

# Safeguarding Children



## Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents in Buffalo

In Buffalo, Osborne is leading an innovative partnership between the police and the community to transform what police do and say when they arrest a parent in the presence of a child. From the child's perspective, a parent's arrest is often a traumatic experience, especially if it involves handcuffs, weapons, force, or what a child perceives as disrespect of the parent. In addition to its traumatizing effects, witnessing a parent's arrest can give a child an intensely negative impression of law enforcement, one they may carry into adulthood. With funding from a [consortium of WNY Foundations](#) under the auspices of the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, The Burden Foundation, and AT&T, [The Buffalo Police Department \(BPD\) has partnered with Osborne](#) to develop and implement trauma-informed policies and procedures designed to minimize the trauma that children may experience when parents are arrested. This collaboration builds new and strengthens existing community-police partnerships while signaling to families that the police and community will do everything they can to minimize trauma for a child whose parent or caregiver is arrested.

### Adopting a Safeguarding Children Policy

Our project is built on Osborne's work with the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance, other community partners and experts, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police that produced the [Model Policy for Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents](#) and training materials for law enforcement agencies. In July 2021, BPD adopted its version of the Model Policy: [General Order 17.0 in its Manual of Procedures on Safeguarding Children](#) "... to establish child-sensitive policing protocols to minimize trauma experienced by a child, present or not present, whose parent is arrested or who is present during execution of a search warrant; and the officers are trained to identify and respond effectively to the child and support the child's physical safety and well-being." BPD is committed to providing Safeguarding Children training to the entire department of approximately 720 sworn officers. As of December 2021, approximately half the department has received the training, with the other half scheduled for training in the first quarter of 2022. The training has [received an overwhelmingly positive response by BPD officers](#).

### Law Enforcement Training: Looking through the Eyes of the Children

A unique aspect of the Safeguarding Children project is a partnership between Osborne and the [UB School of Social Work's Institute of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care](#) to create an interactive four-hour law enforcement training curriculum to provide officers with the knowledge and tools they need to implement the new BPD Policy. In addition to training on the policy itself, the training includes understanding the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on children, a basic understanding of trauma's effect on the brain, trauma-informed practices, and age-appropriate responses for interacting with children. The focus of the training is on viewing police interactions through the eyes of children. Videos from [Echoes of Incarceration](#), a film-making company of young adults who experienced parental arrest and incarceration, help officers understand what children see and feel during these encounters. Body-worn camera footage and real-life scenarios further involve officers in the training. The inclusion of law enforcement, licensed social workers, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration trained trauma instructors on the training team brings a variety of expertise to the training.

Osborne President and CEO Elizabeth Gaynes, who was involved in the original IACP Model Policy project, noted: “My hope is that the importance of Child Sensitive Policing is finally being recognized as a critical piece in reducing trauma for children experiencing parental arrest and incarceration and a significant key to changing the image of police and building trust with the community. Osborne is committed to this work and would love to see more police departments following BPD’s lead.”

### Supporting Children of Arrested Parents and Caregivers Is a Shared Responsibility

Recognizing that supporting children and reducing their trauma was not only the role of the police, Osborne’s Safeguarding Children Project is taking a community-wide approach. The project is guided by a multi-disciplinary [Advisory Board](#) that includes leaders from youth-serving organizations and not-for-profit agencies, police leaders, educators, child welfare leaders, the judiciary, behavioral health professionals, community members with lived experience, and others. It is critically important for every Osborne program to include people with lived experience and persons working directly with them in leadership roles. In addition, Osborne staff meet with local parents and adults affected by parental arrest as children to understand their experiences and identify gaps in services. Advisory board members are focused on enhancing services to children and caregivers, creating child-friendly spaces at police districts, improving communications between Child Welfare Services and BPD, and spearheading initiatives to reduce stigma experienced by people who have been arrested or incarcerated and their families. Community based organizations, including Family Works Buffalo, will offer post-arrest support for children of arrested parents.

### Voice Buffalo Healing Circles

The final component of the Safeguarding project brings us full circle to providing opportunities for healing to people who have been affected by parental arrest in our community. Osborne has partnered with [Voice Buffalo](#), a non-denominational, faith-based organization focused on social justice and equity, to offer monthly healing circles.

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