

Arlington police grant would focus on relations with Muslim community



Dr. Basheer Ahmed sits in an office of the Muslim Community Center for Human Services, which he founded in Richland Hills, in this 2011 photo. The Arlington resident is pleased that the Police Department is applying for a Homeland Security grant to help strengthen relations with the Muslim community. **Bob Haynes** Star-Telegram archives

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ARLINGTON

Basheer Ahmed was a psychiatrist who left his native India to teach at a New York medical university in 1968. He moved to Dallas 10 years later as a professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School before putting in 25 years in private practice in Fort Worth.

For the past 20 years he has run a free medical clinic he founded to treat the uninsured.

But when a terrorist attack occurs in the U.S., his Muslim faith and his dark skin stand out to frightened people looking for someone to blame.

“There are a lot of myths that cause confusion,” said Ahmed, an Arlington resident and founder in 2013 of the [Institute of Quranic Knowledge and Religious Acceptance](#).

So he was pleased to hear that the Arlington Police Department is applying for a Homeland Security Department grant that would help police build on relationships with Muslim communities.

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The \$47,500, two-year grant mainly would fund overtime pay for crime prevention officers — who already do a lot of volunteering — to work on an outreach program for Muslim interaction, said Assistant Police Chief Kevin Kolbye, who runs field operations. It would include presentations on safety awareness, community policing, crime prevention, “simple cybersecurity,” how to interact with police at a traffic stop and a variety of other gatherings and activities.

Kolbye said the grant funds would also be used to buy materials for the presentations and to contract with a consultant specializing in ethnic cultures.

Kolbye said he expects the program will improve upon what he considers an already strong relationship with Muslims and residents of other faiths going back 10 years, including his years with the FBI before the Police Department.

“It goes to our philosophy of community policing,” Kolbye said.

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Long before the national turmoil sparked by police shootings of unarmed black men — and then mentally unstable shooters gunning down cops — Arlington police were working about 10 outreach programs that benefited African-American, Latino and other communities. Among the services, police mentor youths who are struggling in school and steer them away from gangs.

“It’s not always about having to do with traffic enforcement or laws,” Kolbye said. “It’s about investing back in the youths in the community, and the people who live there. It’s about solving the problems that they have.”

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Islam, which has 1.6 billion believers, is the fastest-growing major religion in the world, according to Pew Research Center studies. In the U.S., Muslims account for 3.3 million people, about 1 percent of the 322 million U.S. population.

In Arlington, Muslims make up 2.21 percent of the city’s population, more than double the the national average, according to [Sperling’s Best Places](#), a website that analyzes crime, cost of living and other criteria to judge a city’s livability. That would put the number of Muslims living in Arlington at about 8,000.

The outreach will provide opportunities “to help police officers understand the concerns of Muslism,” Ahmed said. “How can we help them make this a better society, a more peaceful society?”

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