

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

Project Narrative

DATED: July 2020

1. PROJECT STATEMENT

In light of the current social climate in regards to police practices in the country, the West Orange Police Department (WOPD) is looking to expand their access to resources including knowledge, guidance, and training, in an effort to better serve their community in the cases of non-criminal crises. The Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris, Inc. (MHAEM) understands that issues of race undermine mental health and are as a result committed to anti-racism in all agency efforts. Through the development of a collaborative professional relationship between WOPD and MHAEM, the WOPD would have the opportunity to increase their success rate for appropriate disposition and interaction with non-criminal response calls as related to mental health through the development of responses built from empathy and positive regard instead of force. The WOPD and MHAEM recognize that an opportunity is present to explore new models and options for intervention in order to ensure that the use of unnecessary force is minimized and eliminated.

On average, the WOPD reports that they responded to 393 mental health calls from July 13, 2019 to July 13, 2020. These calls resulted in 30 incidents of use of force.¹ In an effort to be more proactive, the department is looking to identify and assess areas of improvement for these incidents. As first responders, law enforcement officers regularly respond to mental health related calls with minimal support and resources. In an effort to explore new strategies and improve outcomes from these community interactions, a partnership between the WOPD and MHAEM is recommended in order to help prioritize appropriate response techniques and advocate for treatment over incarceration when appropriate. A working collaboration between the two aforementioned community entities would help to not only create positive changes for law enforcement officers and individuals with mental illness, but also enhance the overall scope of community care coordination,

¹ Due to multiple officers' involvement, the 30 incidents where use of force occurred resulted in 83 use of force reports.

and the collaboration between criminal justice and behavioral health.

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

MHAEM and the WOPD Collaboration Program will aim to complete the following:

- Expand police department mental health training
- Encourage collaboration between local police and behavioral health services
- Enhance partnerships with community care coordination services
- Improve general community relations and increase access to mental health services
- Reduce need for use of force by utilizing prevention, intervention, and treatment
- Increase data development to track outcomes for justice-involved individuals

3. PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

MHAEM and the WOPD Collaboration Program will achieve their outcomes through the following models of operation:

Training

MHAEM will provide, on a quarterly basis, mental health training to police officers to further enhance their understanding and knowledge of mental illness through Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training. Pending the timeline of the project and Center for Disease Control recommendations on social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, training can be conducted either in person or through interactive/video format. During these trainings, law enforcement officials will be able to accomplish the following: gaining a better 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, understanding what to do when a person is experiencing a psychiatric

crisis, and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness through education and practical application.

After-Action Review

MHAEM will work alongside the WOPD to review body camera video footage, in order to provide feedback and analysis for areas of improvement when responding to mental health-related calls. In an effort to avoid and reduce instances involving use of unnecessary force, MHAEM will offer guidance and support to help responding officers deescalate mental health-related situations through the understanding that training, collaboration, and community building may all contribute to the reduction of a need for force.

On-Site Mental Health Professional Pilot-Program

MHAEM will implement and develop an on-site or online program, depending on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic, by staffing a licensed mental health professional at the police department for one to two shifts a week in order to provide practical and real-time support to officers responding to mental health-related crises. Through collaboration between law enforcement officials and mental health professionals, redirection can occur when mental health crises are not a criminal matter, but rather when they indicate a need for treatment intervention. Through the integration of an onsite collaborative mental health perspective into the WOPD, the goal will be to increase empathy and reflection in the response calls to mental-health related issues, to ensure that individuals in crisis feel safe, supported, and have opportunities to stabilize and seek resources appropriate for their personal situation.

4. PROJECT SUMMARY

In summary, MHAEM aims to promote mental health and to improve the care and treatment of individuals with mental illness by actively working towards removing the stigma associated with

emotional and mental disorders. As a community organization, the agency's mission is accomplished through advocacy, education, prevention, early intervention, treatment, and service. With a strong focus on innovative service delivery by emphasizing overall wellness and recovery, MHAEM has continuously met the needs of the community via case management, counseling, criminal justice, consumer advocacy, supportive housing and employment, and family and children's programs while striving to raise mental health awareness in a culturally competent manner. By applying this same mission model to the collaborative program, MHAEM will work alongside the WOPD to promote these ideals in opportunities presented through training, analysis, and practical support. Through the creation and development of a partnership with the WOPD, MHAEM can help law enforcement officers develop the training and skills needed to navigate the mental health system and ensure that when responding to calls, unnecessary instances of force do not occur.

5. BUDGET

In regards to this pilot proposal to include (i) training; (ii) consultation and evaluation of best practice guidelines for mental health engagement; (iii) embedding mental health professionals to assist on certain shifts for responses; and (iv) evaluation and reporting the outcomes and challenges of this pilot program, the cost will be \$5,000 per month for six months or a total of \$30,000. We propose to commence this pilot program September 1, 2020 or as soon thereafter as the Township directs.