

Memorandum

City of Lawrence

Police Department

To: Tarik Khatib, Chief of Police
From: CIT Committee
Date: June 5, 2014
Re: Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Recommendation

Background

In 1987 police officers were called to an area of public housing in Memphis, Tennessee, where a man was threatening people with a knife. When police officers ordered him to put down the knife, he refused. The officers eventually opened fire and the man died of multiple gunshot wounds. He had a history of mental illness. Many citizens raised their voices in angry protest against the officers with cries of racism and police brutality. Calmer voices prevailed calling for the community to develop a better way to intervene with individuals in mental health crisis. The Mayor of Memphis turned to local advocates from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and enlisted police, community mental health professionals, university leaders, hospital administrators, and church officials to seek a new approach to working with persons with mental illness in crisis.

The Douglas County CIT Council began meeting monthly in February 2014. The council has members from the police departments in Lawrence, Eudora, Baldwin, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, KU Public Safety Office, Bert Nash, Headquarters, NAMI-DGCO, Douglas County Emergency Communications, the District Attorney's office, Municipal Court and a chaplain. The council is working to improve communication between law enforcement, prosecutors and mental health professionals and to identify ways to improve services for persons in mental health crisis. A top priority is to have on call mental health professionals available to assist officers at night and on weekends when an officer needs assistance with a citizen who has a mental health issue.

Discussion

The *Governor's Mental Health Task Force Report* was published on April 15, 2014. In the report it states, "The task force recommends that the state expand the use of Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) to all police departments in Kansas. If CIT is not determined to be feasible for a particular community, steps should be taken to remove barriers to providing CIT or develop an alternative to provide police officers and first responders with the skills, methods, and tactics to safely de-escalate incidents involving persons experiencing a mental health crisis."

CIT training is usually 40 hours provided over the course of a week with an 8-hour day spent visiting local mental health facilities. Officers from the Lawrence, Kansas Police Department (LKPD) have attended CIT training in Topeka, KS, Leavenworth, KS, Johnson County, KS, and at the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center in Hutchinson, KS. Feedback provided by officers who have attended the training suggests 40 hours is a bit excessive, particularly the on-site visits. Scenario based training was reported to be the most valuable use of training time and hearing from consumers (the term most frequently applied to a person who has received mental health services) as the second.

Over the past 2 years, LKPD has sent 9 officers, 4 detectives and 1 chaplain to CIT training with 1 officer attending before 2012. From this group, 3 officers were promoted to the rank of sergeant and 3 officers are working temporary assignments. As a result, there are only 5 officers who are CIT trained on patrol. The current team-based deployment divides officers amongst 8 teams instead of 3 shifts, which further reduces the availability of a CIT trained officer to respond to a call involving a person in mental health crisis. Sending personnel to CIT training hosted by outside agencies is ineffective at best due to the limited number of opportunities, time invested in the training and current resource deployment by LKPD.

The Lawrence, Kansas Police Department has to seriously consider whether it is more effective to train a percentage (20-30% recommended by CIT International) of officers in the full 40-hour CIT training or train all sworn personnel in an abbreviated CIT training program. This training could be conducted over 4, 10-hour training days (in-service). The focus would be on practical, scenario-based training that would give officers the basic skills needed to engage someone dealing with mental health issues as well as identify the mental health resources available in Douglas County, Kansas.

The opening paragraph of this memorandum describes why CIT came into existence and many of the anecdotes provided in support of a CIT program are usually of a dynamic nature that requires officers to respond with force and usually have a tragic end. In these situations, time is of the essence and all officers responding to the call need to have a basic understanding of how to deal with someone having a mental health crisis. Having a 40-hour trained CIT officer might be ideal, but there are two basic reasons this may not always be feasible. First, a CIT officer may not be available due to them being on other calls. Second, it is not always known at the time the call is dispatched that the person is having a mental health crisis.

One means of addressing the unknown when responding to a mental health crisis is to create a database. The database would allow consumers and family members of consumers, as well as families with children who have a developmental or cognitive disability to voluntarily register with the database. It could be available to anyone who wanted law enforcement to be aware of a unique situation when responding to a residence or coming into contact with a registered citizen. It could provide valuable information by providing a photograph and physical description, officer safety issues such as the person may become combative if touched or critical time saving information when responding to a lost autistic child who is drawn to water for example.

Recommendations

Training

CIT training for LKPD officers could be done with a 4-phase approach. Phase 1 is already in place as all officers have been trained in Mental First Aid and a relationship has been established with Bert Nash for their personnel to provide the training to future recruit academies. Phase 2 could be implemented in 2015 by providing in-service training to all officers on CIT basics, informing officers on how to handle a mental health crisis and what community resources are available. The Douglas County CIT Council would handle phase 3 in 2016, which would be the full 40-hour training made available to any agency or organization interested in sending someone to the training. Finally, Phase 4 would be ongoing CIT training during in-service. These classes would be similar to the presentation given by Johnson County Deputy Alison Anderson on Autism.

By having all officers trained at an awareness level for CIT, it allows the department to have a CIT officer on every call without the delay that may come from having to wait on one to be dispatched. It gives everyone a foundation for handling the mental health crisis call in a uniform manner and improves officer skills for responding to less dynamic calls like suicides and welfare checks. The full 40-hour CIT training is still an option to officers, as the Douglas County CIT council will move forward with implementing it. An officer wishing to attend the 40-hour training will need to submit an Officer's Special Report through his or her chain of command to the Chief of Police.

Database

Implementation of the Take Me Home Program. This program is a database maintained by law enforcement personnel for adults and children who may have difficulty communicating due to a developmental or cognitive disability. This database is only accessible to law enforcement personnel. The database includes a picture, disability information, physical description and emergency contact information for all registered individuals. If a person in the Take Me Home program is encountered by a police officer, or is reported missing, the officer can access the database by the person's name or description to locate their information. With this information at hand, the officer can appropriately assist the person.

Citizens who desire the police department to have their information provide all information entered into the Take Me Home Program voluntarily. A form can be provided online for the public to print, complete and return to the department where an LKPD member of the Douglas CIT Council will enter it into the database. The software for the program is free and would be downloaded to a single computer in the report writing room at the Law Enforcement Center.

Sergeant David Hogue
Officer Amber Rhoden
Officer Terry Haak
Officer Sutagee Anglin