



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special appreciation to all of the current and former staff, consultants and interns of the Community Safety Department (CSD) as well as the community members, city employees and local organizations who contributed to the creation and implementation of this new department.





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INTRODUCTION

FROM THE DIRECTOR

I will never forget the first 9-1-1 call I went on in July 2024. We had spent the previous 18 months building a new city department to get to this moment. As the lead clinician on the call, I was nervous and excited to lead a team on our first mental health crisis response. The call was for an older adult resident who was experiencing a mental health crisis and our team spent over an hour with her in her kitchen providing emotional support, connecting with her care providers, and developing a personalized follow-up plan. This single interaction exemplifies the Community Safety Department's (CSD) core philosophy: meeting people exactly where they are, with empathy and professional expertise. Our team's mission represents a bold new approach to emergency response, centering compassion and clinical expertise.

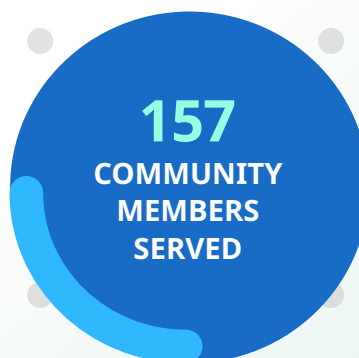
Our inaugural year has been a whirlwind. We developed innovative protocols, created specialized training programs, secured critical resources, and built a flexible infrastructure. In just six months, our Community Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) Team has

responded to over 200 calls that would have traditionally been handled by law enforcement. Our approach isn't about replacing existing systems, but creating alternative pathways prioritizing human dignity, mental health, and community well-being. Every CSD team member embraced roles beyond their initial job descriptions, embodying their commitment to reimagined public safety. I couldn't be more proud of our CSD Team.

Establishing the CSD was no small feat, and this report celebrates not just our achievements, but the collective vision of our community, which was willing to approach public safety with creativity and courage. I am deeply grateful to the residents of Cambridge who trusted us to take a new direction in supporting their neighbors, friends, and family members. Our work has only just begun.

-Liz Speakman

Liz Speakman
Director
City of Cambridge Community Safety Department



DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

In the spring of 2020, after witnessing the death of George Floyd and feeling the impact of countless others lost to unnecessary brutality, communities across the country began to organize around social justice. From protest to policy, Cambridge residents, city staff, local organizations, and elected officials worked together to create the Community Safety Department, daring to imagine a citywide approach that decriminalizes behavioral health crisis and emphasizes appropriate interventions. The CSD's CARE Team is comprised of unarmed civilians with

experience in crisis intervention who respond to select 9-1-1 calls for service without police. The CARE team provides residents with a public safety response that prioritizes issues of mental and behavioral health with some of the city's most vulnerable communities. The CARE Team responds to non-violent behavioral health crises independently of other first responders. These specialized teams employ their training as well as lived experiences to provide immediate and follow-up support to individuals.

HOW ARE MENTAL HEALTH CRISES RESPONDED TO BY THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENTS?

COMMUNITY SAFETY	COMMUNITY SAFETY	COMMUNITY SAFETY	EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS	CAMBRIDGE POLICE DEPARTMENT
				
CARE TEAM ALTERNATIVE CRISIS RESPONSE	CARE TEAM FOLLOW-UP CARE	CARE TEAM COMMUNITY OUTREACH	CRISIS CALL DIVERSION	CO-RESPONSE
2-3 unarmed CARE Team Clinicians and First Responders respond to mental health crisis and/or quality of life 9-1-1 calls	1-2 CARE Team members connect with and support individuals previously engaged with during a CARE crisis response or community outreach	2-3 CARE Team members proactively connect with vulnerable communities and individuals to provide resources and build rapport	The 9-1-1 Call Center Clinician supports callers experiencing non-violent mental health crises through phone consultation, resources, and ongoing virtual follow-up	A police officer and a clinician respond together to quality of life and mental health crisis calls
RESPONSE In-Person	RESPONSE In-Person	RESPONSE In-Person	RESPONSE Phone	RESPONSE In-Person
RESPONDS TO City of Cambridge 9-1-1 Calls	RESPONDS TO City of Cambridge Community Members	RESPONDS TO City of Cambridge Community Members	RESPONDS TO City of Cambridge 9-1-1 Calls	RESPONDS TO City of Cambridge 9-1-1 Calls

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

THE COMMUNITY SAFETY DEPARTMENT'S DECISIONS AND ACTIONS ARE GUIDED BY ITS MISSION, VALUES, AND GOALS.

