



Connie Beck, Director
Social Services | Public Health | Behavioral Health

news release

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Grant to provide full-time Behavioral Health team to assist Sheriff's staff with mental health calls

The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office and the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) are joining forces to increase availability to mental health assistance for people experiencing a need.

Thanks to a grant from the California Department of Health Care Services, DHHS's Behavioral Health Branch will be funded to hire six new staff, including two clinicians, two case managers and two peer coaches, to respond to calls with Sheriff's deputies.

Behavioral Health Senior Program Manager Kelly Johnson said planning and implementation meetings with her staff and the Sheriff's Office are scheduled to start next week, following confirmation of the nearly \$430,000 Behavioral Health Justice Intervention Services Project grant.

She said the six new hires will be broken into two teams that will work four 10-hour shifts each week. "This will be seven days a week, and we'll be embedded in the Sheriff's Office and available to respond to any mental health-related calls for service," Johnson said.

Behavioral Health staff has for years worked closely with Arcata and Eureka police departments through the Mobile Intervention and Services Teams. Known as MIST, the teams work specifically with people who are homeless and need help stabilizing their mental health and securing services and assistance to avoid further problems. The program with the Sheriff's Office differs in that its focus is on anyone who is experiencing a mental health crisis.

"The idea is the peer coach and case manager can do some follow up and linking to services if needed, whereas the clinician will do more crisis intervention," Johnson said. "The Behavioral Health team will be available to accompany any law enforcement officer who is working in the Sheriff's Office."

Undersheriff Justin Braud said the collaboration is a win-win. "Keeping the peace and protecting the public are the top priorities for the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office," he said. "Having trained staff from DHHS to help us when dealing with people in crisis will exponentially increase our chances of resolving these incidents safely and connecting people with the services they need. I see no downside to this collaboration and believe it will help us serve our community more effectively."

Behavioral Health Director Emi Botzler-Rodgers agreed, saying the grant and collaboration between the two departments provides a "tremendous opportunity" for the community. "This grant will help increase opportunities to stabilize individuals in mental health crisis in the community instead of putting them on a hold and bringing them to the hospital or to jail," she said. "It is the kind of work that our community needs more of and a partnership we hugely value."

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