

First Responders Participate In Mental Health Crisis Intervention Training

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First responders in the River Region are learning how to deal with people with mental health issues during a crisis. The three day training was sponsored by the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI).

Wednesday evening, the Montgomery County Crisis Intervention team wrapped up the training program designed to equip first responders with the skills to recognize and assist people experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

Regina Walker with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office says that "in law enforcement, they are trained that when you don't obey their orders that its defiance, when its really not. So they are learning what the client is hearing them say vs what they are actually saying".

Lieutenant Ed Jones with the Lowndes County Sheriffs office says he thinks "all law enforcement personnel from the bottom to the top should be attending this training, because this is what is going to keep us safe out there as well the people that have mental illness".

Training consisted of both classroom instruction and practical exercises and scenarios supervised by mental health professionals. Walker explains "I think the scenarios...the real life role playing has really made a difference with a lot of them, because we have some officers that are new and some that are veterans but you've definitely seen a difference in their mind set and i know that they will take that back and share it with their colleagues and that is the purpose of what we are trying to do".

Responders also heard from those experiencing mental illness either personally or through a family member. Ben Arthur spoke to the room full of law enforcement officers about his personal experiences with Schizophrenia and says the training "will allow them to humanize who we are as mentally ill people".

Officials hope the training will also reduce the stigma associated with mental health. This was the first training of its kind in the River Region but officials say it wont be the last. They hope to have a similar training program in September.

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