DISCUSSION GUIDE

ERNIE & JOE
CRISIS COPS

A film by Jenifer McShane

ernieandjoethefilm.com

ABOUT THE FILM

ERNIE & JOE: CRISIS COPS is an intimate portrait of two Texas police officers who are helping change the way police respond to mental health calls. The film takes audiences on a personal journey, weaving together Ernie and Joe's experiences during their daily encounters with people in crisis. These two officers are not your everyday cops. They are part of the San Antonio Police Department's Mental Health Unit.

LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

I believe strongly that my own contribution as a filmmaker can be in raising awareness of tough societal issues through relatable characters and their stories. While making my last film, **MOTHERS OF BEDFORD,** *it became evident to me that there were many people with untreated mental illness sitting behind bars. Upon learning of the innovative work of the SAPD Mental Health Unit and then meeting Ernie and Joe in person I felt compelled to make this film. The jail diversion work we see these two officers practice is humane and desperately needed to improve not only the health of the mentally ill, but also of their families. We have seen many films illustrating the multitude of sins in police departments across the country.* **ERNIE & JOE: CRISIS COPS** *introduces us to two officers and one police department trying and succeeding in doing it right.*
As long as police officers are charged with responding to 911 calls, The San Antonio Police Department and these officers provide one model that can improve policing and community outcomes for all. My hope is that the film will inspire police departments, officers and communities to work together to reduce the criminalization of those with mental health challenges and find ways to support all community members to thrive.

Jenifer McShane

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

What feelings came up for you when you watched the film?

What did you find most interesting about the documentary?

Do you think that access to community mental health needs to be improved in your city or town? If so, how?

Have you had direct contact with law enforcement? Would you feel comfortable describing your experience?

The work Ernie and Joe do diverts individuals struggling with mental health issues away from jail and prison. How do you think that strategy benefits individuals and society?

Does your local police force use a Crisis Intervention Team approach? If not, do you think this is something that you would advocate for? Why or why not?

Did Ernie and Joe's approach to their jobs differ from your assumptions about police officers? If so, how?

In the course of watching the film, did you realize any preconceived opinions about those struggling with mental illness?

Is access to mental health care an issue in your community? Do you feel citizens are treated equally by law enforcement/ first responders? If not, why?

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

- Find out if your local police department utilizes a crisis response team. If not, advocate for them to do a CIT training.
- Create a working group of civic stakeholders to discuss issues raised by the film. Establish a working dialogue with your local police department or sheriff's office and other community decision-makers, such as government officials, heads of hospitals, behavioral health system managers, etc.
- Encourage all community members to take a Mental Health First Aid class.
- Volunteer with your local NAMI chapter or participate in a local NAMI Walk.
- Learn more about CIT Programs by visiting: **https://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Crisis-Intervention/Crisis-Intervention-Team-(CIT)-Programs**

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

During your event, be sure to share information for those struggling with mental illness to receive support. National hotline and organization information is below and you can also find local resources using this tool from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Help is available 24/7 nationwide. If you are in crisis or know someone who is, reach out immediately to the following for help:

CALL 1-800-273-8255 | National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

TEXT HOME to 741741 | Crisis Text Line

Text FB to 741741 (in the United States) or click “Send Message” on this page to chat confidentially with a trained Crisis Counselor 24/7.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Find Support

This not-for-profit organization is dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education and advocacy, and to reaching out to people with mental disorders and those impacted by suicide.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

DBSA is a peer-directed national organization focusing on the two most prevalent mental health conditions, depression and bipolar disorder, which affect more than 21 million Americans.

Mental Health First Aid

From the National Council for Behavioral Health, Mental Health First Aid is a skills-based training course that teaches participants about mental health and substance-use issues.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. On this site, you can find information about your local NAMI affiliate and learn more about Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) programs that connect law enforcement, mental health providers, hospital emergency services and individuals with mental illness and their families. You can also find mental health resources for Law Enforcement officers.

NAMI Blog: Why Crisis Intervention Team Training Should Be the Standard

This guest blog post by Ernie Stevens and Joe Smarro includes their personal reflections on creating a mental health unit and strategies for implementing CIT in your area.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Find Help & Treatment

Use this search tool from the US Department of Health and Human Services to find mental health treatment facilities and programs around the country.

Vera Institute of Justice | Serving Safely

The Vera Institute of Justice works to secure equal justice, end mass incarceration, and strengthen families and communities across America. Vera is developing empirically driven responses to the substance use and mental health needs of people involved in justice systems. Serving Safely is a national initiative designed to improve interactions between police and persons affected by mental illnesses and developmental disabilities.

OPTION: BRING IT ONLINE

As we all do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19, event organizers across the world are moving events online. Whie nothing can recreate the intimacy of an in-person event, virtual gatherings can still be powerful and leave attendees with new information and a collective sense of action. Here you will find some tips and tricks for successful online events. When considering in-person events, we encourage all event organizers to prioritize the health and safety of their community.

Designing a program: When programming a virtual event, it's helpful to consider that our collective attention span for virtual events is generally less than an in-person event. While viewing the feature-length version of the film may work depending on your audience, we also have a shorter 25-minute cut available that can be an excellent springboard for productive discussion. Capping your online event time at 1.5 hours is generally recommended - of course, you know your audience best, so this may differ if you are facilitating more in-depth programming like a training or small group sessions.

The virtual platform that will work best for you will depend on the run-of-show for your event. Each of the virtual event platforms has Q&A and polling functionality that can be used creatively to prompt audience interaction. Starting with a poll or question to the audience is often a great way to foster interactivity and communication with the audience who you may not be able to see. Here are some of the platforms that our team has used and can recommend:

Zoom: A flexible platform that can reliably handle large crowds and is customizable for different formats - especially handy if you need to utilize break out rooms, or want to foster intimacy with a small event where the audience can see each other on video.

TUTORIAL

https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360029527911-Live-Training-Webinars

CrowdCast: Also handles large events well with tools for audience interaction like polls and Q&As - however the audience is not able to be on video or speak.

TUTORIAL

https://docs.crowdcast.io/en/articles/699973-how-to-rock-your-first-crowdcast-event

OVEE: This platform is made by ITVS and popular with PBS stations - OVEE can incorporate videos reliably from Youtube, Vimeo or the PBS media player.

TUTORIAL

https://ovee.itvs.org/pages/get_started

SAFETY TIP: Be sure to secure your event against bad actors who may want to interfere with your program. This useful article explains how to protect yourself from "Zoom-bombing."

We ask that you be sure to share our online survey with your audience after the screening - this feedback helps us improve our work and continue

CONNECT ONLINE

Film Website
ernieandjoethefilm.com

Twitter
twitter.com/ernieandjoe

Facebook
facebook.com/ernieandjoethefilm

Instagram
@ernieandjoethefilm

SUPPORT THE FILM

Our goal is to share the film with communities including law enforcement and mental health organizations across the country. Should you wish to support the outreach campaign for **ERNIE & JOE: CRISIS COPS**, please visit our fiscal sponsorship page at the Center for Independent Documentary: **https://www.documentaries.org/ernie-and-joe**. Thank you!