MISSION

The Cambridge Community Safety Department's mission is to provide additional services to enhance the community's health and well-being, valuing compassion in its prevention and intervention efforts.

VALUES

- We are continuously learning, evolving and reimagining our approach in order to best meet the needs of the community we serve. Our department culture embraces a growth mindset and values curiosity, humility and our shared humanity.
- We commit to continue exploring restorative practices in order to build empathy, compassion and help repair trust in the community in creative ways.
- We center relationships, partnerships, authentic collaboration and joy in all of our work. We are guided by the wisdom, insights and experiences of those who came before us and those who are doing the work today to build solutions in community. We are intentionally laying groundwork for the future we envision.
- We are consciously not reproducing systems of oppression and aim to create equitable, anti-racist and non-discriminatory ways of serving our community.
- We acknowledge the historical implications of the criminal legal system and the harm it has done to our communities. With this understanding, we value the dignity and humanity of all people.

GOALS

1. Reduce overreliance on traditional law enforcement and emergency medical responders by instead dispatching professionals with the tools necessary to resolve a crisis without unnecessary criminal justice involvement.
2. Increase connection to voluntary short-term and long-term community resources for those calling 9-1-1 or receiving other crisis assistance to improve outcomes for residents facing mental health issues, substance use issues, and homelessness.

THE MODEL

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CSD MODEL

After hiring and training the inaugural CARE Clinicians and Responders in September 2023, the department moved into its next phase of community engagement through initiating community outreach efforts to vulnerable communities and individuals across Cambridge in December 2023.

In February 2024, the CARE Team began responding to 9-1-1 needle pickup calls while also offering follow-up care services to community members in need. The CSD substantially expanded its operations in July 2024 by responding to 9-1-1 crisis calls.

The CARE team currently responds to 9-1-1 calls requesting wellness checks, mental health crisis response and support for the unhoused population. In addition to providing immediate services to requests for support, the CARE Team offers follow-up care coordination for Cambridge’s most vulnerable community members. In October 2024, the CARE Team expanded from 3 to 4 days of crisis response. As of March 2025, CARE is responding to crisis calls on a Monday through Friday basis.



1. CALL

A community member experiencing or witnessing a crisis calls 9-1-1.



2. DISPATCH

A City of Cambridge dispatcher identifies CARE as the appropriate resources and sends a CARE Team to the scene instead of Fire, Police, or EMS.



3. RESPONSE

The CARE Team uses their knowledge and experience to assess the situation and work with community member in crisis.



4. SUPPORT

As appropriate, the CARE Team provides follow-up care coordination including connecting the community member with additional services and providing direct support.

THE TEAM



From left to right: Kelly Fineran, Kara Blue, Liz Speakman, Evie Lueders-Booth, Marie Mathieu, Jeff Alger, Patty Contente, Vanessa Ashtin, Andy Lovley, Dimitri Virgile, Matt Gomes (not pictured)

CSD IN THE PRESS



BOSTON GLOBE

Dial 911 in Cambridge? Now social workers, rather than police, are responding to some calls. [\[LINK\]](#)

Unarmed social workers, rather than police, have begun responding to certain 911 calls involving people in distress in Cambridge...

CBS NEWS

Cambridge announces new civilian safety team to help with non-emergencies like needle pickup [\[LINK\]](#)

Cambridge is unveiling a new civilian safety team that will help overwhelmed first responders in the city deal with non-emergencies. The Community Assistance Response and Engagement or CARE team consists of Cambridge neighbors, looking to lend a hand..

WBZ NEWSRADIO

Cambridge's CARE Team Will Soon Take The Lead On Certain 911 Calls [\[LINK\]](#)

Social workers will soon respond to certain types of 911 calls in Cambridge. City officials are finalizing policies and protocols to have the Community Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) team take the lead during non-violent mental health emergencies, with police officers standing by in case they need help...

HARVARD CRIMSON

Cambridge Unarmed Response Team Dispatches to 911 Calls [\[LINK\]](#)

The Cambridge Safety Department's unarmed response team is now responding to nine different types of non-violent 911 calls — including mental-health related emergencies — in the latest development to the city's initiative to expand policing alternatives.

