

Verde Independent

Monday, September 12, 2016

Spectrum Healthcare's Mobile Crisis Team Partnership Program

Cheri Frost
Special to Verde Valley Newspapers, Inc.

Monday, September 12, 2016

No one ever plans a mental health crisis. It can't be scheduled or penciled in a calendar as one would a dentist appointment or a vacation.

Just as you can't schedule the flu or any other illness, a mental health crisis strikes suddenly, often without warning. It cares not about location or time of day; it simply occurs, and when it does, it often results in a call to 911.

And when first responders, like law enforcement or EMT's, arrive on the scene, they do what first responders are trained to do. In the case of law enforcement, a person in crisis might be arrested for disorderly conduct and taken to jail, or placed in an ambulance and taken to the ER to await assessment.

But what if there was a better way to help those suffering from a mental health crisis? What if there was a way to free up emergency services, get the right help for people in need, better care for the mental health needs of the community, and save the city and county thousands of taxpayer dollars?

These were the questions, April Razo, CEO of Spectrum Healthcare, an Integrated Healthcare Provider in Cottonwood, Arizona, decided to answer. Spectrum Healthcare is well-known within the community for the mental healthcare it provides. Spectrum's Mobile Crisis Team is always on call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, providing patients help with mental health crises whenever they arise, but Ms. Razo knew that to really make a difference within the community, a much larger network of care would need to be in place; a coordinated effort between all first responders and those who provide crisis care.

Thus, the Spectrum Healthcare Mobile Crisis Team Partnership Program was born.

Ms. Razo, together with Sarah Schol, Sr. Director of Strategic Initiatives and Northern AZ Operations with the Crisis Response Network, hit the road the beginning of the year and began an intensive two month training tour, meeting with and training all first responders in the area. Training sessions were held at all hours of the day and night to accommodate the varied schedules of the Verde Valley's First Responders.

Ms. Razo explains why the program works, "The Spectrum Healthcare Mobile Crisis Team Partnership Program affords law enforcement officers real time alternatives as they encounter persons with mental illness in the field.

Ultimately, we are able to connect people with the help and treatment they need and avoid costly and ineffective methods, such as jail or emergency departments. This has significant savings to the taxpayer, but more than that, it offers huge savings in ways we can not measure in dollar amounts, like minimized disruption to the family system and people's lives, as well as access to the appropriate treatment."



Spectrum's Health Care's Mobile Crisis Response has filled a major need for service: The ability to reach crisis level mental health care in the field by law enforcement not only continues to divert people from jail who don't need to go, it also forms lasting connections with treatment and reduces recidivism.

Captain David Rhodes, with the Law Enforcement Service Division of the Yavapai Sheriff's

Office echoes this partnership sentiment. "When responding to calls for service, Law

Enforcement has had precious few options as alternatives to incarceration," Captain Rhodes said. "Often times support services would be the best solution however access to such services were not available at the time they were needed. Spectrum's Health Care's formation of Mobile Crisis Response has filled what was a major need for service. The ability to reach crisis level mental health care in the field by law enforcement not only continues to divert people from jail who don't need to go, it also forms lasting connections with treatment and reduces recidivism. Spectrum Health Care is a major factor in the decriminalization of mental illness"

The program, which initially began with law enforcement agencies, has now spread to encompass local area Fire Departments, as well as EMT's. And the support from these agencies has been phenomenal.

But, how well is it working?

In the five months since the program's implementation in February of 2016, the Spectrum Healthcare Mobile Crisis Team has responded to 109 calls from First Responders in the Verde Valley. Out of those 109 calls, 55 percent have been stabilized within the community, and 28 percent were assessed and found to be needing a higher level of care. Without the coordinated efforts of the Mobile Crisis Team Partnership, 90 of those 109 calls would have resulted in an arrest or a trip to the Emergency Room. By providing on-site mental health crisis help, this partnership has not only saved the county approximately \$470,000, it has also resulted in a much better outcome for the lives of those affected.

And the positive effects of the Mobile Crisis Partnership Program has not gone unnoticed.

"The Eastern Area Command of the [Yavapai County Sheriff's Office](#) has been extremely happy with Spectrum's Mobile Crisis Response Unit," says, Lt. Rich Martin. "The willingness to work with deputies to resolve issues that in the past would have resulted in taking the "patients" to jail for misdemeanor offenses and then hoping to get them help from the jail.

While it has not completely eliminated the need to sometimes go this route and it has significantly reduced the number of times it is necessary. We have also found it helpful to get those involved the help they need while freeing up the Deputy to get back on the road. In my own opinion the reason for the success was the willingness to communicate and get input from everyone involved to develop a plan that was flexible and seeking input about progress and how the program was functioning."

And bettering lives is at the heart of this program.

As Ms. Razo further explains, "When I first took over as Deputy Director at Spectrum Healthcare, I learned of a situation in which police had no choice but to put a patient suffering from severe depression and suicidal ideation into jail. The individual became so upset that he tried to free himself from custody and ended up being charged with two felony accounts. It was clear that if we had been able to respond in that moment, we could have prevented that from happening and given him the help he actually needed.

That's just one example of how people with mental illness routinely end up in jail. Jail becomes the de facto mental institution and it is the least appropriate place for that kind of treatment to occur. People with mental illness end up staying in jail much longer than those without and it completely upends their lives, often putting them back to square one.

It's costs the county thousands of dollars and helps no one. As I heard stories such as these, I realized that we are at a place where we can make a difference and do something about it. And that's exactly what we're going to do."

Wanting the best for the community and those who live in it has been a motivating factor in the creation of the Mobile Crisis Partnership Program. The best results are obtained when everyone is working on the same team and shares a common goal.

Cottonwood Chief of Police, Stephen Gesell summed up the relationship perfectly. "Partnerships between police agencies and mental health care practitioners have become a necessity in providing the best service

to those in crisis.

Spectrum's Mobile Crisis Unit has proven to be an invaluable resource in a short period of time. It continues to connect those in need with services immediately, increases present and future positive outcomes, and keeps individuals that don't need to enter the justice system out of it."

Related Links:

">Content © 2016

">Software © 1998-2016 **1up! Software**, All Rights Reserved