



CIT

CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM

Kentucky's award winning CIT-trained officers
make big impact on lives of local citizens in crisis

/Abbie Darst, Program Coordinator

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hen an officer arrives on a scene swirling with volatile energy – tempers flare, patience is low and understanding is difficult – calm communication often can be a tough task. However, it is this exact situation where an officer's communication skills and patient, calm demeanor can be most effective in resolving the situation.

But what if the person is emotionally disturbed or mentally ill? Certain expectations can be taken for granted in day-to-day communication that may not be true when dealing with an individual suffering from a mental illness or emotional crisis. For years, dealing with mentally and emotionally disturbed individuals has presented law enforcement officers with unique challenges, as well as unique threats.

Kentucky's Crisis Intervention Team trainers are equipping the commonwealth's law enforcement officers with a new tool set to better engage these situations – good ears and a gentle tongue.

"There is a little bit of an aggressive attitude that comes with our job, and it's learned," said Murray Police Department Officer Chris Scott. "Through the first 13 years of my career it was

jump in, take charge and do what you have to do and that's all there is to it.

"But with the CIT tactics it is a little more of a calmer approach," he continued. "It's a way to approach things and realize that you can still be in control of a situation without rushing the situation, and you often can come out with a longer-term solution instead of a short-term solution."

Since its introduction in 2001 with the Louisville Police Department, CIT training has taught officers how to better understand and deal with people who may be mentally ill, developmentally disabled or distraught and suicidal. During the course, officers learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of someone's mental state and how certain medications, or the lack thereof, can affect a person's behavior and how to de-escalate a situation and calm a person down.

The goal of the training, according to CIT State Program Director Denise Spratt, is safety – both for the officer and individual in crisis. The tactics and ideas taught during the 40-hour course are designed to prevent the use of force in some situations, and give officers the resources to get a person the medical attention he or she needs as opposed to a night in jail. >>

TEACH ME TO TALK – PART II



/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas

>> For the more than 900 Kentucky peace officers who have been trained using CIT techniques, the course's success becomes more and more evident with every officer who goes back to his or her community with a deeper understanding, compassion and desire to make a difference.

Murray's Officer Scott was able to make that difference in March 2008 when he received a mental health warrant to serve on a woman who had held her husband at knife point the night before. It was the close of the shift and Scott's captain wanted him to resolve the situation as quickly as possible.

The woman's husband had told police she was not a criminal, she just needed help.

Though Scott and his partner had been given the key to the house by the landlord and had the order to go in and retrieve the woman, Scott decided to simply knock on the door and try talking to her.

After several unresponsive knocks on the front door, Scott heard a knock from inside the carport door, and knew for sure what he was dealing with then, he said. He went to the carport door and started a conversation with the woman. After talking to the closed door for 20 minutes, Scott finally gained her confidence enough for her to open the door – where she was standing with a large butcher knife still in her hand.

With only a locked storm door between them, Scott continued to talk to the woman, reassuring her that he had done everything he said he would do, including not rushing into her house, since she was adamant she did not want anyone inside her home.

Scott eventually was able to talk the woman into putting the knife down and coming out the door. No one put their hands on her except to pat her down for other weapons. And when asked if she would get in the car with his partner to go to the hospital and get some help, she said, "Sure, I'd love to go for a ride," Scott recalled.

"Her demeanor had changed from very hateful and very defensive to wanting to go for a ride," Scott said. Evan (Scott's partner) said she talked the whole way over and was just as friendly as could be and he never had to restrain her.

"It took a little bit to gain her trust, but to

me, 20 to 30 minutes of talking is better than three to five minutes of fighting," he said.

The woman was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic when admitted to the hospital.

After the ordeal, Scott's captain asked him what he thought the outcome would have been if he had chosen to follow orders, force entry into the house and pick her up. Scott told his captain he probably would have tased her or possibly resorted to deadly force because of the knife and her defensive attitude.

"After that, I was very impressed with the results I got," Scott said of his CIT training put in action.

Though Scott and his colleagues were able to resolve this situation peacefully and did not harm her in any way, that is only part of what CIT training actually teaches officers.