FOR ADDITIONAL NEWS ON CSD, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE



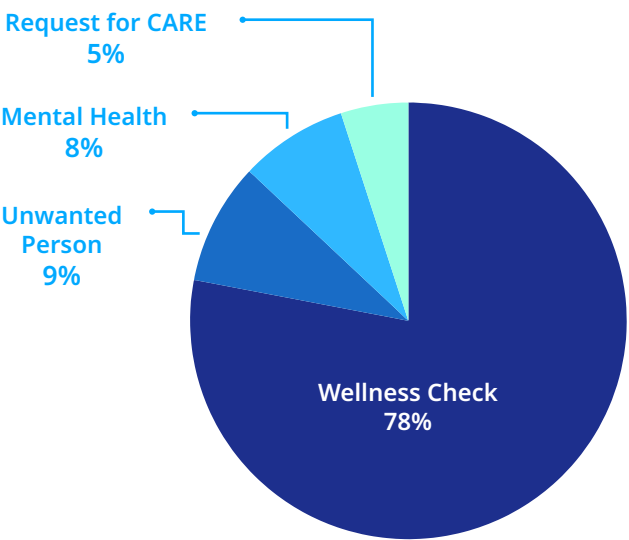
CRISIS RESPONSE

In July 2024, the CARE Team was proud to begin providing an unarmed civilian response to 9-1-1 calls for non-violent behavioral health crises.

CRISIS CALL RESPONSE



9-1-1 CALL TYPES RESPONDED TO



1,596
Needles
Picked Up & Disposed Of





CARE Success Story

THE CALL

Repeated 9-1-1 calls from community members concerned about a woman living outside.

SOMETIMES IT TAKES PERSISTENCE— WELLNESS CHECKS, OUTREACH AND CARE COORDINATION

THE RESPONSE

Over the course of several weeks, CARE was dispatched through 9-1-1 many times for wellness checks for community member Sarah (named changed for confidentiality), who was seen sleeping outside and looking unwell. After a few of these calls where she declined any services and supports, the team started **conducting regular outreach efforts to better understand her needs and build a connection**. In addition to responding to 9-1-1 calls, the CARE team conducts outreach to community members and provides ongoing care coordination to foster a continuum of care and support. After consistent outreach, Sarah opened up and shared that she has been living outside since COVID. As a result of her established rapport with CARE, she agreed to get a cell phone with the team's accompaniment. Sarah also expressed a newfound openness to consider housing options available to her. **The team continues to work with her towards her identified goals.**



CARE in the Community

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**“I’m so glad that you all exist.
This is exactly what I needed.”**

- Community member receiving CARE crisis
services through 9-1-1

SAFETY

THE CSD TAKES EVERY MEASURE POSSIBLE TO ENSURE THE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND ITS CARE TEAM.

How often do CARE Responders and Clinicians resolve calls without requesting police backup for safety reasons?

Very often. CARE Responders and Clinicians **resolved 100% of calls** in 2024 without the need for safety-related police involvement.

How safe do CARE Responders and Clinicians feel on-scene?

Very safe. CARE Responders and Clinicians complete a wellness survey after every call and **reported feeling safe 100%** of the time in 2024.

How often has a physical injury happened to a CARE Responder, CARE Clinician or community member while CARE was on-scene?

Never. CARE Responders and Clinicians **never reported a physical injury** during any of the calls they responded to in 2024.

EFFECTIVENESS

CARE IS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN RESPONDING TO AND CLEARING CALLS INDEPENDENTLY ACROSS CAMBRIDGE.



94% calls where CARE did not need police assistance to clear call
(e.g., at times, police may need to force entry into a home in order to ensure a community member is not having a medical emergency)

