

Council Ring confrontation

Group calls for police transparency in wake of officer encounter with children

Earlier this week at the Campfire Council Ring in Lower Bidwell Park, 15-year-old Jane described what it was like being arrested by police on July 5. The incident was caught on cellphone cameras and has caused quite a stir in the community. In the videos, an 11-year-old girl (Jane's friend) is tackled to the ground by a police officer. According to Jane, an officer had told the girl she could walk away "peacefully." Then the situation escalated.

"They just tackled her for walking away like they said she could do," said Jane (whose name was changed because she is a minor).

Emily Alma and her organization Concerned Citizens for Justice (CCJ) say the incident highlights the need for more comprehensive training for officers when it comes to use of force.

"Our underlying concern is to see a change in culture—it feels like there's this command-and-control mindset that is traditionally part of law enforcement culture everywhere," she recently told the CN&R. "We're concerned by the fact that an 11-year-old girl ended

up on the ground in handcuffs."

All of the footage is viewable on CCJ's website (see infobox). In one video, an officer and a park ranger are seen struggling with the 11-year-old girl on the ground, putting her in handcuffs while at least one person asks the officer to let the girl fix her bikini top, which had become askew, exposing her chest. In another video, an officer is seen shoving people on the scene, and another officer appears to grab a detained girl by the hair.

The Chico Police Department issued a press release the following day, saying officers responded to the Council Ring for a "possible assault" and a "welfare check" regarding a missing or runaway juvenile.

"When the officers attempted to detain the missing juvenile at the request of her guardians, several other juveniles attempted to interfere and prevent the detention," the release says. "One juvenile attempted to physically pull a detained juvenile from a police officer's hands. The crowd of approximately 10 other juveniles interfered and exasperated the already tense situation. The officers ultimately arrested five juveniles for resisting/delaying a

peace officer."

Police Chief Mike O'Brien told the CN&R that the department had received a complaint regarding the incident and is reviewing the matter, but wouldn't comment further. It's unknown whether body camera footage of the incident was recorded. Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said Wednesday (July 31) he personally was not aware of any pending charges against any of the children arrested. Some cases may not fall under his jurisdiction because of the kids' ages.

CCJ emerged two years ago following the law enforcement shooting deaths of two young men experiencing mental health crises in Chico, and its main focuses are on police department transparency and increased crisis intervention and de-escalation training. Last October, its members spoke out against the handcuffing of an 8-year-old boy by Butte County Sheriff's Office deputies. The recent encounter in Bidwell Park brought the issue back to the forefront.

"[Concerned Citizens for Justice] is dismayed to learn that another incident has occurred in our community where law enforcement officers used force to subdue a child," reads a press release the organization penned. "It is critical that law enforcement personnel are trained in de-escalation techniques and that de-escalation is a first response in every response."

David Blake, a retired California peace officer and consultant on use of force, reviewed the cellphone videos posted by CCJ and the statement issued by police for the CN&R, prefacing his analysis by saying it would be "very difficult" and "likely negligent" to develop an accurate

Emily Alma of Concerned Citizens for Justice says a recent physical encounter between police and youths at Bidwell Park highlights the need for more comprehensive use-of-force training for officers.

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