◀ CIT-trained Campbell County Police Officer Marty Hart, the department's chief hostage negotiator, helped rescue a woman before she made a suicide jump off the Combs-Hehl bridge on the Ohio River.

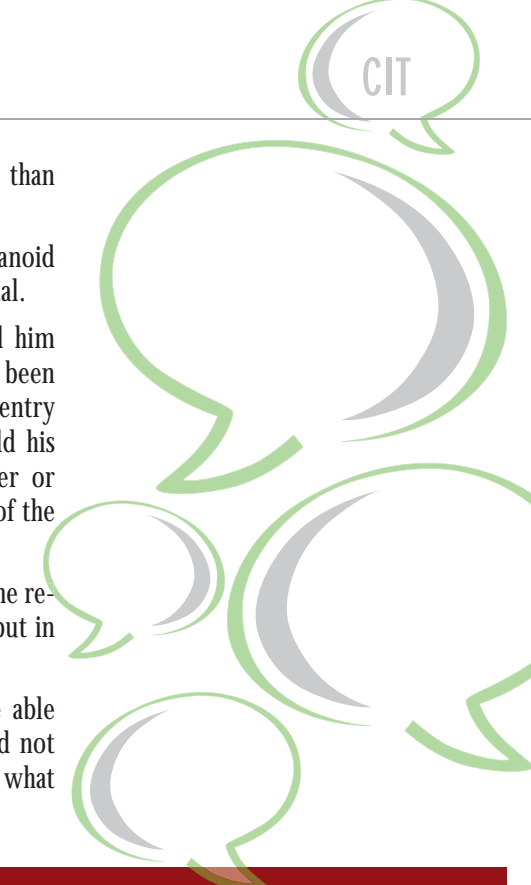
"I think sometimes officers coming into the class think that because they are being taught verbal skills, they are not supposed to use any of their previously learned tactics, and that is absolutely not true," Spratt said. "The verbal tactics are designed to enhance their officer-safety skills and a lot of times, by talking to somebody, they are able to keep it from escalating to the point of a physical confrontation, and that's what this is all about."

Campbell County Police Officer Marty Hart understands that lesson all too well.

While serving on an off-duty traffic detail for Combs-Hehl Bridge repairs, Hart received a call that a woman was threatening to jump from the bridge. When he arrived, a Hamilton County officer from Cincinnati was talking with the woman who was then perched on the edge of the bridge as if sitting on a fence, Hart said.

Hart, who has a minor in psychology and also serves as Campbell County Police Department's primary hostage negotiator, approached the officer first, told him that he was a CIT officer and asked to speak to the woman. Hart then engaged the woman and began talking with her.

The woman was concerned that her husband should know that she had jumped so he could >>



CIT Training Techniques

There are numerous techniques that Crisis Intervention Team training emphasizes to officers. These de-escalation strategies are meant to help officers learn a different way of dealing with difficult people in difficult situations and try to understand what the root of the issue really is.

CIT TRAINS OFFICERS TO:

- Use a calm demeanor
- Listen to the individual
- Use "we" statements
- Educate those around the scene that this is a mental-health issue
- Talk on eye level to help build rapport
- Make the individual come to your physical level, do not pace
- Give other persons on the scene a task so you can isolate the individual in crisis and his/her situation
- Listen to repetition used by the individual, he/she will always tell what the problem is by repetitive mentioning of a certain issue
- Use patience and slow pace in the confrontations – this brings ease and caring to the situation
- Try not to assign blame
- Use their name

>> come and get the car. Hart used that to buy him time with her. He told her to hang on so he could get her husband's information from her.

Meanwhile, his partner began walking toward another woman who was approaching the scene on the bridge. To distract the suicidal woman, Hart asked, "That isn't your mom is it?" However when she heard the word 'mom,' she scooted herself even closer to the edge. Hart continued to move in toward her and when she turned to look at the approaching woman, he grabbed her, locking his arms under hers and lifted her off the edge of the bridge and placed her on the hood of his cruiser – saving her life.

"CIT training emphasizes verbal tactics while acknowledging times when the person's actions will dictate a different tactical response," Spratt said of Hart's actions. "When the woman failed to respond to the officer and moved to the edge of the bridge, Hart responded with the necessary life-saving action."

