

The Alexandria Police Department is partnering with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse to develop a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT). A CIT is comprised of highly skilled and specially trained police officers who function as part of regular police patrol. These officers receive 40 hours of specialized training in the recognition of psychiatric disorders, suicide intervention, substance abuse issues, verbal de-escalation techniques, the role of the family in the care of a person with mental illness and legal training in mental health and substance abuse issues. In addition to classroom instruction, officers also participate in role playing exercises based on real-life scenarios and spend time visiting mental health and substance abuse inpatient and outpatient treatment facilities where they have the opportunity to engage in one-on-one dialogue with mental health consumers, and learn about resources available to help people in crisis.

CIT is based on a model developed by the Memphis Police Department in 1988 following a Police shooting of a mentally ill person, and it has since been adopted in communities in 45 states. The training is designed to educate and prepare police officers who come into contact with people with mental illnesses to recognize the signs and symptoms of these illnesses and to respond effectively and appropriately to individuals in crisis. Officers are often the first responders in these incidents and it is essential they understand how mental illnesses can alter people's behaviors and perceptions. The trained CIT Officer is skilled at de-escalating crises involving people with mental illness, while bringing an element of understanding and compassion to these difficult situations. CIT programs have been proven to drastically improve outcomes in police interactions with persons with mental illness by decreasing arrests for minor offenses, while increasing referrals to treatment to prevent future legal involvement. CIT programs have consistently demonstrated reduced reported injuries to officers and subjects involved in calls related to persons with mental illness.

Police Department staff have worked in collaboration with Mental Health to develop a CIT and the City has been awarded a grant to help develop the program. In fiscal year 2010, 20 officers will receive CIT training to establish a CIT program within the Police Department. Information about officer selection and training dates will be coming soon. For questions, call Sergeant Courtney Ballantine at 703.838.4938.