

Madison PD focuses on training officers on mental health calls

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MADISON, Ala. -- Mental illness has been a topic of conversation among many lawmakers this week. It's an issue that several state and federal agencies are looking to find more funding for.

One local police department is working to ensure that its officers are confident in responding to calls involving the mentally ill.

"I think it's becoming a trend," said Madison City Detective Stacy Thomas. "I think that people are becoming more aware that this is something that is going on across the United States. I think they are aware that there's something that needs to be done."

Mental illness can be a tough subject to discuss, but it's one that the Madison Police Department is training its officers on.

"What the training does is it kind of gives you some general classifications of the type of people that you might come into contact with," explained Madison Police Chief David Jernigan. "Many times you'll have a mental consumer who is off their medications, maybe not thinking clearly and sometimes that decision making ability is hampered and they end up violating the law."

Chief Jernigan said that's when law enforcement intervenes. It's how officers respond to a call that can make a major difference in an outcome of a situation.

Detective Thomas spent half of her career as a Crisis Intervention Te:

officer in Memphis. She was trained specifically on how to deal with calls with the mentally ill.

"De-escalation and the trust thing is very important with mentally ill people. They need to know that they can trust you," said Detective Thomas.

Madison PD focuses heavily on making sure its officers are prepared to respond to these calls. But, Chief Jernigan said not every department in the state has funding to do so.

"They get some training at the state police academy, but I think what really will work is when they get back to their area that they work in that there is funding available to get them CIT trained," said Chief Jernigan. "The CIT training is very much dependent on the resources in your particular area."

Chief Jernigan added there's much more work that needs to be done to help the mentally ill in Alabama.



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