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TOP STORY

New mental health officer program will teach officers how to respond to mental health calls

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Lauderdale County Sheriff's Office has partnered with the probate judges office, Florence police, and mental health facilities to form a mental health program for officers.

Mental health calls happen all too often. Now a new team will work to stop people from becoming a danger to not only others but to themselves as well.

Lauderdale County has created a mental health officer program in a partnership with multiple agencies to help combat mental health issues.



Shane Blalock will be the coordinator for the mental health program in Lauderdale County. Blalock has been serving as a mental health officer for 12 years.

The program will essentially train officers on how to respond to mental health calls when they happen. Everything from mental break-downs to suicidal thoughts.

"They are usually to the point of being suicidal or homicidal," said Shane Blalock, the newly appointed mental health coordinator for the program.

Blalock gets 6 to 10 calls a week for mental health issues. This isn't his first go with mental health it's something he's done for 12 years as a Florence Police officer.

"A lot of these people, had we not intervened would have possibly hurt, killed someone else or killed themselves," said Blalock.



Florence Police Officer, Shane Blalock, being sworn in as the coordinator of the new mental health program for officers in Lauderdale County.

The Lauderdale County Sheriff's Office, Florence Police, the Probate Judge, and local mental health facilities have all partnered together to create this program to get people the help they need.

Florence Police Chief Ron Tyler said this program is essential because of cuts at the state level.

"The state of Alabama needs to recognize mental illness as a medical condition and they need to properly fund those services," said Tyler.

The new mental health officer program will have a total of six officers. Four of them are Florence police officers and two of them are Lauderdale County deputies. They will respond to calls, talk with people, and if need be take them to behavioral facilities.

"Every time we interact with somebody they are in a state of crisis and our job is to deescalate and get them the treatment and help where they don't get back to that place again," said Blalock.

All agencies agree the need for more mental health officers has grown over the last two years. Officials hope this program will help officers develop relationships with those who need help.

"They see us as 'oh I want to call the police', because they are going to help me get back to where I need to be," said Blalock.

Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said they also plan to train all deputies on the basics of responding to mental health calls. Blalock will be in charge of that training.

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