CARE TEAM 9-1-1 RESPONSE— TOP 5 CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOODS RESPONDED TO IN 2024

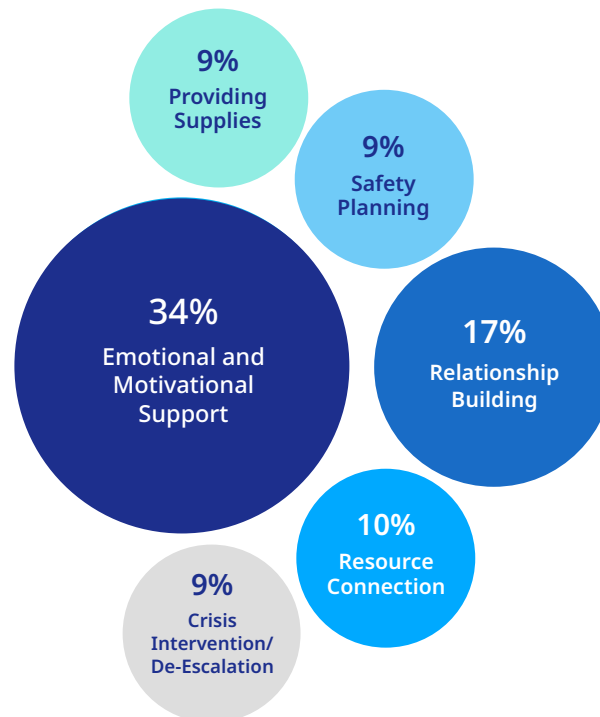
Since its July 2024 launch through December 2024, the CARE Team responded to 9-1-1 calls in all Cambridge neighborhoods.



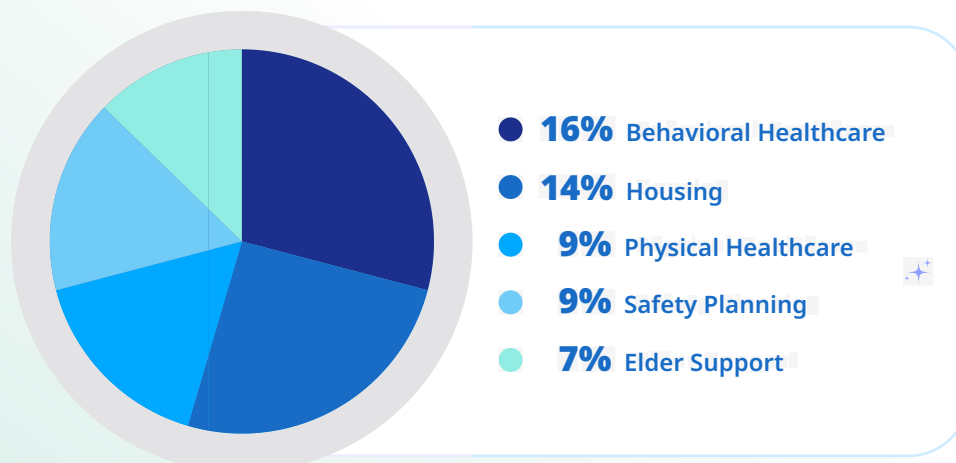
EFFECTIVENESS

CARE IS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN DELIVERING A RANGE OF SUPPORT SERVICES BASED ON THE COMMUNITY MEMBER'S AND SITUATIONAL NEEDS.

TOP TYPES OF SUPPORT CARE PROVIDED



TOP REPORTED NEEDS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS CARE HAS RESPONDED TO





CARE in the Community

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“You have my deepest gratitude. I am indebted to your team.”

- Community member after receiving CARE crisis service through 9-1-1



CARE Success Story

“Food can often be a bridge to gain trust with vulnerable members of our community.”



BUILDING BRIDGES: PARTNERING TO SUPPORT THE CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY

“It was a pleasure to host members of the CARE Team at a shift at Food For Free! It was obvious to us that **this team is incredibly invested in understanding the Cambridge community**, and the resources that are available to residents as they train to take on this challenging new role. The breadth of their resource mapping makes it clear that they’ve put in the critical time to be well placed to start taking calls. We were impressed by their dedication and enthusiasm for the job ahead, and discussed ways in which Food for Free can help them in their work, and how food can often be a bridge to gain trust with vulnerable members of our community. We look forward to partnering with the whole team to not only help serve community members in crisis, but also as a resource to ensure that **the necessary wrap-around services are available to them** for after-call follow-up as well.”

- Alanna Mallon, former Director with Food for Free



FOLLOW-UP CARE

Many of the 9-1-1 calls that the CARE Team responds to require follow-up care coordination. This can include a phone call from CARE later that day or week, short-term care coordination with a CARE Team member, and/or referral services, depending on what the community member needs. The CARE Team is committed to ensuring that they meet community members where they are and deliver the best care during and after the crisis.



