



LECC Spotlight Article: Grand Rapids Police Department’s Partnership with the Cybercrime Support Network (CSN) and the United Way’s 211 Hotline

Technology has become an essential part of daily life. However, as the use of technology continues to rise, the number of corresponding cybercrimes¹ has increased as well. Like many agencies, the Grand Rapids (MI) Police Department was struggling to keep up with the increasing number of reports of these complex cases. According to Sergeant John Wittkowski “responding to cybercrimes was proving difficult because the department lacks the resources to follow-up on most cyber investigations since locating the source, or suspect, of the crime is often challenging.” In addition, agencies often have limited resources to help support victims in the aftermath of a cybercrime. That’s where community partnerships can come in.

211 Hotline

In March of 2020, the Grand Rapids Police Department partnered with the [Cybercrime Support Network](#) (CSN)² to help cybercrime victims through the “Heart of West Michigan United Way’s 211 hotline.”³ The 211 hotline is a call/text/chat program that uses the existing 211 national network as a reporting and triage line for victims of cybercrime. Through this initiative, individuals in Grand Rapids who have experienced a cybercrime may contact a Crime Victim Support Specialist⁴ to get immediate help. This hotline ensures victims have all the resources

¹ Cybercrime is any activity that uses the internet to access, transmit, or manipulate data for illegal purposes. This includes the fraudulent representation of oneself for financial gain, personal gain, or with malicious intent. Common types include: identity theft; imposter scams; hacked accounts and devices; financial and purchase scams; and cyberbullying, harassment, and stalking. (See: <https://www.hwmuw.org/cybercrime>.)

² Cybercrime Support Network (CSN) is a public-private, nonprofit collaboration created to be the voice of cybercrime victims. With the strong support of its sponsors – Craig Newmark Philanthropies, AT&T, Comcast, Google, KnowBe4, Nord VPN, Trend Micro and Verizon – CSN can continue to support victims through FraudSupport.org, which provides assistance to both individual and small business victims of cybercrime and online fraud. For more information, visit [Cybercrimesupport.org](https://www.cybercrimesupport.org).

³ <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2020/03/hotline-to-expand-resources-for-cybercrime-victims-in-grand-rapids.html>

⁴ These call specialists receive specialized training to assist residents who have been impacted by cybercrime, made possible through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Grant. (See: <https://www.hwmuw.org/cybercrime>.)

they need while guiding them through the process of reporting, recovering, and reinforcing their security following a cybercrime. The hotline is free, confidential, available in multiple languages, and available 24/7.

The Grand Rapids police officers are still dispatched to any cyber-related crime where there is an immediate threat to life or property or any incident involving children. Police also continue to take complaints if there is an investigative lead or a local connection for follow-up purposes. For cases that originate out of the area, though, or when there is no suspect information or leads, those victims are directed to the 211 hotline.

Developing the Partnership and Outreach Efforts

The Grand Rapids Police Department first learned about the program during a presentation on the existing collaboration between the CSN and the local United Way 211 system. Once aware of these capabilities, the department decided to explore the possibility of a partnership because it had begun seeing an uptick in cybercrime calls but lacked the resources to follow-up on the increased numbers of reports. Once the partnership was formed, the department used informational and marketing material provided by CSN to develop their internal messaging and training. Once the appropriate protocols were established internally, the agency issued a joint press release to inform the community members and also announced the new partnership on social media. The new partnership was also covered by the local news media.⁵

Tips for Agencies

Agencies interested in implementing this initiative should check out the CSN's [partnership opportunities](#).⁶ According to Sergeant Wittkowski, implementing this partnership has been "pretty seamless at this point." His advice for agencies considering implementing a similar partnership with CSN would be to "ensure that there is a solid policy in place with clear protocols on how these types of complaints will be taken, which ones are to be investigated in-house, and which ones are to be farmed out to CSN."

Many of the resources provided by the 211 hotline specialists are also available online through another one of CSN's initiatives, [FraudSupport.org](#), which is a resource database for cybercrime victims and law enforcement. The [Resource Library](#) provides tools, resources, and collateral for educators, law enforcement, businesses, and organizations to share with their audiences and the general public. Their website also includes a number of security tools for [individuals](#) and [businesses](#).

⁵ "Hotline to expand resources for cybercrime victims in Grand Rapids." March 6, 2020. Available at: <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2020/03/hotline-to-expand-resources-for-cybercrime-victims-in-grand-rapids.html>

⁶ <https://cybercrimesupport.org/become-a-partner/>

Conclusion

According to data released by the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), 2019 saw both the highest number of complaints and the highest dollar losses reported since the center was established in May 2000.⁷ In 2019, the IC3 received 467,361 complaints—an average of nearly 1,300 every day—and recorded more than \$3.5 billion in losses to individual and business victims.⁸ Based on these numbers it is estimated that one in four U.S. adults are victims of cybercrimes each year and they often struggle to find the help they need.⁹

As the data shows, cybercrimes continue to be a pressing issue for law enforcement. However, partnering with the CSN, or a similar community organization, is an effective way to increase an agency's ability to be responsive to cybercrime victims by providing them with resources and assistance to recover from these crimes.

When announcing this new partnership, Chief Eric Payne said, "The partnership between the Grand Rapids Police Department, Cybercrime Support Network and Heart of West Michigan United Way is an excellent example of how collaboration can work in law enforcement. With identity theft, frauds and scams on the rise, this is another tool we can use to help individuals who have experienced these crimes. It gets victims the resources they need and helps repair the damage done by cybercriminals."¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2019-internet-crime-report-released-021120>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://cybercrimesupport.org/>

¹⁰ Grand Rapids Police Department Press Release: "Police Department partners with agencies to help cybercrime victims." March 4, 2020. Available at: <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Our-City/News-Media/Police-Department-partners-with-agencies-to-help-cybercrime-victims?BestBetMatch=cybercrime|d13b95b2-5146-4b00-9e3e-a80c73739a64|4f05f368-ecaa-4a93-b749-7ad6c4867c1f|en-US>