute, was the cause mental health-related (and an ongoing issue) or was it related to something new in the offender's life (such as job loss or another financial struggle)?
- What other people could be interviewed to fill in details from as many people as possible to obtain the full picture?

Within the same timeframe, the POP team was building relationships with organizations outside the PD who could be of assistance to people involved in certain incidents. Some of the organizations they formed working relationships with include:

- **New Hope:** an organization that addresses domestic and sexual violence at the individual, family, and community level.
- **Family Resource Center:** a single point of entry to access community-based, culturally competent family support services, such as mental health, financial assistance, etc.
- **Learn to Cope:** a non-profit support network that offers education, resources, peer support and hope for parents and family members coping with a loved one addicted to opiates or other drugs.
- **SAFE Coalition:** a regional coalition of community partners in Western Norfolk County who have come together to provide a pathway for support, education, treatment options and coping mechanisms for those affected by substance use disorder.

Additionally, the POP team worked closely with the District Attorney's office to ensure they followed up on incidents as they made their way through the justice system, working with them to identify repeat offenders and possible alternatives (such as diversion programs) to typical jail time (when possible). The POP team saw all of these relationships as necessary to making a lasting difference not only in these people's lives, but also for the PD and the other residents of Station Pointe.

The POP team first took the top 5 offenders in the location and started to dig deeper into each incident. As they conducted the interviews with the offenders, family and management at the complex, they began to paint a bigger picture of the root cause of each incident. This is where their relationships with the various organizations came in to play. As victims needed assistance with domestic abuse, they were put into contact with New Hope and the resources they have. If the victim or offender had a drug related issue, they were connected with Learn to Cope and/or the SAFE Coalition. They didn't simply drop off pamphlets or share numbers, however. The POP team actively worked with each victim and/or offender to ensure they reached out to the appropriate helping organization and build a true support structure around them. POP would then conduct follow-up calls to ensure they were receiving the services and help they needed. They didn't just limit themselves to some of the bigger issues, they also worked with offenders to help find job placement services and helped them locate a ride to an appointment. On more than one occasion, if no ride is available, the POP team members gave the person a ride to and from the appointment themselves.

As the residents and the management team of Station Pointe saw that the MPD and POP team's actions were different from what they typically expected from a police organization, that helped build further trust between them all. Residents became more willing to share information with the officers when they arrived, and the management team slowly started to become an asset to the equation. As time went on, the management team realized that the information they garnered during routine spot checks of the apartments could be of use to the MPD when researching an incident. In one specific incident, the team had thought they reached

a conclusion that a domestic abuse call was a one-off incident incited by recent events in the family's life. As they dug deeper and talked to management, they learned that in a recent spot check of the apartment there seemed to be evidence of the wife being locked in a closet over a period of time. That information was integral in assisting the POP team with truly identifying the root cause and getting the offender, and specifically the victim, the help they need.

With early successes with the program, the Chief and the POP team wanted to ensure they worked on expanding the reach of the program to round out a more complete picture of certain crimes in the area. From this effort came a regional meeting with the District Attorneys, probation officer, and area police department representatives to identify prolific and repeat offenders. With this knowledge on top of the information they already had, the team could devise more substantial responses and, in many cases, redirect their efforts to work with people who seemed like one-and-done offenders in Mansfield, but who had really been repeat offenders in other communities.

The whole project was an ongoing education experience for everyone. The Chief and POP team assumed that people knew more than they did about what they (as an organization) were capable of. Things were not always easy; throughout the process, several factors negatively affected the successful implementation of the plan, most notably of which centered on perceptions and cultural expectations from several different groups:

- **Within the police organization** - Initially, many officers within the department opposed the philosophical change in the operation of the organization. This was further reinforced with the hiring of the analyst as well as the assignments to the POP team. Culturally, people saw this as a challenge to their status within the organizational and cultural hierarchy. Initially, this led to veteran officers and command staff vocally opposing the changes. Mansfield, as a Civil Service community has strong job protections and as a result it is more difficult to remove poor managers, supervisors and employees. This led to the need to enact slow progressive discipline actions to change behaviors when necessary, for some of the more stubborn personalities. It is more difficult to enact cultural change within a profession that is so rooted in not changing. When command staff doubts the validity of a change, there's even less incentive for people to change things in a positive manner. Taking from Kotter International's change model, it was necessary to build a guiding coalition early on who could distract nay-sayers until they could make it to the point of generating quick wins. Once people started to see the quick wins, it became easier and easier to turn the organization around to the change. Though there are still pockets of resistance to some of the newly-implemented ideas, most, if not all, of the PD believe in the POP philosophy of the department at this time.
- **Within the community as a whole** – The citizens of Mansfield, but especially those within Station Pointe held on tightly to the notion that police officers only want to arrest people to hold them to the letter of the law. Changing their perceptions took a lot of the same tact as was needed inside the organization. It was necessary to create small wins –

