

MHU News

Monthly Newsletter of the Houston Police Department's Mental Health Unit June 2009

CIT Officer of the Year

The two finalist nominees.

Page 2



Mid-Manager of the Year Award

Lt. Mike Lee receives the award for his work in the Mental Health Unit.

Page 3



C O V E R S T O R Y

Senior Officer Joe Osborne Receives CIT Officer of the Year Award

Senior Officer Joe Osborne, member of the Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT), received the 2008 Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Officer of the Year Award Monday, May 11, 2009, during the department's National Police Week Awards Ceremony held at Landry's Downtown Aquarium Restaurant. Officer Osborne received the award for his productivity during the CIRT pilot program.

Officer Osborne was one of the three full-time officers who participated in the CIRT pilot program that ran from May 5th through December 23, 2008. During the pilot, Officer Osborne responded to 387 CIT calls-for-service, initiated 210 CIT investigations, completed 275 CIT offense reports, responded to six



SWAT situations, and completed 132 Emergency Detention Orders.

Officer Osborne's commitment, dedication, and hard work helped make the pilot a resounding success and helped make CIRT a permanent program in the department. Joe continues to be one of the most productive officers in the CIRT program.

Officer Osborne says that his current assignment is the most fulfilling he

has had on the department because of the opportunity to help those in need, particularly homeless veterans.

Officer Osborne served over 10 years in the U. S. Air Force working in radar approach control and the air traffic control tower. His experience enables him to connect with homeless veterans, especially those with post-traumatic stress disorder. He has been very successful at being able to build a rapport with many of the homeless veterans he interacts with and talking them into receiving help. Unfortunately, the number of homeless veterans with mental illness is sharply increasing.

In his off-time, Officer Osborne works as a licensed funeral director and mortician.

CIT Officer of the Year Finalists

It is an honor to be nominated for the CIT Officer of the Year. It is impressive to be one of the three finalists. The three finalists for this year's CIT Officer of the Year Award were Officers Joe Osborne, Robert Belknap, and Randy Crowder. The following is a summary of the nominations for the two other finalists.

Senior Police Officer Robert Belknap, Jr. Finalist



Officer Belknap handles many of the CIT incidents that occur at Intercontinental Airport Houston (IAH). The fear and stress of flying often result in a crisis for many individuals with serious mental illness. Officer Belknap has been very successful in safely de-escalating many of these situations.

Officer Belknap has also responded to CIT situations involving employees of the airport. One such incident involved a baggage handler who suffers from social phobia and severe depression. She has also been treated

for psychosis. She went into mental health crisis in the baggage area and Officer Belknap was called to respond. Officer Belknap was able to de-escalate the situation and provided her and her supervisors with his phone number in the event additional assistance was needed. Officer Belknap also contacted the family and provided them with resource information.

This situation exemplifies Officer Belknap's willingness to "go the extra mile" to help individuals with mental illness.

Officer Belknap is a staunch supporter of the CIT program and represents it well.

Senior Police Officer Randy Crowder Finalist



Officer Crowder has been a CIT officer since the program's inception and is one of the department's most productive and committed CIT

officers. He has talked people out of committing suicide, has de-escalated individuals in psychotic episodes, and has responded to numerous other CIT situations.

One such call occurred on January 12, 2009. An employee held his fellow employees in fear of their lives. The suspect kept saying "I killed my dog." He was agitated and incoherent and acting in a threatening manner. The other employees thought he was drunk but could not smell any alcohol on him.

Unknown to his fellow workers, before arriving at work the suspect had stabbed his pet numerous times at home and caused extensive damage to his house.

Officer Crowder responded to the scene and safely de-escalated the situation. Officer Crowder recognized the signs and symptoms of mental illness. The suspect was later diagnosed at the NeuroPsychiatric Center as having paranoid schizophrenia.

Neither the manager of the business nor the employees had any knowledge of mental illness. They were very impressed with Officer Crowder's knowledge of mental illness and his ability to safely de-escalate the situation. The manager was so impressed, he asked Officer Crowder to return two weeks after the incident to help him, the manager, develop mental health awareness training for his employees.

Lieutenant Mike Lee Receives Mid-Manager of the Year Award

Lieutenant Lee received the award for the significant changes he has made to the department's strategy for responding to individuals in serious mental health crises. Responses to the serious mentally ill are some of the most difficult, litigious, and potentially dangerous calls officers make. These calls have become a significant part of policing in the 21st century. Law enforcement agencies across the nation are struggling with this issue. Under Lt. Lee's leadership, the Houston Police Department has developed and implemented innovative, cutting-edge programs that have kept Houston at the forefront of this issue.

CIRT: Lt. Lee worked collaboratively with the Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA) to develop and implement the Crisis Intervention Response Team (CIRT). Houston is the only law enforcement agency in the state and one of the few nationally with a CIRT program. Several law enforcement agencies across the state and nation have inquired about Houston's CIRT program.

