



Harrisonburg-Rockingham Regional Crisis Intervention Team



Media Release

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Local Agencies Partner to Respond to Individuals in Crisis

Over the past two years community stakeholders in the Harrisonburg and Rockingham County area have worked toward forming a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) task force. The task force overseeing this project included a diverse group of people within our community (staff from the Harrisonburg Police Department, Rockingham County Sheriff's Office, Harrisonburg-Rockingham Court Services Unit, Harrisonburg-Rockingham Community Services Board, and the Office of the Magistrate). The goal of the task force has been to form a CIT program for the Harrisonburg-Rockingham area. The task force set goals to obtain the funding necessary to establish a local CIT program and was awarded funds from the Asset Forfeiture Transfer Program through the Office of the Attorney General of Virginia in the amount of \$90,726. The task force also obtained \$70,453 through the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program. Utilizing a portion of this funding, the task force hired a CIT Coordinator who will facilitate the implementation of guidelines established by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS).

Background of CIT

The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) is a well-documented and successful model of improving interactions between law enforcement and people experiencing acute episodes of mental illness. The training is designed to educate and prepare police officers who come into contact with people in crisis, to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness and to respond effectively and appropriately to the individual. Because law enforcement officers are often the first responders in these incidents, it is essential that they understand how mental illnesses can alter someone's behaviors and perceptions. The trained CIT officer is skilled at recognizing and deescalating crises involving people with acute episodes of mental illness, while bringing an element of understanding and compassion to these difficult situations. The overarching objectives of this program are twofold and inter-related:

- 1) Offer specialized training to law enforcement officers on how to effectively work with people exhibiting signs of acute mental illness and substance abuse.
- 2) Further develop the local Crisis Intervention Team task force, with representatives from law enforcement agencies, mental health service providers, local and regional jails, local and state community corrections programs, consumers and advocates, to design and implement a written protocol that governs the agencies' interactions in working with people experiencing acute episodes of mental illness and with people



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with mental illness who have found themselves in situations in which law enforcement has intervened.

This newly formed program is yet another resource and asset for the local community. Numerous partnerships and grants have enabled the formation of this team, which organizers expect to serve the Harrisonburg and Rockingham County area for many years to come.