build trust with one or two early adopters and prove that the PD could help them versus just arrest them. Once they proved themselves, it was like a snowball effect where the tides turned from the PD having to track down people to try to help them (and convince them they could) to people proactively seeking the assistance of the PD in matters they never would before.

- **Within certain related organizations** – As the PD reached out to organizations in and around Mansfield to build greater cooperation, they were often immediately met with a negative reaction. One organization in particular refused to speak to officers the first few times they reached out. Once they learned what the PD was accomplishing at Station Pointe, they quickly came to realize that they could have a good working relationship with them, where they could each help the other. Building those coalitions with organizations who could provide information and assistance to families/victims/offenders in need was critical to the success of the program, but it oftentimes took time to build critical rapport to create an effective working relationship.

The team knew they were on the right track when they ran numbers for the 2016 year and found that they had already seen a 17% drop in calls for service (from 855 in 2015 to 708 in 2016). In the four-year period that comprised their original goal, the total calls continued a downward trend, closing out 2019 with 551 calls, representing a 36% reduction of calls. See Total Calls for Service by Year in the Appendix for the complete breakdown of numbers. The number of reactionary calls for service also saw a similar decline, dropping from 519 in 2015 to

419 in 2016 (a 19.5% reduction in one year) and an amazing 222 in 2019, for a 34% reduction in the goal period.

Total incidents at Station Pointe followed the same pattern, they went from 61 total in 2015 to 53 in 2016 (a 13% drop in one year) all the way down to 33 in 2019 for a total reduction of 46%. Each of the Top 10 incident types saw a decline year-over-year, though some were more significant than others. Verbal Domestic incidents dropped from 12 down to 8 in the 4 years, for a reduction of 33%. The second highest incident type was Malicious Destruction, which saw a 66% decline in the four years, from 9 in 2015 to 3 in 2019.

Of particular note to the team was the reduction in arrests per year. The number of arrests occurring within Station Pointe dropped from 22 in 2015 to 9 in 2019, a 59% reduction in arrests. The top reason for arrest in 2015 was Assault, (6 total that year), which dropped steadily in the timeframe and ended at 1 in 2019, an 83% drop in that type of arrest. More notably, when the Chief compared broader numbers, it became clear that the work in Station Pointe was making more progress than the arrest numbers for the rest of the town in the same timeframe. In 2015, the 22 arrests in Station Pointe represented 2.06% of all arrests for the MPD. In 2019, the 9 arrests accounted for only 1.39% of all arrests, a 33% drop in Station Pointe's overall impact to the PD's workload.

The relationship between the management team and police department, while initially and understandably chilly, has become a true partnership of information sharing. This occurred

naturally as management and the PD altered their perspectives and grew their lines of communication, by breaking stereotypes of all involved. Where the traditional police response used to be: arrive on scene, assess if a crime was committed, and then disperse individuals and clear the scene, the new model reflects a cooperative approach that aims to solve the underlying problems instead.

Seeing the success rates developed out of the program has resulted in its applications to other areas in the town, with a focus on evolving, expanding, and continuing to evaluate outcomes.

Overall, the changes made in Mansfield represented a shift in mindset both for police department personnel and the community. Using data-driven techniques to identify the highest calls for service, and a crime-prevention, innovative style, the PD has developed an ongoing operational model that builds community trust while crafting collaborative solutions to underlying root causes to community problems. The total costs to the program were absorbed by reallocating previously budgeted moneys when Fiscal year 2016 began.

