



Downtown Community Safety Partnership

A New Model for Community Crisis Response

by Matthew Sanscartier

In times of crisis, people dial 9-1-1. But not every emergency scenario requires resolution by emergency services.

Many urgent situations require the intervention of professionals other than emergency responders. At such times, a social worker, community facilitator, or even a Good Samaritan might be the best person to deal with the circumstances, but most cities lack the resources to engage these alternatives immediately. This leads to emergency response teams becoming overburdened with distress calls and sometimes facing problems they can't solve effectively.

That's why our downtown Winnipeg, Canada community decided to really look at this challenge through a different lens. Our goal was to create a new model for a more targeted and appropriate alternative to complement and alleviate undue stress on emergency services.



Customer

Downtown Community Safety Partnership

Solutions

- Rave AppArmor for critical communication, mass notification and incident collaboration.

Using data to maximize our impact

Winnipeg's Downtown Community Safety Partnership (DCSP) initially came together as a multi-stakeholder partnership and became a non-profit organization in April 2020. DCSP aims to assist all members of our downtown community and get people the help they need when they need it. DCSP also alleviates pressure on the city's police department and emergency services by intervening at the street level and connecting those in distress with appropriate resources. In 2021, we started to show signs of engagement within the community. By 2022, overall calls to our organization had quadrupled and we began to expand our street teams. As a frontline community resource, we offer foot patrol, mobile advance teams, long-term case management and supports, all of which come together to offer a continuum of care needed by the community.

Some organizations rely on anecdotal evidence to plan activities and allocate resources, but perceptions are limited, and individuals sometimes lack perspective and objectivity. For example, someone who only deals with unhoused persons in one neighborhood may not have any insight into the activities of a colleague who works with parolees a few blocks away. DCSP realized early on that collecting and analyzing data would help us achieve our mission and maximize our impact. Today, we use data to inform day-to-day operations, as well as long-term strategic decisions.

We also knew that data would prove important for our operations. We are a non-profit organization that runs primarily on public funding, grants, and service agreements. Therefore, we must account for every action and every penny of our limited resources. We need to demonstrate to our community partners, funders, and board of directors how we are optimizing our financial and human resources and helping those most in need.

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I'm DCSP's director of operations and intelligence. I oversee all our teams, including our foot patrols, mobile advanced first aid teams, and long-term case management support teams. I am also responsible for data collection and program evaluation analyses. I started here as a business intelligence analyst, looking at data, numbers, and graphs, writing reports and grant applications, and monitoring continuous service quality. But I now use data to identify hotspots, help our five team managers mobilize their crews, and ensure that everything runs smoothly. Together, we're making downtown a safer place for everybody who works, lives, and plays here.



Apparmor in the community

One of our primary data capture tools is Rave Mobile Safety's AppArmor. DCSP's foot and mobile patrol teams use the AppArmor Command mobile app to record all interactions with community members. We use it to track our activities, determine if we are hitting the epicenters for service calls, and reallocate our foot patrols and first aid teams to maintain a proactive presence in the community. We currently have more than 70 internal users.

We have team members from a diverse background, including those interested in emergency services and social services, but we employ a different approach during our outreach—after all, we're not law enforcement. Still, our sphere of activities requires a lot of sophistication on the back end, so we created categories in the app to reflect our interactions within the community. These interactions include engaging with people living on the street, intervening with those needing medical assistance, and having conversations with people who need directions.

Some of these interactions are short: Team members might see somebody sleeping on the sidewalk and ask if they need anything. The person says no, and the responders say, "Okay. Is it okay if we check back in an hour?" They'll log that quickly.

Another call might take three or four hours. Responders might go to a crisis response centre where someone is waiting to detox and experiencing withdrawal symptoms. They'll sit and wait with them for several hours, talking to them and making sure they stay calm. DCSP workers log those situations as well. And sometimes DCSP gets calls to offer transport from a shelter to a crisis centre, for example, and we log that as a transport stat.

Our case management team uses the AppArmor Command desktop application to log their interactions with participants, too. For example, suppose a caseworker hasn't heard from a participant in a while, and they know that they have an upcoming probation appointment. In that case, they'll call them or a friend/family member to offer a reminder. They'll log all of that activity, documenting how much time they spent getting one person to a probation appointment to ensure that they don't breach probation, get arrested, and go back to jail. We divert such cases from the criminal justice system and reduce recidivism in these ways.



"The entire AppArmor support team is really on top of its game. I've never had to wait an hour on the phone with someone to look up a solution or track down a supervisor to address my concern. Support is quick, courteous, and comprehensive."





How many hours does this save the police and the justice system? They would typically have to find and arrest someone who hasn't done anything wrong or violent; they just missed a probation appointment. So, if our team can demonstrate that we spend five hours tracking somebody down, reminding them of the appointment, offering them a ride, and getting context for their present situation, that is a lot less expensive than five hours of police time or an hour of a judge's time.

