

Contact: Dan Ward
Phone: (620) 441-4447
Fax: (620) 442-1410
dward@arkansascityks.gov

Police Department
City of Arkansas City
117 W. Central Ave.
Arkansas City, KS 67005



Press Release

Former Ark City resident joins Arkansas City Police Department

Williams grew up in Ark City, moved to Abilene; now attends Cowley College

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (July 27, 2015) — The Arkansas City Police Department's newest employee loves her new job and is glad to be back in the town where she grew up.

Sarah Williams had been working for the police department through The Arnold Group since the end of May. "They have someone come in and help every summer" as a temporary public service officer to assist with code enforcement, she explained last week.

But when the public service officer position was advertised on a full-time basis, Williams jumped at the chance. She was hired earlier this month and began her duties as a police employee July 10.

"Basically, my job is to do just code enforcement. That's what they hired me for," Williams explained. "But I am now (transitioning into animal control)."

In addition to those two job capacities, the department's two public service officers also handle evidence and assist with Municipal Court services. Williams said she will learn to do both tasks soon.

PSOs are not sworn police officers, so they do not have the power to arrest people or write tickets, but they can respond to citizen complaints and check them out, which helps with police officer workload.

"I like it very much," Williams said. "The atmosphere in this department, and working with everyone over there, they're so nice and it's a very easy work environment. You get along with everybody."

Williams praises Police Chief Dan Ward for his leadership and management of the police force.

"I think Chief has done a phenomenal job. Everyone fits so well together and it just works," she said.

"Everyone's got everybody's back, and I like it. That's why I applied for the position."

For immediate release

more

Williams' plan for now is to work as a PSO for the next two to three years while going to school to become a teacher. "That's my goal in life — to be a teacher," she said. "I'm not sure I could do the full police officer thing. But for now, I like this job."

Williams currently is taking classes through Cowley College and she will earn her associate's degree next May. Then she will finish her last few years of college online through Fort Hays State University.

"Between working full time and school full time, that's basically my life right now," she said.

Arkansas City provides a comfortable and familiar environment for Williams as she juggles full-time employment with full-time education, she said.

"I grew up here. My dad was actually the pastor at Hillcrest Bible Baptist Church for about 10 years, so I was here a good portion of my life, from age 8 to 16," Williams said.

"Then I moved away to Abilene. My family's a military family. I lived there for about six to seven years, and just came back this year. I consider Arkansas City my home because this is basically where I've lived my life, so I moved back here in May to start fresh where I grew up because I like this town."

Williams said she doesn't have much time for hobbies, although she enjoys working out and playing sports, especially volleyball, which she played in high school. She even had a scholarship to play at a Christian college, but it closed after her first semester and she had to start over with her education.

"It was a (curveball), because my goal was to graduate from there, but it didn't happen. That's OK. Life throws you curveballs and you just go with it," she said.

Family was another big reason Williams felt drawn back to Arkansas City.

"I'm a big family person. I spend time with my family, all the time," she said. "My mom and her husband live here, my sister and her husband and kids live here, and my two brothers live about an hour away from here. I try to do more than just work and school, but that's what my life is right now."

She said she enjoys that fast pace, though. "It is very busy, but it makes my day go by super-fast," Williams said, "and something about the job that I like is I never go home saying, 'Oh, I don't want to go to work tomorrow.' I always want to come to work."

Animal control

One of the things keeping Williams so busy right now is her animal control duties. She is responsible for responding to all citizen complaints of dogs at large, dead animals in the street and occasionally even wildlife.

"I feel like since I moved over, my partner and I ... feel like between the both of us, we've gotten a lot accomplished. That's just from our standpoint. Animal control is not our only job, but sometimes I feel like people think that should be our only job. We're doing a lot, but I don't know what else we could do."

Ward addressed both the wildlife issue and the overall volume of animal control work in an interview.

"Technically, wild animals are not our bailiwick," he said. "That's (the Kansas Department of) Wildlife and Parks. We have no jurisdiction over wild animals. We don't govern animals; we govern the owners of the animals."

"The animal control call volume has gone up," Ward added. "In the first six months of 2015, we have had a 12-percent increase in animal calls, compared to the first six months in 2014. During that same time, we have had a 5-percent decrease in the number of animal bite accident calls. (So) more people are calling in about animals, but fewer animals are biting people."