The changes implemented resulted in an increase in citizen and officer collaborations, helping support those citizens in crafting solutions to their problems. This has brought about better relationships between the citizens and police, while driving down the calls for service. The community has come to realize (through seeing it happen in case after case and word-of-mouth discussions on social media platforms) that the MPD is not merely here to arrest everyone. Building that trust was a slow process, but it has been exemplified through the actions of the POP team as well as the officers responding to scenes. As the public sees time and time again

that arrests aren't the number one priority, more people are reaching out to MPD to help identify services to help themselves or their loved ones.

The lessons learned are innumerable. Police culture changes slowly and reluctantly, often fighting the very changes that will improve their abilities to make positive impacts. Fear of change is not unique to policing, but after seeing the results of a change in philosophy, the officers have begun to embrace the new model, and the results have been felt in the community. The community now has a say in the process and in turn feels vested in the successes of their police department. It has resulted in more support for requested resources such as budgetary items, and a town wide vote to fund and build a new Police station which opened in 2019.

Officers have learned that applying Problem-Oriented Policing to guide operations results in less wasted time, higher levels of success rates, and improved relations with the community they serve. Concepts initially dismissed as merely "academic" only 5 years ago have become the bedrock foundation of the organization's philosophy and are commonly used in day-to-day operations to formulate solutions and guide resources.

The numbers clearly and steadily showed the team that the hard work everyone was putting into the complex was working. This was also reflected in Beacon Properties awarding Station Pointe the Legacy Award as the single best run property in its multi-national portfolio. The award is given only once a year and the radical shift in quality of life at Station Pointe earned

them that recognition from their parent company, earning them the distinction of becoming a true Cinderella story.

Moving forward, the goal of identifying the “top 5” generators for calls for service continues and each month helps maintain the urgency to continue making progress. Instead of being treated as a “task force,” the organization understands that although the goals will change as they succeed in solving underlying problems (thus removing “old top 5” generators), they will be replaced by new challenges which acts as a reinforcing loop of communication with their partners in producing more positive changes.

