

PIO Lessons Learned from a Major Event

This presentation was edited from a presentation on the PIO response to the Century 16 Theater Shooting that occurred in Aurora, Colorado on July 20, 2012. This presentation contains nonspecific information to provide some insight and guidance to professional Public Information Officers. Any examples of press releases or emails in this presentation have been previously released to the media and/or public.

Presentation by Sergeant Cassidee Carlson
Aurora Colorado Police Department

ccarlson@auroragov.org

303-739-6616



Family PIO Liaison Program

- This program was established to provide a buffer to the media for the grieving families.
- A professional PIO was assigned to each family (that chose to participate) to offer their expertise in dealing with the media.
- Purpose of the program.
 - Not family spokespeople
 - Provide a media contact to give family space to grieve.
 - Assist families with dealing with media however they wish



Family PIO Liaison Program

- Have people identified beforehand that can step into this role. Should be from outside the lead agency. This also means they will not have knowledge of the case which means they will better serve the purpose of the program and not share confidential information about the case.
- Have training prior to include victim advocacy issues, define perimeters of program, etc.



Logistics when needed to activate

- Set up a meeting as soon as possible. Attendees should include Victim Advocates, PIOs, and District Attorney.
- Matched up PIOs with families (already assigned a victim advocate *also a great idea in a major incident).
- Set up Gmail accounts and Google Voice Numbers for each family.
- Sent out assignments to VA and PIOs and told them to reach out to one another to introduce as they would now be a team.



Family PIO Liaison program

- Email addresses were set up through Gmail with family names. Example: smithfamilypio@gmail.com
- Google voice numbers also set up for PIO use.
- Utilizing these tools makes it easy to switch PIOs if necessary.



Implementation

- The families were told about the program by victim advocates and told it was **COMPLETELY OPTIONAL**.
- Have the families meet the PIOs when appropriate, might be best to have victim advocates do the introductions.
- Confirmed which families wanted to participate then sent out email to media to include which families were participating and the email addresses.



To members of the media:

Past experience in working with victims and families of tragic incidents has taught us some families suffer undue stress making decisions about responding to requests from members of the media. To help assist families with this element, the Aurora Police Department has partnered with area PIO's through the Emergency Services Public Information Officers of Colorado (ESPIOC) to offer media liaisons to family members affected by Friday's tragedy. We have made it clear to the families that our outreach is not intended to influence their decisions reference media contact. The purpose of the PIO liaison is not to act as a family spokesperson or to influence their decision whether to interact with the media.

- The public information officer (PIO) should be the first point of contact when trying to arrange interviews. Some families may be comfortable speaking to the media, while others may not. We ask you to respect these wishes. Please understand that the families' preferences may change over time.
- Avoid asking questions about the facts of the criminal case.
- Some families may welcome media coverage of memorial services, while others may want them to remain private. If media coverage is welcome, use of a pool camera may be appropriate.
- Please work with the family's PIO representative to best respect the family's requests.
- We understand that journalists have a job to do, and that you will seek out interviews with the victims' families. We anticipate that you will be respectful of the family's wishes in regard to media contact.



Family PIO Liaison Program

- PIOs assisted family in coordinating interviews with media if they chose.
- Also released family statements and pictures.
- Families decided if wanted media at funerals and how; then PIO coordinated.
- Some PIOs did automatic email replies with updated information if pertinent – very valuable.
- Program was huge success.
- Media was very receptive of program.
- Alleviated lead agencies from calls about victims.