That increase in workload has come at roughly the same time as a reduction in staffing devoted to animal control and a persistent inability to fill both PSO positions consistently.

"(The change to PSOs) took place before I got here," Ward explained.

"You had five people who were doing the job that now two people are doing. That was a budgetary thing. If you look back at the time period it happened, there were some significant cuts in the budget. That was one area they tried to consolidate and make it work. Also, since I have been here, we have not been able to staff fully that position. It's obviously way overworked."

Part of the problem, Ward said, is that with so many duties, it is easy for PSOs to become overwhelmed, or pulled away from one ongoing task to deal with another, more urgent issue that arises.

"When I came in, we had two PSOs and they worked different time periods. One would come in early and one would come in later, so we had a bigger range of hours they were covering, and they also had different days off, so we had coverage through the weekends, as well," Ward said. "You pretty much had one PSO working and they were really strapped, and constantly changing to do different things."

"What we've done is try to make it streamlined better. We put the two PSOs on the same shift, and they work Monday through Friday together," he continued. "That way, we had one that was dedicated today, 'This is the task that I'm going to accomplish,' and the other one could take all the calls."

"We did that to be more effective and efficient with the limited resources we have. The problem is that I haven't been able to have two (PSOs) on the staffing long enough to find out if it helps. What I'm getting from them is, yes, it helps when we have two people. Now that we have (Williams) on board, I'm hoping that we're set for a while."

"We have also worked with the courts, and we have streamlined and reduced the amount of time required of PSOs for probationary duties," Ward added. "That makes it a little more efficient for them."

Ward said the challenges of managing the budget always will be there, but safety is his priority.

"All departments across the country have to do more with less. All administrators have to face the tough decision of what services are we going to reduce, and when you're talking about a police department, every time, people come first," he said. "The cuts are going to be in areas that do not affect crime and traffic safety. Those are always going to be your priorities."

He said he emphasizes community policing and citizen involvement to help to bridge the gap.

"We need citizens to help," Ward explained. "If you have a dog that is running loose in your neighborhood, and you know who the owner is, we encourage you to talk to the owner. I don't want animal control to pick it up because that's going to cost you money in kennel fees and fines. We don't want to have charge citizens. We prefer if citizens work together to solve those issues."

Ward said that due to Ark City's geography, he does not see the animal control issue going away.

"We're positioned between two rivers, we're pretty rural, and as populations increase in other areas, it pushes them out further," he explained. "Wildlife is always going to be here and coming into Ark City."

He said there also has been more of a push for animals at large, especially dogs running loose.

"They're seeing more of them because we do not actively patrol that. We are reactionary when people call in. We are not picking up the dogs that we used to back when we had two full-time animal control officers," Ward said. "They (also) used to patrol the streets for dead animals. That's not just something we can do without increases to the budget."

Code enforcement

Another thing keeping Williams busy is code enforcement calls, especially those relating to tall grass and weeds, which tend to pick up in the summer. It's been an especially rainy summer, as well.

“From what the past has been, they said summer is really super busy,” she said. “This year, I think I’ve stayed on top of it. When I get a complaint, I usually go out that day. I will go and check the site. If there’s a problem, I will take care of it. If I don’t see a problem, then I close (the case), because sometimes people just call and complain because they’re upset, and so I physically go and see.”

“So I’ve made it a priority to make sure if I get a complaint, after I get whatever else done that needs to be done, I go to the site,” Williams explained.

“If there’s a valid complaint, it needs to get taken care of. It’s been a busy summer with that, but I feel like for the most part, (PSO) Eric (Gross) and I have come in and taken care of it.”

Williams also explained how the code enforcement process works from her perspective.

“We open up a case, and if the complaint is valid, I go out and take the pictures, and look at the site,” she said.

“Then I come back and upload the pictures, and send a letter to the owner. If the owner has a tenant in the house, I send a letter to the owner and the tenant to let them both know something needs to get taken care of.”

Williams said she really hasn’t had any issues, and it all comes back to customer service.

“I seem to get along well with people in the community because I smile and they know who I am,” she said. “They usually do what they need to do. Everyone feels like their problems are important, and if you make them feel that way, (they respond well). Everyone in this community is important.”