Key Project Team Members

Ronald A Sellon, Chief of Police Mansfield Police Department

David Sennott, Police Officer, MPD POP Unit

Michael Fenore, Police Officer, MPD POP Unit

Erika Baburins, Crime Analyst, MPD

Project Contact Person

Ronald A Sellon, Chief of Police Mansfield Police Department

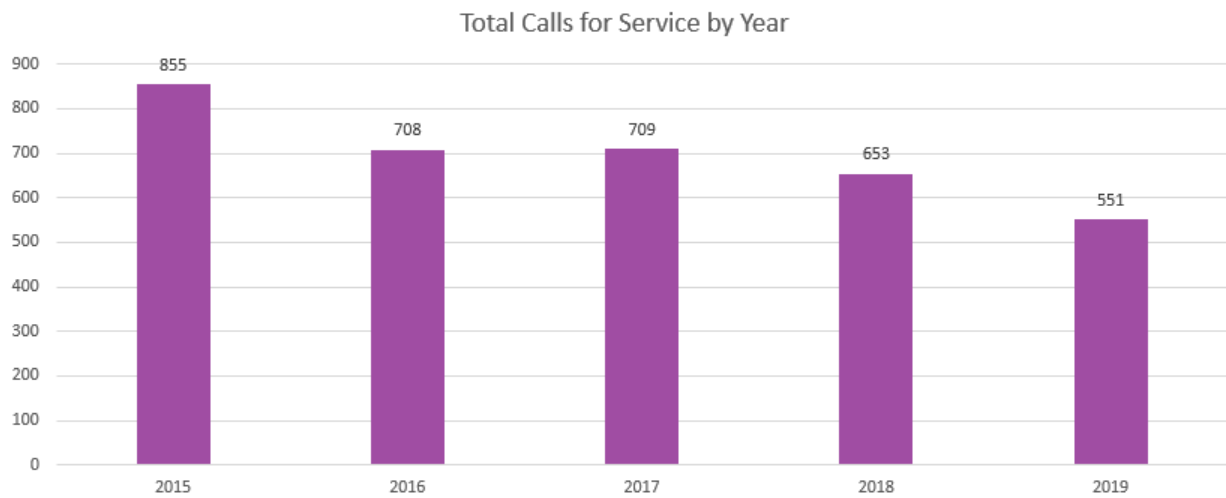
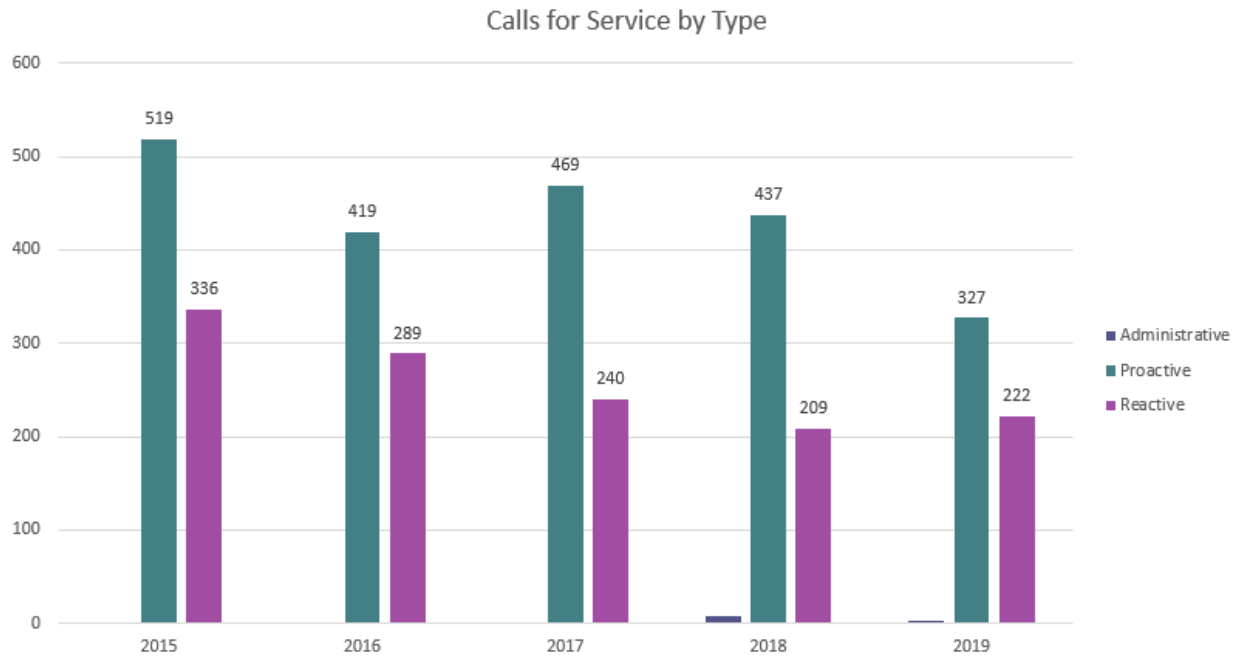
500A East St