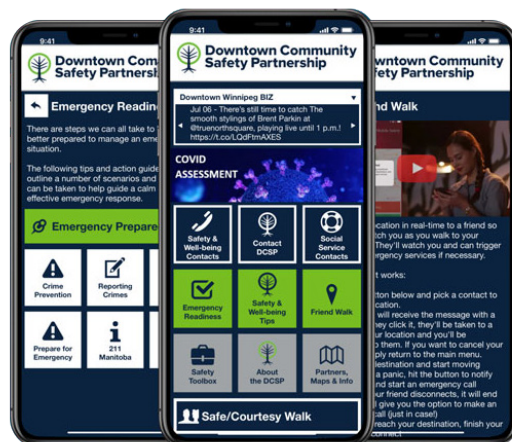
A lot of the conversations we have with funders and donors highlight money saved and responsibilities shifted. But really, what we're talking about is a social return on investment. Our teams often act as a grounding presence for someone who may not have anybody else to be there with them or provide what they need at any given moment. Having a tool to help us keep track of it all and demonstrate our impact is huge. Our investment in building those many trusting relationships at the street level, through maintaining several points of contact, has proven very valuable.

Tweaking the app to suit our needs

We had a lot of categories in place when I joined, and I can modify these categories to reflect changes in our activities and community needs. I'm a DIY kind of guy who worked with statistics packages in grad school, but I have no background in app development, so it was a little intimidating at first.

Thankfully, the Rave AppArmor interface is user friendly, and the support line is very helpful. You don't have to be an analyst or a designer to make things happen. AppArmor is modular, and I can quickly make changes to our setup without any coding required.

For example, one of my employees recently suggested including our rotation handoff on our main screen. So, I went into the AppArmor portal, added a button that called up a browser, and entered a hyperlink to the PDF file. If we see an uptick in clothing donations, we can add a category to track them and use data to manage what we've received and where it's going. AppArmor simplifies our ability to react to changing conditions in the community and adjust our activities accordingly.



Apparmor support is quick, courteous, and comprehensive

I have taught our team leaders how to customize the app for their respective employees and have relied on the AppArmor support line to answer any questions. Any time I didn't know something, I'd email or call, and I would always get a resolution pretty quickly.

One night, I encountered a major issue regarding an update that didn't play well with iPhones. Our mobile teams were seeing blank screens and couldn't use the app. I called tech support, and they escalated my concern even though it was after hours. A few minutes later, I got a call from AppArmor's co-founder. He knew the product inside out, so he was able to help me immediately.

The entire AppArmor support team is really on top of its game. I've never had to wait an hour on the phone with someone to look up a solution or track down a supervisor to address my concern. Support is quick, courteous, and comprehensive. It's one of the benefits of working with a small company like Rave's AppArmor, which has maintained its personal ethos even though it is now part of a larger Fortune 500 company, [Motorola Solutions](#).

Helping bystanders do the right thing

In addition to using AppArmor internally, DCSP has made a version of the platform available to the public. I believe most people are compassionate and want to help others. When people spot or experience trouble, they want to do the right thing, but they don't always know who to call.

This bespoke app provides contact information for various city, social, and emergency services, including transit. The app helps them decide whether to contact 911, 211, 311, or DCSP. Users can contact the DCSP dispatch centre from within the app for various reasons, whether they witness a crisis or see somebody living outside when it's -40 degrees. The app also offers a popular Friend Walk feature, allowing a user to share their location with someone who can track the user in real time—like when walking home from a bus stop late at night. If the user encounters trouble, they can press a button and send an alert to the person tracking their movement.

Members of marginalized communities might also have a historical distrust of emergency services. Our app and services give people a way to help by providing them with the best possible information and non-emergency support based on the kind of engagement or event they're seeing.



DCSP partnered with the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone (BIZ) to promote our services and the app. They helped us create billboards, bus shelter ads, and other marketing collateral featuring the public-facing app and explaining what it does. We just came off a marketing campaign that helped us reach 1,200 downloads of AppArmor, increasing our ability to reach people in need and those who want to help.

Identifying our place in the community and leaving no one behind

Over the past two years, we have used AppArmor to collect data identifying our place and role in the city. We recently hired and partnered with a data science firm that's using the AppArmor API to revamp our internal systems. Our retooled setup includes dashboards providing up-to-the-minute data accessible to our teams in formats tailored to their activities. Using available data, we saw that inbound referrals quadrupled and transport calls tripled in 2022.

It's one thing to rely on anecdotal evidence, but relying on data helps organizations remain objective.

AppArmor helps us respond to these changes, deploy our teams accordingly, and communicate our operational impact to our community partners, funders, and board of directors. Our reports are data-driven, with most of their content transferred from AppArmor into our business intelligence platform to create heat maps demonstrating what we are doing and where. It's one thing to rely on anecdotal evidence from our street teams, but assigning numbers to our community interactions helps us remain objective. We can discern patterns and allocate financial and human resources to priority areas and interventions, increasing our effectiveness both as an organization and as individual community workers.

As DCSP moves from the startup phase to maturity, we are becoming more proactive and increasing our visibility in the city. We wear bright green, and our goal is to have a "green toque" on every street corner so community members can identify and come to us as an alternative to calling 9-1-1.

We have established ourselves as a complement to Winnipeg's emergency services that addresses the unmet needs of our community's diverse populations. With AppArmor, we will continue to find and fill the gaps in community services, so no one is left behind.





To learn more, visit: www.motorolasolutions.com



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