



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 28, 2023

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# **Serve & Connect Program Provides Social Work Presence in Law Enforcement Agencies**

**Cayce, SC (April 28, 2023)** – Serve & Connect is excited to announce an expansion of its work focused on bridging relationships between law enforcement, mental health service providers, and people experiencing mental illness. Working in partnership with West Columbia Police Department, Cayce Police Department, and the University of South Carolina's College of Social Work, Serve & Connect launched a program that provides embedded social workers within law enforcement agencies.

The Serve & Connect Social Work Outreach Program makes it possible for law enforcement agencies to receive support identifying individuals in need and connecting them with available services with the goal of diverting people experiencing mental illness away from the criminal justice system and into community-based resources.

The vision for this program is based off the successful model led by Chief Marion Boyce with the West Columbia Police Department. With Chief Boyce's leadership and the support of the University of South Carolina's College of Social Work, Serve & Connect is excited to bring this model to the Cayce Police Department. Chief Chris Cowan and the Cayce Police Department were identified as a partner for Serve & Connect's first program site given their track record of exploring innovative ways to support their citizens.

The Serve & Connect Social Work Outreach Program in Cayce launched in January and during their first quarter of operation, the program reached out to 29 individuals for confidential follow-up after a law enforcement interaction. Out of the 29 individuals, nine received resources which ranged from mental health, court information, employment, and additional police department services. In addition to the nine individuals who received a direct referral, several others engaged in discussions with the social worker regarding life challenges and needs.

At Serve & Connect, we envision a future where police and citizens are working together as one community to address root causes of crime and promote safety so that everyone can thrive. Mental health is vital when seeking to promote community wellness and thriving. Our hope is that this model serves as a mechanism to grow capacity for more law enforcement agencies to promote mental health and wellness. Through the great work generated with the first expansion site at Cayce Police Department we hope to develop a model that works that can be offered to agencies across South Carolina.



## About Serve & Connect

Serve & Connect is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that aims to ignite positive change through police-community partnerships. Kassy Alia Ray founded the organization in memory of her late husband, Officer Gregory Alia, who was killed in the line of duty in 2015. Backed by evidence-based practices designed to fuel collaboration, Serve & Connect provides the tools, training and technical assistance necessary for police departments, local organizations, leaders and residents to work together to improve community outcomes.

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### Addendum – Quotes Provided

Additional Media Provided Upon Request.

Interviews with Program Officials and Social Work Program Members available via request.

#### Chief Boyce, West Columbia Police Department

“Responding to someone dealing with a mental health crisis is one of the most complex calls a law enforcement officer can handle,” shared Chief Boyce. “It requires specialized training and de-escalation techniques in order to attempt to get them the help they require. These calls, more often than not, also require more time than other calls for service that we deal with. Having an outreach program to follow up with these calls and make sure that our residents have sufficient resources to help them, positively benefits our community.”

#### Chief Chris Cowan, Cayce Police Department

“The City of Cayce Police Department is honored and excited to partner with Serve and Connect in starting our social work program,” shared Chief Chris Cowan. “Law enforcement is seeing a stark rise nationally in mental health components in calls for service and we want to provide assistance in every way possible, specifically by introducing the impactful work of social workers. Everyone deserves respect and resources. Many mental health resources have diminished, and law enforcement is standing in the gap to find nontraditional ways to support all citizens. This program is similar to the West Columbia Police Department’s program that successfully partners with the University of South Carolina’s College of Social Work. Our aim is to develop and expand their model to support the City of Cayce with hopes of reducing our calls for service. This will positively impact mental health in our communities and help our patrol officers.”

#### Macey Silano, Serve & Connect Mental Health Program Manager

“The program at West Columbia is an amazing tool for law enforcement to utilize. This program assists individuals after incidents,” shared Macey. “Good, bad, happy, sad, everyone deserves a chance to make a better life for themselves. Sometimes, they just need someone to reach out their hand to help.”



Rhonda DiNovo, MSW Program Coordinator and Graduate Certificate in Drug Addition Studies, University of South Carolina College of Social Work

“On behalf of the University of South Carolina’s College of Social Work and the West Columbia Police Department, I am honored and committed to partner with the Cayce Police Department to expand outreach and service referral efforts in our communities” stated Rhonda DiNovo, MSW Program Coordinator and Graduate Certificate in Drug and Addiction Studies, Coordinator at USC. “Statistics show nearly 30% of all 911 calls for service to our police departments may be related to someone experiencing substance use or mental health crisis. Through our outreach efforts by trained master level social work students, we provide necessary assessment, brief intervention, referral, and follow up. This outreach expansion will offer great benefits by giving more support to our officers, increasing community service referrals, and supporting our community members in their time of need.”