25%

of calls result in CARE follow-up care coordination or connection to other service providers



60

community members served by follow-up care coordination



100%

of community members receive follow-up from CARE Team if requested during a crisis call



36 Days

average amount of time a community member receives follow-up care coordination

Additionally, the CSD works closely with colleagues at local library branches, YWCA, First Step, Food for Free, Christ Church Cambridge, Cambridge Housing Authority sites, and other community sites to deliver resources and services. The CARE Team logged over 5,500 community member interactions in 2024 and has distributed supplies (including hand warmers, hygiene kits, toiletries, socks, jackets, and snacks) through their outreach efforts across Cambridge. These partnership and outreach efforts ensure a continuity of care when the CARE Team is on crisis calls. The team can readily access local resources due to their strong relationships and are often called to manage a crisis for someone they previously had met during outreach.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The CSD is continuously learning, evolving and reimagining its approach in order to equip the team to best meet the needs of the community. To do so, the department prioritized a variety of learning and development opportunities in 2024.

56 STAFF TRAININGS COMPLETED BY CSD STAFF

- The CARE Team has participated in over 500 hours of formal training delivered by external facilitators, speakers, and trainers and over 100 hours of observation and crisis response training from Fire, Police, and EMS colleagues.
- Some of the training topics that the CARE Team has completed include:
 - Harm reduction, including sharps injury prevention & response, and overdose prevention
 - Assessment and brief intervention of mental health crises and suicidality
 - First Aid, CPR, Narcan
 - Scene safety & situational awareness
 - De-escalation & conflict management
 - Trauma-informed care & Mental Health First Aid (including Youth)



LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE PROGRAM SITE VISITS

In an effort to bolster crisis response capabilities and gain insight from other existing programs, the CSD spent time with the following alternative response programs:

- **Durham, NC Community Safety Department**



Several city departments (CSD, Police, Emergency Communications) teamed up to visit the thriving Community Safety Department in Durham, North Carolina. Cambridge staff were able to witness firsthand mental health professional-led teams being dispatched to various call types such as trespassing, wellness checks and mental health emergencies.

- **Northampton, MA Division of Community Care (DCC)**



In an effort to continue learning about various crisis response strategies, build team cohesion, and enhance service provision to community members, CSD partnered with the DCC to unite both teams. The two departments discussed protocols for crisis response, ways to engage community members, the importance of self-care in helping professions, and how to determine scene safety.

- **Amherst, MA Community Responders for Equity, Safety and Service (CRESS) Team**



Fellow community responders from the Amherst, Massachusetts CRESS Team, visited the CSD in November 2024 to learn more about the CARE Team's operations, dispatch protocols, and the collaborative public safety work across the Cambridge. CRESS and CARE also discussed their respective approaches to community outreach and engagement.

- **Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) collaboration**

CSD was accepted into the Harvard Kennedy School's Government Performance Lab's 2023-2024 cohort of alternative response programs. During that time, GPL provided technical assistance to support the development of CSD's departmental goals as well as program evaluation objectives and metrics. GPL also facilitated regular cross-departmental learnings insights from alternative response programs across the nation.



CARE in the Community

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“[The CARE Team] have been awesome in helping our pantry run smoothly, treating our patrons with dignity, and helping increase our language capacity, since they speak multiple languages. They’ve allowed us to serve patrons more quickly, so patrons don’t have to wait outside in the cold for as long and can help communicate with people who speak languages that our staff do not speak.”

- Rachel Plummer, Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, Associate Director



CARE Success Story

“The CARE Team’s persistence and support helped David take critical steps toward stability and housing.”

BUILDING TRUST, CHANGING LIVES: DAVID’S JOURNEY WITH THE CARE TEAM

The CARE Team began building a relationship with community member David (name changed for confidentiality) in March of 2024. David had struggled with substance misuse and being unhoused in Cambridge for several years. At first, David did not want to engage with the CARE Team. Over time, **they built rapport with David by continuing to check in with him and provide needed supplies**, like socks and snacks. Over the summer, he had many belongings stolen, and CARE was able to replace some clothing and personal items for him with donated items.

In September of 2024, David began officially receiving follow-up care coordination from the CARE team. The team worked alongside him to submit an official assessment in order to access housing. CARE also helped him receive the supportive resources of Cambridge Community Court. **In December 2024, David secured housing.** The court closed his case three months early based on his hard work of accessing the available supports and resources.