Hart and Scott each received a 2009 CIT Officer of the Year Award for their efforts and actions with emotionally disturbed individuals in their communities.

"If you think about your stereotypical police officer with a criminal justice degree, everything geared toward criminal interdiction, safety tactics, use-of-force scenarios – CIT, for me is the more personal side of law enforcement," Hart said. "You get to see the individual from their perspective. ... You can come up and see someone who's being belligerent and assume that they are intoxicated or on something, but now that you know what to look for, it may help you realize that you're ... dealing with a medical issue that they have no control over."

"It makes you realize that the typical stuff 'em and cuff 'em ... is not going to be in [their] best interest and you're not going to solve or help the problem, but make it worse," he continued. "Now, instead of arresting the person you can bring in an ambulance, medical professionals or social workers, depending on the scenario you're dealing with, and try to help them with their problem so you do not have further issues down the road."

Response must change

Taking that extra step proved invaluable for Louisville Metro Officer Beth Ruoff, who also recently received a CIT award.

Ruoff responded to a spouse-abuse center to remove a client who was intoxicated. When Ruoff entered the room, she found the woman almost non-responsive in a fetal position in the corner. She was extremely paranoid of people and sounds, so Ruoff began explaining everything she was doing and sat down on the floor with her. The only time the woman would calm down was if Ruoff was around. She spent several hours convincing her to go to the hospital and, since she was the only one the woman trusted, ended up staying with her another six hours at the hospital, never leaving her side.

"As an officer, you are required to make split-second decisions that impact not only the lives of community members, but yours as well," said Ruoff, who has served with LMPD for three years. "CIT training prepares officers for unique situations that occur when encountering the mentally ill and how our response must change. This training has brought awareness to the law enforcement community that traditional tactics and use of force may not be appropriate when dealing with a consumer in crisis."

During the time Ruoff spent with the woman, she shared her personal experience with her own mother being a person with Bipolar disorder, just like this woman. She spoke about what it was like growing up, since this woman was going through a divorce and had four children.

"This woman will remember this experience for the rest of her life and probably has never been treated with more compassion, care and empathy than from Officer Ruoff," Spratt said during the CIT awards ceremony in June.

The rapport Ruoff was able to build with this woman is key in CIT training, which stresses the importance of a calm demeanor, listening to the individual and how patience and a slow pace can bring ease and caring to the situation with which an officer may be faced.

"CIT encourages us more to look at the solution of the problem," said Dep. Tim Reynolds

with the Marshall County Sheriff's Office. "We can't fix every problem, sometimes not any problem, but we need to try to address the sense that we are there to help fix the issue, not necessarily to be the bad guy."

Reynolds answered the call to assist the Calloway County Sheriff's Office on a mentally disturbed man who had doused himself and his trailer with gasoline. He had previously told another officer on scene he was done and was going to end it all. Due to the power being shut off, Reynolds was unable to make contact by phone and had to resort to speaking to the man through a loud speaker. He spoke for nearly an hour without any contact from the man when he suddenly emerged and wanted to speak to the officer who had been talking to him. However, he was still approximately 50 feet away from the gasoline-soaked man and could not hear or understand what was being said.

Knowing that face-to-face negotiations are the most dangerous, Reynolds recognized the need to move in closer to resolve the situation. Because the man and the entire trailer had been soaked in gasoline, the SWAT team and its usual tactics were rendered ineffective, since a single spark could ignite the whole scene, Reynolds said.

Using a cruiser, he pulled up as close to the trailer as possible and used a flashlight to approach the man. With the man still soaked in gasoline, Reynolds talked with

him face to face.

The man told Reynolds, "I don't know you, and you don't care about me." But Reynolds reassured him that even though he was a total stranger, he did not want anything bad to happen to him, Reynolds recalled.

Eventually, Reynolds was able to shake his hand and officially introduce himself and, from that point, never let go of his hand. After several hours spent gaining his trust, he was able to pull the guy from the trailer and resolve the situation peacefully and with no one being harmed.

"I think that's the goal of CIT, overall, to put a face, put a family with that call," Reynolds said. "We have to take the attitude out that it is just another call. He had been in and out of the system and we all knew of him, but he still had family and he's still under pressure and going through some sort of crisis at that moment."