Mental Health Unit: Lt. Lee saw the need to develop a unit to oversee the department's multi-faceted strategy for dealing with individuals in serious mental health crises. Under his leadership, the department's first-ever Mental Health Unit was formed. The unit oversees the CIT and CIRT programs; develops and provides all CIT training; oversees the unit's CIT database; reviews all offense reports regarding individuals in serious mental health crises; publishes a monthly newsletter; liaisons with the mental health community, the district attorney's office, and other law enforcement agencies; develops department policy and procedure regarding individuals suspected of mental illness; oversees the new Chronic Consumer Initiative pilot program; conducts investigations requested by the



Office of the Chief of Police, the mayor's office, investigative divisions within the department, and other law enforcement agencies; and conducts research.

Offense Reports: With the implementation of the Mental Health Unit, all offense reports involving individuals in mental health crises are sent to and reviewed by the unit. Prior to this, all such offense reports were sent only to the homicide division.

Database: Data is essential to the effective management of any issue. The first step in accumulating this necessary data was to have all offense reports involving individuals in mental health crises routed to the Mental Health Unit. Once received, it was necessary to keep track of police-related data, such as is tracked by all other investigative divisions. Lt. Lee developed this database based on databases used by crime analysis, investigative divisions, and other law enforcement agencies.

Chronic Consumer Stabilization Initiative: Working collaboratively with MHMRA and the City of Houston Health Department, Lt. Lee has piloted the Chronic Consumer Stabilization Initiative. Utilizing the Mental Health Unit's database, the 30 most chronically ill mental health consumers, who the Houston Police Department responds to continuously, are identified. Two licensed mental health clinicians from MHMRA

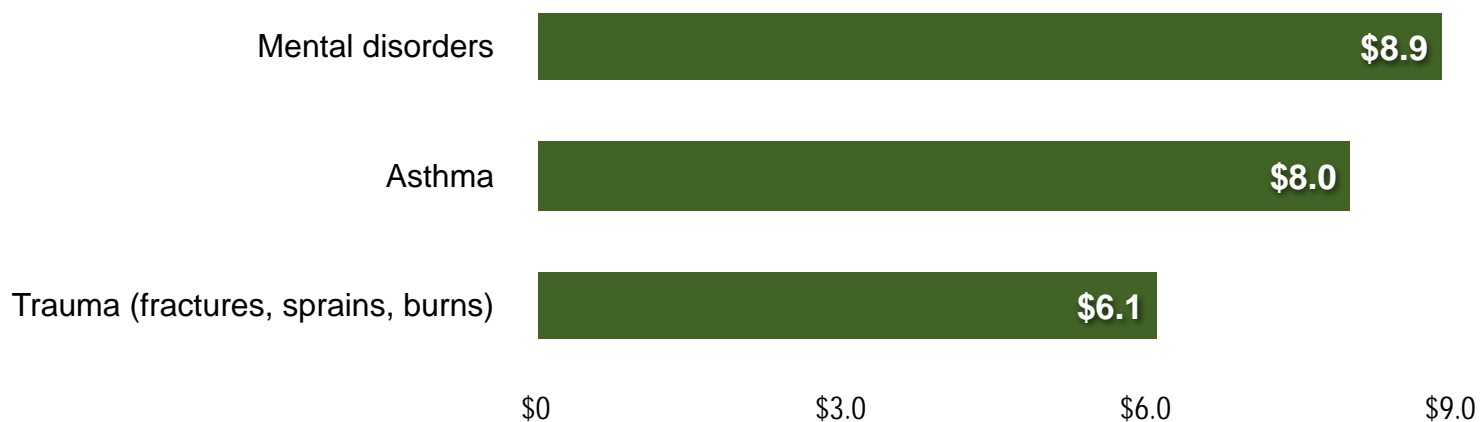
work with these individuals in an attempt to stabilize them. All avenues are explored in this attempt: medical issues, housing, food stamps, mental health issues, guardianship, and other issues are considered.

CIT Training for the Hostage Negotiation Team: Lt. Lee has worked to forge a relationship between the Hostage Negotiation Team (HNT) and the Mental Health Unit. Approximately 50% of the calls received by the HNT involve a person in mental health crisis. It made sense, therefore, to form a working relationship with them. The first step was to provide all HNT members with the 40-hour CIT class. The second step was to have a CIRT unit respond to all HNT calls. Information is invaluable to a negotiator. The clinician on the CIRT unit has direct access to consumers in the MHMRA system, which most are. The negotiators find this information invaluable.

Dispatch: Until recently, call takers did not ask callers if the situation they were calling about involved a person in a mental health crisis. This information is crucial to our objective of attempting to send a CIT officer to all calls involving individuals in serious mental health crises. Lieutenant Lee has implemented two questions to the call-taker protocol. The first question asks if the situation involves anyone in a mental health crisis. If answered "yes," the second question asks if the person the caller is calling about is in a mental health crisis. If answered "yes," the call is coded as a CIT call. This is a significant development that will help us utilize our CIT officers more effectively.

What are the most costly medical ailments in children?

Nearly \$100 billion was spent to treat medical problems in children ages 17 and under in 2006. The three most expensive (in billions):



By Michelle Healy and Sam Ward, USA TODAY, Tuesday, May 12, 2009. Note: 2006 is the most recent year data was available. Source for 2006 data: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2009.

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