Upon exiting court, David shared with a CARE Clinician, **“Thank you again. If you all didn’t help me, I don’t think that I would be here right now. Again, thank you.”**

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The CSD's community outreach and impact efforts continue to meet community members where they're at, effectively serving as a strong bridge between residents and city organizations and resources.

- 5,512 Community Members served via Community Outreach Efforts
- 12 Sponsored Community Events
 - In June of 2024, the CSD decided to embark on an entirely new venture. The CSD hosted an outdoor open-invitation luncheon for city colleagues, non-profit partners and all community members of Cambridge. Over 170 people attended the event, including many unhoused community members with whom the CARE Team was working.



CSD VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUNDING

The Community Safety Department awarded grants of \$150,000 each to four local organizations in 2024 to support violence prevention programs and services delivered across Cambridge.



Cambridge HEART centers marginalized people to build local capacity to disrupt cycles of harm by responding to crises, conducting research, and facilitating community cohesion. With support from the violence prevention grant, HEART is proud to have a welcoming warm line open to support the community. As of early 2025, the HEART team is in the final preparation stage to launch their mobile crisis response. They look forward to being a choice for people who are going through a crisis who prefer not to call 9-1-1.



InnerCity Weightlifting (ICW) began as a weight training program, focused on serving individuals post-incarceration, and evolved into a social justice organization aiming to create economic mobility through careers in fitness and beyond. The violence prevention grant was instrumental in helping advance ICW's mission to reduce youth violence and provide equitable opportunities for individuals with the most extreme barriers to safety. The funding supported their capacity to carry out their Personal Training Apprenticeship Program, using personal training as a tool for violence prevention by creating a pathway for the highest risk, gang-involved youth and young adults to build trust, hope, social capital, and sustainable economic mobility.



My Brother's Keeper (MBK) exists to build a safe and supportive community that creates positive change by empowering each individual to dream and succeed without limits. Through the violence prevention grant, MBK ran a 6-week teen empowerment program in the summer of 2024. By providing comprehensive workshops on financial education, entrepreneurship, healthy relationships, and life planning, MBK empowers young adults to make informed choices, set realistic goals, and develop practical strategies for achieving them. "



Transition House was established in 1976 as the first emergency shelter on the East Coast for survivors escaping domestic violence. The violence prevention funding directly supported their children's services team and counseling program. The Transition House Community Team facilitated a 90-minute training session for 90 student-athletes during a Players for Prevention Night event. Between July and December 2024, their therapeutic team provided direct counseling to 15 children and 25 adults. One participating adult shared, "I've done counseling before but it's the first time I feel hopeful during my sessions."

WHAT'S NEXT

☐ **Crisis Response Expansion in 2025**

The CSD aims to more broadly fulfill its mission in 2025 by responding to even more 9-1-1 calls. To do so, the CSD intends to further expand its hours and grow the CARE responder team. As the CARE Team's protocol and processes become more familiar and streamlined with its other first responder partners across the city, the ability to serve even more community members will continue to grow.

☐ **Expansion of the Employee Support Line**

In March 2024, the Community Safety Department piloted their own Employee Support Line for select city departments. This direct line to CARE enabled City of Cambridge employees to call the CARE Team when in need of consult or direct support regarding community members in need. In 2025, the CARE Team plans to expand this line to include all City of Cambridge departments.

☐ **Trips to other Community Response Programs**

In 2025, members of the Community Safety Department will be visiting with the Albuquerque Community Safety Department. The visit's objective is to learn more about Albuquerque's violence prevention and intervention work, acquire best practices for developing and maintaining strong working relationships with other first responder departments, and inspire CSD staff to envision further areas of growth and development.

☐ **Violence Prevention Planning**

The CSD has been tasked with leading the creation of a comprehensive Violence Prevention plan for the City of Cambridge. The CSD will work collaboratively with other city departments and community service providers to develop a plan and begin implementation in 2025.

☐ **Monthly Convening of Service Providers**

The CSD is teaming up with colleagues from the Multi-Service Center (MSC), city library branches, and other organizations across Cambridge to host bi-monthly convenings to offer support and brainstorm barriers that come up in crisis response and outreach work.

☐ **Alternative Response Conference Presentation**

Marie Mathieu, CSD Assistant Director of Clinical Services, was invited to present on the Alternative Mobile Services Response panel about how to best prepare 9-1-1 call-takers to implement alternative response models and divert behavioral health-related calls to alternative response teams. Additionally, two other team members will attend the AMSA conference as participants.



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