

Family, Community Deserve Answers in Police Shooting - Aug. 11, 2014 - By Lauren Lee

On April 30, 31-year-old Dontre Hamilton died after being shot multiple times by a Milwaukee police officer at Red Arrow Park downtown.

Hamilton had been running scared for days and was exhausted, family members said; he had a history of paranoia and schizophrenia but usually was not violent.

Two officers had gotten a call about Hamilton sleeping in the park that day, and they checked on him. When they determined he was not a threat to the area, they left. Another call about Hamilton came in, and that's when the third officer arrived.

Hamilton's family gave this account based on a meeting last month with the Milwaukee County district attorney's office:

After the officer began to pat down Hamilton, a scuffle ensued. The officer pulled out his baton and hit Hamilton, who took the baton away from the officer. Some witnesses reported that Hamilton did hit the officer with the baton, while others said Hamilton did not swing the baton. The police officer then fatally shot Hamilton.

An employee at the Starbucks in Red Arrow Park said the police officer was the beat cop for that area. The officer had not undergone crisis intervention training, a 40-hour training that helps police officers react appropriately when dealing with people who have mental illness.

Even if this officer had had the training, I wonder if the outcome would have been different. And we are left with many unanswered questions, which is what frustrates me and continues to frustrate Hamilton's family.

Several months after the shooting, the family still has no closure and has few answers. What's going to happen with this officer's case? We don't know. Is it acceptable that a man with a mental illness is shot to death by police? Especially if the man was doing nothing more than sleeping in a park and already had been checked on by two other officers?

Hamilton's brother, Nathaniel, describes the incident as "overkill." That's how it seems to me. If indeed 15 shots were fired, as the family reported after meeting with the DA's office, it's hard to believe that amount of force would be necessary. I think the whole situation could have been prevented.

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