



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

news release

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Law enforcement officers train to better handle mental health crises

Law enforcement officers and mental health service providers are learning techniques to de-escalate mental health crises during this week's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training.

The five-day CIT course teaches law enforcement officials to identify major mental health disorders and other disabilities when working with people in the field. These skills can help to de-escalate a crisis and divert those experiencing mental health challenges into treatment rather than the criminal justice system. The Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), local law enforcement agencies and community organizations have been hosting these state-certified trainings since 2007.

Kelly Johnson, senior program manager for DHHS Mental Health said, "It's crucial that law enforcement, mental health and advocacy groups work together to learn better strategies for interacting with people experiencing mental health crises. CIT is proven to reduce numbers of people with mental illnesses entering the criminal justice system and reduce the use of force by police when interacting with people experiencing mental health crises."

This year's training will follow a national curriculum that covers specific mental health diagnoses in greater depth to increase awareness of how these conditions may influence a person's behavior. Other sessions will focus on working with people experiencing homelessness and helping officers and providers manage secondary traumatic stress associated with their jobs. Participants will also tour local mental health facilities to learn more about available services.

The Humboldt Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Arcata Police Department, Eureka Police Department, Humboldt County Sheriff's Office, the Public Defender's Office, the District Attorney's Office, the Probation Department and DHHS organized this year's CIT training.

By the end of this week, nearly 450 people will have completed the course locally over the last 12 years. Those include representatives from law enforcement agencies, law offices, ambulance services, medical facilities, park systems, tribes and DHHS.

“We’ve continued to see an increase in support for CIT in Humboldt County,” Johnson said. “This increased interest is a good sign that our local law enforcement agencies understand the value of CIT and are implementing these strategies in their departments.”

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