

THE CHRONICLE

History | Heritage | Culture

Volume 47, Number 21

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

THURSDAY, February 18, 2021

TV personality, Talitha Vickers, releases first book

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY
THE CHRONICLE

Talitha Vickers has blessed the Triad community with her on-air work and community service for years. After years of effort and planning, Vickers now has become an author by releasing her first book, "Why My Hero Had to Go."

The book was inspired by the relationship between her brother, who is in the armed forces, and her nephew. She had wanted to find a way to shed some light on the difficulties her brother and nephew had to deal with when her brother was deployed overseas.

"Every time that my brother had to leave for deployment, no matter the age of my nephew, it was very difficult," said Vickers. "Whether he was two years old and tugging at my brother's leg, or he was five years old and my brother would try to sit him down and explain where he was going and what he was doing, and even up to his teenage years, it was just a constant struggle for a child to understand why his dad was leaving again."

"During those deployments, we were always there, and we would always try to explain it to my nephew, but he could

never grasp it. I drew from all of that and I said I need to make something, even if it's a coloring book, so he could understand his dad was doing something really important and special."

Following several deployments by her brother, Vickers noticed her nephew becoming more withdrawn when that typically wasn't his personality. She found out kids at her nephew's school were giving him a hard time by saying "your dad doesn't love you" and "your dad never shows up to football games."

"That just crushed me, because we had worked so hard to find ways they could stay connected, like the book said, through the stars and looking at the same moon even though they were hundreds of miles apart," she said about her feelings. "That really pushed me even further in writing the book, not only for military families to understand, but also for their peers to understand that just because there is a different family dynamic from your own, doesn't mean that child isn't loved."

"I drew from my nephew and what I physically saw from my brother. My nephew would share with me the things I didn't see when he was at school and things kids would say



Submitted photo
TV news anchor, Talitha Vickers, recently released her first book entitled 'Why My Hero Had to Go.'

to him and I said I had to include that in the book so kids could also understand the life of service men and women."

According to Vickers, the themes of the book center on love, inclusion, and kindness. "It really shows how family can stay connected through their daily routines and their en-

vironment," she said about the book. "So, it's showing through daily routines how kids can stay connected to their loved ones dealing with deployment, but also really drive home the message and show you can stay connected with any loved one."

"I have yet to meet a child that can grasp the

word deployment and what it means. So, I wanted to break it down and chop it in little pieces so it's bite-sized for children to understand what it is they're doing and really pull back that curtain through the illustration from Keith Hobgood to be able to have the lightbulb go off for children."

This is Vickers first time as an author of a book, and she is very happy to have the opportunity to tell this story to kids.

"I am overwhelmed, and this is something that has always been in my heart," she said about being a first-time author. "I've always loved working with children and I am a Sunday School teacher. I just love working with children and seeing the magic in their eyes through books, so to be able to write my own and share that with my children and read the book to the twins is so magical."

From start to finish, the book took eight years for Vickers to complete. With work, family and community involvement, Vickers had little time to write, find the perfect illustrator, or a publisher.

"When you sit down and think, okay I am going to write a book, in my mind I was thinking I could bang this out in a couple months or a year because I know this story and it's a true story and I know the themes I want in there, but it was eight years," she said. "Eight years of stop and go, eight years of moving to different states for my job and I am so glad that it took that

See Book on A2

W-S considering alternative response models for law enforcement

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

The City of Winston-Salem is considering adopting an alternative response model to address 911 calls that involve individuals dealing with mental health issues.

Talks about police funding and procedures have been discussed in cities across the country since last summer, following the murder of George Floyd while being detained by police officers in Minneapolis. Locally, several organizations, including the Forsyth County Police Accountability and Reallocation Coalition (FCPARC), have been

formed and have called for the city council to defund the Winston-Salem Police Department (WSPD) and implement response methods that don't involve law enforcement.

In response to the calls for change, on Monday, Feb. 8, the Public Safety Committee listened to a presentation that outlined two alternative response models. Currently the WSPD uses the "law enforcement only" response model. Typically the officers that respond to mental health calls have had crisis intervention training.

One of the alternative models calls for a co-response, where both police and a mental health professional respond to calls. The other model, which is referred to as the CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) model, calls for mental health professionals to respond alone, but they can still call on law enforcement as needed.

Research provided on the CAHOOTS model which was first adopted in Eugene, Ore. in 1989, shows that in 2019, between 5% and 8% of all calls were diverted and the department has saved



an estimated \$8.5 million. "The program has been so successful that the police department believes there are people who call just to get a service that you otherwise wouldn't call 911 for," said Scott Tesh, director of Winston-Salem's Office of Performance and Accountability.

In recent years several other cities across the country have transitioned to the Co-Response or CAHOOTS model, including Greensboro, Charlotte, and Raleigh. Several cities have also adopted "Civilian Response" opportunities that diverts

"non-urgent" calls that may not need law enforcement. "Oakland, Calif., City Council was looking at ways they could do this and most recently there was an article in Governing Magazine where this came up in the city of Charlotte," Tesh said.

"Non-urgent call types being noise complaints, abandoned cars, property damage. Some of those minor infractions where they might be looking at ways to not send law enforcement to respond to those either."

To determine the need for an alternative re-

sponse model, the city has partnered with RTI International, a non-profit research entity, and they are in the process of doing an analysis of all 911 calls. The goal of the analysis is to better understand the community's needs, identify the best alternative response strategy for the city, and support implementation of an alternative strategy. According to representatives from RTI, the analysis will be broken down into four different phases and will take about 18 months to complete.

Following the presentation by Tesh and others, Selene Johnson, who is a certified behavior analyst, shared her thoughts on the alternative models.

Johnson said in the nearly 30 years that she has worked in the field, she has never needed a weapon to defend herself and only had to call law enforcement once, and even then it was only because she thought a young man was going to run into the street. Johnson said estimates show at least 25% of all fatal law enforcement encounters involve people with mental illness. She said oftentimes the loss of life could've been avoided.

"In my 28 years of experience working in the field of intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities and mental health, I have never carried or needed a weapon, a taser, pepper spray or handcuffs despite the fact I have supported hundreds of people, including young adults in behavioral crisis," Johnson continued.

"Why are people with mental illness and disabilities at an increased risk for these fatal encounters? Well, when a police officer interacts with an individual, she or he expects compliance and cooperation; however, a person with a mental disability may not be able to comply. This is often mistaken as a malicious choice to resist, when in fact, the person may lack the understanding or even the physical control."

Johnson, who is white, said just the presence of law enforcement can further exacerbate a situation, especially for Black and brown people. She said, "Professionals who are fully trained in mental health crises have been shown to have the opposite effect by calming, de-escalating and re-directing."

WTTXS-E-RES & SERIALS MGMT
DAVIS LIBRARY CB # 3938
PO BOX 8890
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27515-8890 90

www.wschronicle.com

