

For 52 years, Crisis Services Hotline has provided safety, help and hope to Erie County. And since 1980, Crisis Services has provided an immediate emergency mental health crisis response in the community through our Emergency Mobile Outreach Services. Our clinicians meet people in crisis wherever they are, whether at home, a business, or in the streets to provide those services.

We are encouraged that Mayor Byron Brown and other community leaders are focused on their responsibility to address the needs of individuals with mental illnesses and substance use disorders, and those experiencing homelessness. We urge that the primary response move away from law enforcement to appropriate emergency mental health service providers whenever possible. Simply increasing the capacity of social workers and other mental health professionals to work alongside law enforcement to co-respond to address situations does not go far enough in reducing the role of law enforcement.

We encourage the Mayor and the Common Council to provide leadership and funding to improve crisis system capacity so that Crisis Services Mobile Outreach Program's mental health professionals can increase availability to address urgent and emergent behavioral health needs independently of the Buffalo Police Department and only engage law enforcement assistance when indicated by safety or criminal concerns.

In response to the September 12, 2020 shooting of a man with mental illness by a Buffalo Police officer, and a September 3, 2020 incident of an off-duty Buffalo Police officer using force on a man with mental illness, Crisis Services requests the following of Mayor Byron Brown and Buffalo Police Commissioner Byron Lockwood:

- After the internal and criminal investigations are complete, we request the ability to review footage for both of these incidents with BPD representatives as part of the Police Mental Health Coordination Project's Quality Assurance process. As the sole provider of the CIT Training for Erie County, this review will help us learn to what extent the response to these incidents was consistent with the principles of CIT, and to examine the 911 call, how the call was dispatched, and the response to the calls. We believe that in both incidents, there likely were missed opportunities for crisis intervention by our team of experts that could have made a difference and avoided the use of restraint and force. With a thorough review, we can work together to improve training and procedures.
- Require the Buffalo Police to respond to "agency assist" calls made by Crisis Services within 30 minutes. Delaying response any further puts the client, staff, officers and community members nearby at risk as escalation may occur with extended wait times.
- Develop a Buffalo Police CIT training plan to guarantee every shift in every District has a trained CIT Officer to respond to mental health calls. Crisis Services will work with your assigned representative to create a training plan and schedule for 2020 and 2021.
- Establish a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Buffalo, the Buffalo Police Department and Crisis Services outlining mental health call protocols and procedures utilizing Crisis Services Mobile Outreach Counselors. Our Crisis First Responders are the only licensed mental health professionals in Erie County designated under NYS Mental Hygiene Law, its criteria and direction for crisis response for individuals with mental illness. Crisis Services is the sole 9.45 Designee for Erie County residents 18 years of age and older.

- Our community is demanding police reform and reduction of police response to mental health calls. Crisis Services will only endorse police reform that does not enhance police positions but rather invests in mental health crisis response experts such as Crisis Services.
- Any police reform implemented in the City of Buffalo needs to include investment in mental health providers like Crisis Services. Currently, the Erie County Department of Mental Health and Erie County Medical Center are the sole funders for our crisis response services. In addition, Crisis Services has provided CIT training at no cost to the Buffalo Police Department. It is critical that the value of our services be recognized by City of Buffalo, and that the City begin to assist with financial support to expand and enhance services for mentally ill City residents.
- The command officers of the Buffalo Police Department must lead the department as a whole to decriminalize mental illness. This includes their approach on calls, language used to talk about individuals with mental illness, and to care for the mental health of their own officers and staff through trauma-informed practices, education, and programming on mental health first aid and suicide prevention.

We believe police reform is needed but believe it must be done in partnership with integrated systems of care that will guarantee sustainable success. Mental health response requires a mental health professional. Crisis Services has been a pillar of crisis response for Buffalo and Erie County since we began in 1968. Crisis Services, a well-established provider, with demonstrated excellence in crisis response care is the most comprehensive 24-hour crisis center in upstate New York. Crisis Services has a 24/7/365 infrastructure in place, with trained mental health professionals on staff to meet the needs of the community. We want the community to be aware of our existing, long-standing services to those in crisis:

24-Hour Hotline (Crisis Counseling Program)

For 52 years, Crisis Services Hotline has provided safety, help and hope to Erie County. **It operates 24/7/365 and is staffed by professionals trained to provide crisis intervention, emotional support, referral, and triage to other services (both internally within Crisis Services and externally).** On average, our Hotline Counselors **answer 7000 calls per month** and are able to provide immediate intervention, supportive counseling, safety planning and connection to services for any crisis including mental health, suicide, domestic violence, rape, family violence, elder abuse and trauma.

For four decades, Crisis Services has provided immediate emergency mental health crisis response in the community through our Emergency Mobile Outreach Services. Our clinicians meet people in crisis wherever they are, whether at home, a business or in the streets.

