



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

news release

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APD and DHHS join forces to address mental health

Four days a week, a mental health clinician or case manager is stationed at the Arcata Police Department (APD) and goes on calls with officers to conduct outreach and follow up with people in the community who need assistance.

The collaboration between APD and Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Behavioral Health is known as the Mobile Intervention & Services Team or MIST, and pairs police and mental health professionals to work with people in need of help stabilizing their mental health and securing services and assistance to avoid frequent interactions with law enforcement.

APD Sgt. Brian Hoffman said the partnership is a valuable one. "Our officers are experienced in dealing with these issues and do so every day, but the reality is we do not have the institutional knowledge of what services are readily available at any given time and are also pertinent to each situation."

That's where DHHS Behavioral Health Case Manager Shao-Lan Lew-Smith comes in. Three years ago, Lew-Smith was training at the Police Academy when she decided to make a change and left early to take a position at the county's psychiatric health facility Sempervirens. "I realized the happiest I've been in my professional life was working in mental health," she said. But that experience at the academy helped her gain a broader perspective which aids her in her job today. "I can see where the police are coming from and from the client's point of view," she said.

While the MIST program has been in Humboldt County since 2015, this particular group of officers and Behavioral Health staff have only been working together for a few weeks, but Lew-Smith said so far, it's been positive. "The officers have compassion for people, but they're coming from the enforcement standpoint and don't really have the time or the experience to listen to what is going on with the person and what the person is telling them."

Sgt. Hoffman agrees. "With calls for service always accumulating we have difficulty finding the time needed to bring some of these situations to a resolution that require extended assistance and time. MIST personnel are able to provide the time and nurturing needed to make the most out of a situation."

Lew-Smith and Mental Health Clinician Keely Page are each stationed at APD twice a week and get dispatched with officers for behavioral health-related calls. The officer and case manager or clinician take separate vehicles so that if it is safe, and necessary to provide more assistance, the clinician or case manager can stay.

"I do follow up with clients who I have previously outreached to, helping clients with housing applications, applying for General Relief and Section 8 and linking them to mental health and social services," Lew-Smith said.

"Where MIST really enhances these services is applying their knowledge of what is needed in each situation, be it a mental health crisis, someone wanting sobriety services or needing a safe place to sleep, and being able to immediately follow through with assistance," Sgt. Hoffman said.

Aside from being able to identify needed services and assisting in connecting people to them, having a non-uniformed presence can also be a real attribute when creating a connection with those in need, Hoffman said. "I have seen firsthand what MIST can do partnered with APD officers on the street and look forward to pushing the boundaries of what policing can accomplish when coupled with social services."



From left: DHHS Behavioral Health Program Manager Kelly Johnson, Mental Health Case Manager Shao-Lan Lew-Smith, APD Sgt. Brian Hoffman, Mental Health Clinician Kelly Page, APD Lt. Bart Silvers and Supervising Mental Health Clinician Brian Barnes.

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