

[Scott]: The Explorer Program is a program that we work with the police officers, usually Carmel PD. But it's a post that we're all kinda like, you could say like, junior police in a way. So we're not police officers. We just help them out. We work events such as public safety day in Carmel. We work the Carmel High School football games. We kinda work security there and traffic and do all that fun stuff. We do cross country events. And we just direct traffic and work security. And we're there to report. We're not supposed to intervene. But we just... we're eyes and ears.

[SFX ONE]

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From WHJE, this is First Responders 411, getting you the inside scoop on first responders in and around Carmel.

[SFX TWO]

I'm Tatum Prati.

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[Tatum]: For many years, the Carmel Police Department has led a Police Explorers Program. This program teaches youth about the ins and outs of a career in law enforcement. Sergeant Schoeff is one of the police officers who oversees the program.

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[Sergeant Schoeff]: So this is just another opportunity for us to be able to bring in younger talent that have an interest in law enforcement, give them an introduction to it, and give them an opportunity to kind of build relationships with local officers and to go through some basic level type of training and experience on what it's like to be a police officer. It helps them to determine whether or not that's something that they want to do long term in their career.

[Tatum]: Working under Sergeant Schoeff is Officer VanNatter. He is an explorer advisor and is responsible for running the exploring post.

[Officer VanNatter]: We like for all of our explorers to start out by going to the Carmel Police Teen Academy. So every summer, we offer two weeks of a free like example of the police academy. And there, they learn how to march and how to PT, they learn a lot about SWAT and canine and traffic stops. Then they become explorers. And their first year in explorer, they're on probation, so they don't get a uniform, they can't work events, they can't do ride-alongs. But once they complete that first year and they've learned the things we require them to learn and passed a couple of tests, then they get a uniform, they can start volunteering at our events, and then they can start riding along with police officers on duty, on the job, in the police cars. And that's a really great experience.

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[Tatum]: Right now, there are thirty explorers with three squad leaders, two sergeants, and one lieutenant. They have two meetings each month where they learn specific skills.

[Officer VanNatter]: We facilitate training. We'll do one class where we just teach handcuffing. And we'll do another class where we teach them how to do field sobriety as if you were dealing with a drunk driver. And they learn how to do that. So they get all this experience, so when they do become a police officer, they've already basically had all the training.

[Tatum]: Obviously there is a lot of responsibility with being a Police Explorer. So what kind of people are allowed to join?

[Sergeant Schoeff]: Well, we have a variety of people that are involved with our explorer program. We try to be as inclusive as possible with that. There are some dynamics behind it that make it to where we have to be a bit selective. Obviously, knowledge of law enforcement, we

have to have people that are not consistently causing trouble and having some sort of a criminal record and so forth. We need people that are looking to abide by the law and abide by the rules of the school. So we need people that are going to be committed to doing the right thing and committed to being successful individually within their school and in their attitude and behavior and just who they are as a character. We need a high level character individual to be apart of our explorer program.

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[Tatum]: Speaking of good character, Scott Lytle is a freshman at Carmel High School and has been a Carmel Police Explorer since eighth grade.

[Scott]: My favorite part is just being able to hang out with people, new people. It's always fun. I like walking around. I like directing traffic. It makes you look professional. It's just fun. I love hanging out with the officers. You know, it's fun to get to know them. My, probably, least favorite part is just the fact that the games, you know, I'm not really ever able to go to a home game because I'm always working it usually because I want to work it. But sometimes I do want to go, but I want to work it. So it's like... you know.

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[Tatum]: It is extremely important that the Explorers meet expectations especially since they wear uniforms that clearly represent the Carmel Police.

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[Sergeant Schoeff]: We put them in a special uniform to identify them as explorers and that they're representing our department. But they're doing so without police powers. So anything that they experience, their direction is to come and let one of us know of it. So if they see, and we've had circumstances where explorers have seen people fighting or have seen something that didn't

seem quite right in a parking lot or something suspicious somewhere. And we just instruct them to come and let us know that, so that we can look into it to determine if there's some sort of police action that needs to be taken. And again, they may be on our side while we approach a situation to try to figure it out. Again, an opportunity for them to learn from it. What we don't want is for them to interact and engage because that's not their role. Their role is for those eyes and ears and helping us know what's going on around the event, whatever it may be.

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[Scott]: It's an explorer uniform. We make sure that they don't look extremely like police because, you know, we don't want them to mistake us for police 'cause then they confront us, and then it gets awkward real fast. So we've had adults before kind of come at us and talk to us about it. Then we usually just have to go get an officer. You either call them in on the radio, text them, something like that.

[Tatum]: Along with carefully selecting explorers who meet the expectations, there are some other requirements as well.

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[Officer VanNatter]: We just require that all of our explorers know what the police ten-codes are. So we have ten-codes, and we have signals. So if our explorers, let's say they're volunteering one day on the Monon trail, and they hear that there's a man with a ten-thirty-two who's ten-thirty-seven, and they think, "Oh, I better go over there and help and see if I can help out with maybe somebody that needs an ambulance." And they get there and they don't know their codes, and they forget that ten-thirty-two means a man with a gun and ten-thirty-seven means they're suspicious. Now you've got an explorer going to an area which they shouldn't be at. So it's important that they know their codes and signals. And then we all use the phonetic alphabet

because it's so hard to tell the difference between c, d, and e on the radio unless you say Charles, David, and Edward.

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[Tatum]: Once an explorer has learned the ten-codes and phonetic alphabet, they are allowed to go on ride-alongs with the police. Ride-alongs usually help the explorers decide they want to be police officers when they grow up. They also get to do other things during the meetings.

[Scott]: We work like traffic stops, so we get to run through mock traffic stops. We do some self-defense classes. Handcuffing. We just shot live-fire the other day. The first time I picked up a gun, like an actual gun 'cause it was in the Explorer Program, and it was crazy the amount of respect that I had 'cause it wasn't like a toy or anything. It's huge.

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[Officer VanNatter]: I think it's very important that teenagers, especially those who are interested in a career in law enforcement, learn the, number one, the proper way to shoot because if you go out and try to learn by yourself, you might teach yourself bad habits, you might teach yourself things that aren't safe.

[Sergeant Schoeff]: That importance of that in training the explorers on utilizing guns is not about helping them be a perfect shot or helping them be... you know. We're not at the point where we're trying to change them on their skills. It's really more about that responsibility in the seriousness behind the responsibility, not taking it lightly.

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[Officer VanNatter]: The best part about the Exploring Program to me is I get to see these young men and young women when they come in and they do Teen Academy when they're thirteen or

when they're fourteen, they start the post, and I get to follow and see them grow and change and go from being little kids to being grown men and grown women. And it really gives me a lot of pride to see that and know that I helped maybe in shaping what they're doing in the future.

[Sergeant Schoeff]: They help a lot. They are so beneficial to our department. And security events. At the Teen Academy, the explorers will come back and help us with a variety of different things. They really are a great benefit to our department. So we kind of see it as an opportunity for us to benefit them and for them to benefit us.

[Scott]: It's always fun hanging out with the police officers and do all that stuff and shoot guns and work security, and look at cameras. It's just a lot of fun.

[Tatum]: This has been Tatum Prati for WHJE. More stories like this can be found at [whje.com](http://whje.com).

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