Emergency Mobile Outreach Services (AKA Mobile Outreach)

This program, which was started in 1980, **provides emergency mental health evaluations for individuals at risk of psychiatric hospitalization.** Referrals are received from a variety of sources, including, but not limited to, family members, mental health clinics, doctors, or individuals themselves. In addition, 15% of referrals into this program come from law enforcement officers in Erie County.

Officers referring in to the program are guaranteed a rapid response by Mobile Outreach to assist them while on-scene (typically a 30 minute response).

This program is staffed by licensed mental health professionals and other professionals, that provide **24/7/365 rapid access to emergency mental health services**. The licensed mental health professionals in this program follow NYS Mental Hygiene Law, its criteria and direction for crisis response for individuals with mental illness. Crisis Services is the sole 9.45 Designee for Erie County residents 18 years of age and older. Our staff are designated by the Erie County Commissioner of Mental Health under the NYS Mental Hygiene Law and have the authority and responsibility to enact an involuntary transport (9.45) to a psychiatric emergency room when criteria is determined further evaluation is needed.

These involuntary transports are done in partnership with local law enforcement in most cases. **However, not all Mobile Outreach responses require law enforcement, with approximately 60% of cases being responded to solely by Mobile Outreach.** It is the goal of this program to divert individuals from unnecessary presentations at local psychiatric emergency rooms, as well as divert individuals away from law enforcement involvement, including jail, when mental health services are more appropriate.

Mobile Outreach is the only agency contracted by Erie County Medical Center's psychiatric emergency room (CPEP) to provide this service. **Mobile Outreach diverts 60-70% of the clients they respond to in the community from the hospital.** In 2019, Mobile Outreach opened over 4500 cases for Erie County residents, and completed nearly 2000 mental health evaluations in the community. On average, 25% of clients receive a response within 30 minutes of the time of call, with another 14% being seen within four hours, and a total of 83% of people being seen the same day as the call.

CIT Training Project

Crisis Services is the sole provider of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for local law enforcement, and has been since 2013. To date, Crisis Services has trained over 600 officers across Erie County (including 131 from the Buffalo Police Department).

Crisis Services began discussions with Buffalo Police Department about adopting the CIT model in 2006 with Commissioner H. McCarthy Gipson. Through the last 14 years, Crisis Services continued to encourage, assist, evaluate and advocate to each successive Buffalo Police Department leadership team to develop a CIT program. Buffalo began training in 2016 and has 131 CIT trained patrol officers. To be most effective, it is recommended that 20% of your patrol force be trained in CIT.

CIT training is specialized training to assist law enforcement in their response to individuals with mental illness. Officers are identified by their departments and attend a week-long training, run by Crisis Services 'CIT Training Coordinator, and in partnership with local law enforcement. The CIT officers, with their specialized training in mental health, are targeted to respond to calls identified by dispatch as potential mental health issues. They are also trained in how to bring in mental health professionals, particularly Mobile Outreach, to assist.

The basic goals of CIT center on both officer and client safety, as well as directing individuals with mental illness away from the criminal justice system and into the mental health system. The training focuses heavily on de-escalation techniques to minimize officers from having to go “hands on” during a situation. We developed a collaborative curriculum for our community that not only trains officers on the principles of CIT but broadens the education to responding to veterans, overview of various community-based services, education on the role of peer support specialists and a thorough review including a ride along with Crisis Services Emergency Mobile Outreach Program. Our goal of expanding the model, historically known as an enhanced police response model, was to integrate the expertise of our crisis first responders to guarantee the priority of the law enforcement officer is to help safely meet the mental health needs of the person in crisis.

Crisis Services coordinates regular meetings with law enforcement officers who assist with the CIT training to evaluate sustainability, stay abreast of best practices, and to make sure we are meeting the needs of local law enforcement officers.

However, CIT is more than training course. To be effective, CIT requires a commitment by the Police Department leadership to support best practices, reduction of the stigma associated with mental illness, reduction of the use of force during responses to individuals with mental illness, and insisting that officers follow the protocols, policies and procedures that ensure a consistent and safe response to those living with mental illness in our community.

The response to mental health crisis occurs on a continuum of care. We seek innovative ways to make the critical and needed change that is demanded by our community at this time. Crisis Services is currently working with Erie County Central Police Services to implement a 911 Call Diversion Program. This pilot will help train 911 dispatch to assess mental health calls to 911 and divert appropriate call to Crisis Services 24- Hour Crisis Hotline. This model will help re-direct at the first point of contact in the emergency response system to mental health experts at Crisis Services. This pilot launch will be announced soon and was graciously supported by the Patrick P. Lee Foundation.

We will be talking about all that is noted in this release and our Agency’s mental health response services on Wednesday September 16th at 1pm during a Crisis Services Facebook Live Event.

Crisis Services Facebook Page - <https://www.facebook.com/CrisisServices/>

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