Mansfield, MA 02048

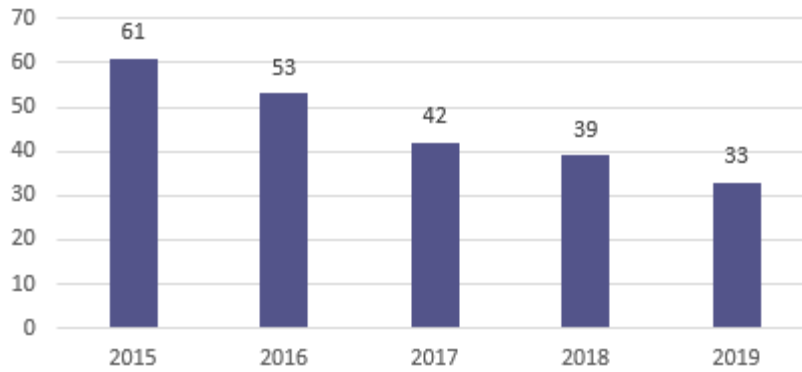
508-261-7300

rsellon@mansfieldma.com

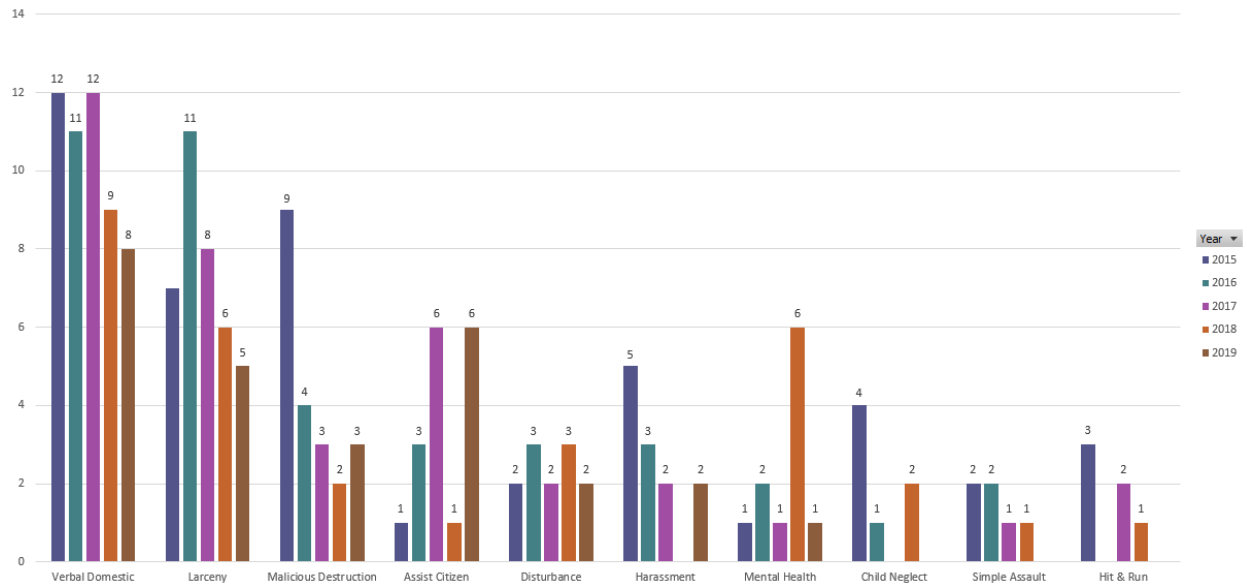
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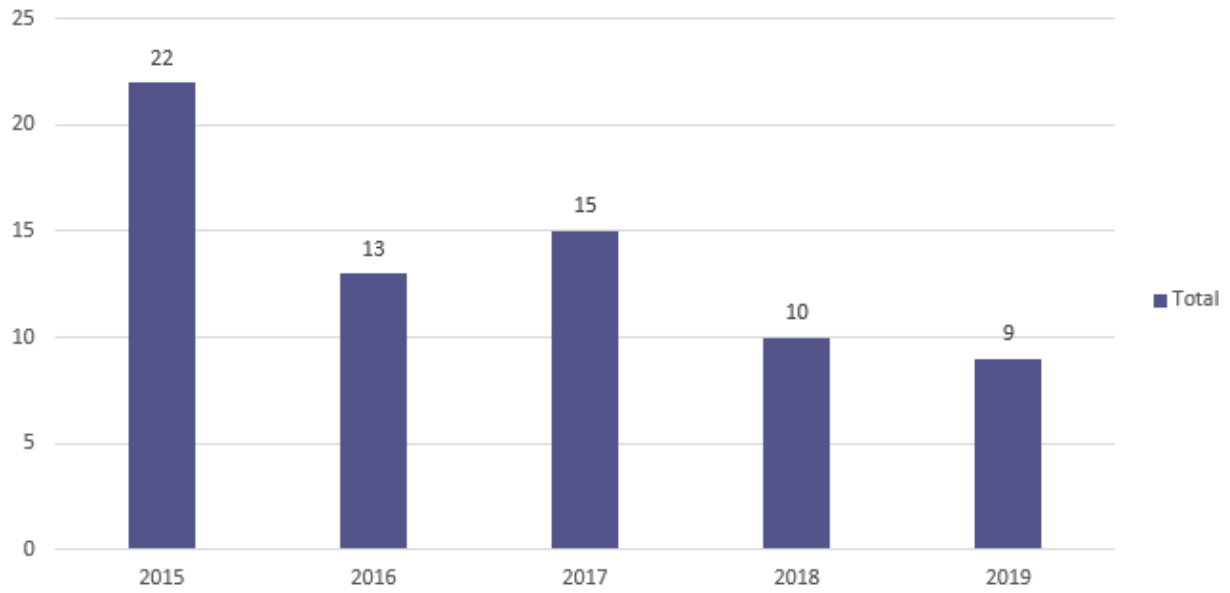
Total Incidents per Year



Incidents by year- Top 10



Total Arrests per Year



Station Point receiving the Legacy Award