Though CIT is geared toward interaction with mentally-ill people, the tactics can be used in nearly any situation where a person is in a crisis.

"The implications and what you can do with it on the street to me is so important that it really sticks out and it is really effective," Campbell County's Hart said. "There is nothing difficult about it. It is a matter of the officer being given the information and knowing what to look for."

CIT Advisory Boards Help Build Local Relationships

An important tool that comes with Crisis Intervention Team training is the establishment of local advisory boards. These boards, set up after training is completed in an area, allow law enforcement and the mental-health centers in the region to come together, along with local advocacy groups like the National Alliance of Mental Illness, or NAMI, and allows them to work hand in hand to build better relationships.

Building the bridge between law enforcement agencies and mental-health clinics is invaluable to the long-term success and effectiveness of CIT-trained officers, said State CIT Program Director Denise Spratt.

These groups build on the relationships started in the class and serve as problem-solving mechanisms. Each committee is chaired by law enforcement, and any issues or concerns involving the response to people with mental illness, substance abuse or developmental disabilities in the community can

be brought up in the committee meetings. CIT-trained officers can relay any operational issues at the meetings and decision makers from the agencies are there as well, so if something needs to be changed, the people are present who have the authority to make those changes, Spratt said.

There are 14 mental health regions in Kentucky, but not each region has an advisory board established in the area.

"In my opinion, our working relationship with Four Rivers (Behavioral Health Center) has increased dramatically," said Murray Police Officer Chris Scott. "It is a little of a give and take, but all in all, when we have problems, I've been able to address them and it has created a two-way communication street that wasn't there before."

"If nothing else, they know who we are and we know who they are," he continued. "It is difficult sometimes to relate to somebody you don't even know. ... Getting to know each other has helped a lot."

In Ashland, the advisory committee has only been established since June, but the area has seen a lot of positive results from its meetings, said Ashland Police Maj. Todd Kelley who is the committee leader in the Pathways Behavioral Health region.

The Ashland advisory committee extends down into the Morehead area and incorporates numerous hospitals and mental health clinics, as well as involving officers from multiple departments in the area who have received CIT training.

"Hopefully what we share altogether will be used to bring help to those who are going through tough times in the upcoming holiday season," Kelley said. "Instead of only trying to meet and put something new in place, we've been able to learn from experiences that happen between meetings and then go from there."

The Ashland/Morehead area advisory committee meets approximately every other month as schedules allow. ■

"The stuff you pick up in CIT makes you a better interviewer, too – though it is not an interview course," Hart continued. "You can go through courses that teach you to interview and read body language, but this adds another tool and gives you insight into what might be going through this guy's mind. ... It allows you to get on a more personal level and develop a good bond. Good interviewers know that the key to get a confession or good information is developing some level of a trust bond between you and the person you are interviewing."

In the eight years officers across Kentucky have been trained on CIT tactics, numerous scenarios have played out, many crisis have been encountered and these officers have taken the extra necessary steps to resolve issues in the best interest of the individuals, themselves, their departments and their communities. Each call these CIT-trained officers answer could lead to one more life saved, one more bad situation diverted and one more citizen who has gained trust and respect for their local police agency.

"I've had good training, but I can always give you a negative," Hart said. "But when I think about CIT, I can't give you a negative because of the applications across the board." J



The following is a list of currently operating committees and their chairperson.

- Capt. John Ward, Kentucky State Police Post No. 4, Communicare Region (Elizabethtown area) John.Ward@ky.gov
- Chief Glenn Skeens, Owensboro Police Department, River Valley Behavioral Health Region (Owensboro area) Skeensgw@owensboro.org
- Sgt. Jason Newby, Kentucky State Police Post No. 2, Pennyrile Center Region (Hopkinsville/Madisonville area) Jason.Newby@ky.gov
- Capt. Nathan Kent, Kentucky State Police Post No. 1, Four Rivers Behavioral Health Region (Paducah area) Nathan.Kent@ky.gov
- Maj. Todd Kelley, Ashland Police Department, Pathways Region, (Ashland/Morehead area) toddkelley@ashlandkypd.com
- Capt. Melanie Watts, Bowling Green Police Department, Lifeskills Region, (Bowling Green area) Melanie.Watts@bgky.org