

**West Orange Police Department and Mental Health Association of
Essex and Morris, Inc. Collaboration Project**

Outcomes Report
(September 2020 – February 2021)

DATED: March 2021

1. MHAEM/WOPD COLLABORATION SUMMARY

The collaborative efforts of the Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris (MHAEM) and the West Orange Police Department (WOPD) has led to opportunities for success in managing mental health awareness and community related response calls in a manner that facilitates treatment and recovery while reducing involvement in the criminal justice system. MHAEM supports coordinated efforts to conduct the following: 1) identify and provide necessary services to reduce the occurrence of mental health crises, 2) ensure that crises are dealt with in a manner that proves least damaging to individuals and most conducive to a therapeutic outcome, 3) enhance training for law enforcement to persons in crises, and 4) provide access to resources and community based follow-up for encountered individuals. The MHAEM and WOPD collaboration project operated with an end goal of improving outcomes for individuals with mental illness by increasing the partnership role between mental health and law enforcement entities through the provision of training, recommendations, resources, and real-time support.

2. MHAEM/WOPD PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The MHAEM and WOPD collaboration program operated with the following shared objectives: 1) expand police department mental health training, 2) encourage collaboration between local police and behavioral health services, 3) enhance partnerships with community care coordination services, 4) improve general community relations and increase access to mental health services, and 5) reduce need for use of force by utilizing prevention, intervention, and treatment. MHAEM and WOPD collaborated on a six-month pilot initiative, beginning September 1, 2020, where WOPD was provided with training, body camera after-action review, and onsite co-responding in an effort to implement and achieve program objectives.

3. MHAEM/WOPD OUTCOME MEASURES

Training

MHAEM was able to provide trainings to WOPD in an effort to further enhance understanding and knowledge of mental illness. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all trainings were provided via video format and shared with law enforcement officials and staff on a month to month basis. During this period, WOPD was provided with six separate trainings focusing on a variety of topics including: mental health (signs, symptoms, de-escalation techniques, crisis assessment), suicide prevention and awareness for the community, law enforcement and suicide awareness, co-occurring disorders and substance use and abuse for the community, law enforcement and mental health, and mental health and racism/cultural awareness. Through these trainings, WOPD was able to increase their knowledge and understanding of the causes of mental illness, recognizing symptoms of mental illness, learning how to approach and communicate with a person showing symptoms of mental illness, how to respond when a person is experiencing a psychiatric crisis, and the importance of reducing the stigma associated with mental illness through education and practical application.

After-Action Review

During the pilot initiative, MHAEM and WOPD worked in tandem to review body camera video footage on a bimonthly basis in an effort to assess and provide feedback and recommendations for areas of improvement when responding to mental health-related calls. Additionally, MHAEM was also able to offer recognition and highlight effective strategies and dispositions demonstrated through law enforcement interactions with community members. At each review, MHAEM was provided with incident reports and accompanying footage for further assessment, working alongside a WOPD Lieutenant for real-time collaboration/discussion.

MHAEM was able to review 43 incidents during this initiative. Assessment of videos determined the following outcomes: 4 recommendations were made for performance improvement purposes, while 39 incidents had no further recommendations at the time. Recommendations included:

- Engaging in follow up questions to further develop rapport, de-escalate, and provide support within scope of practice until mental health professionals are able to connect with individual in crisis.
- Assessing for safety when responding to a call pertaining to self-harm and/or suicidal ideations.
- Increasing the utilization of empathetic listening, respecting personal space and boundaries, and using non-threatening non-verbal's so as to not further agitate or escalate a crisis situation or an individual presenting as verbally aggressive.

On-Site Mental Health Professional Pilot-Program

WOPD reported that on average, 393 mental health related response calls occurred from July 13, 2019 to July 13, 2020. In an effort to provide real-time assistance, MHAEM licensed staff made themselves available for weekly co-responding to WOPD mental health related response calls. Upon receiving a call from dispatch, MHAEM would report to the designated scene/incident or redirect the call to MHAEM's PATH program (if homeless outreach was the request). Through this initiative, MHAEM was able to provide practical and real-time support to officers responding to mental health-related crises. As a result of this collaboration, all parties were able to ensure that the individual received the appropriate level of care in order to promote treatment and recovery and prevent involvement in the criminal justice system.

During the six-month initiative, co-responding efforts provided the following outcomes:

- 20 face-to-face mental health response outreaches (equaling 15 hours)

- 17 face-to-face outreaches in coordination with MHAEM PATH program
- 3 involuntary hospital transports
- 8 voluntary hospital transports
- 12 linkages (i.e., mental health services, substance treatment, community resources) were made in the community as a result of follow up

As evidenced by outcomes, The MHAEM and WOPD co-responding partnership has ensured that all individuals in crisis feel safe, supported, and have the opportunities to stabilize and seek resources as appropriate for their personal situation.

PROJECT SUMMARY CONCLUSION

As first responders, it is important to recognize that law enforcement officials will encounter some of the most vulnerable people in our communities – those that have mental health concerns and needs. WOPD’s recognition of this has allowed for a collaboration and partnership with MHAEM to increase the success rate for appropriate dispositions and interactions with individuals in the community living with mental illness. Through mental health awareness training, recommendations and analysis, and real-time support, MHAEM has assisted WOPD with the important process of utilizing community resources in an effort to promote options of prevention, intervention, treatment, and overall wellness and recovery.