

Johnson County Mental Health Center Co-Responder Program

Collaborating to Improve Community Response to Mental Health Needs

For 50 years, United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS) has spearheaded efforts to make vital human services available to individuals and families in Johnson County, especially those facing challenges. UCS brings



Johnson County Mental Health Center Co-Responder Program.

together human service providers, policymakers, funders and community leaders to address issues impacting the well-being of residents. These partnerships ensure that the collective human service impact in Johnson County is far greater than the accomplishments individual organizations can achieve working alone.

In 2009, UCS was asked to facilitate the Mental Health and Criminal Justice Intercept Project which helped lead to the creation of the

The Need

Too often, across our country and in Johnson County, men and women with mental illness land in jail or sit in emergency waiting rooms instead of being connected to the services they need. In 2008, leaders of Johnson County's mental health and criminal justice systems believed that by working collaboratively, strategies could be identified and applied that would reduce the number of persons with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system. During that year, 17% of the inmate population (17,637 men and women) in the Johnson County Adult Detention Center was on psychotropic medications during incarceration. One-third of residents in facilities operated by the County Department of Corrections received on-site psychiatric services. Courts and correctional agencies were the third most frequent source of referral to the Johnson County Mental Health Center.

In the spring of 2009, UCS was asked to facilitate the Mental Health and Criminal Justice Intercept Project – a collaborative planning process with members of organizations who were charged with making recommendations and developing effective strategies.

Recommendations resulting from this collaborative process included a co-responder approach by Johnson County Mental Health Center and law enforcement.

The Result

The Johnson County Mental Health Center Co-Responder Program adds the services of a qualified mental health professional to a police department's patrol division.

“We value our relationship with UCS and its work facilitating the Mental Health and Criminal Justice Intercept Project. UCS’ project leadership was the catalyst for the development of Johnson County’s Mental Health Co-Responder program, which serves as a nationwide model for collaborations between behavioral health services and law enforcement.”

***Tim DeWeese, Director
Johnson County Mental Health Center***

The co-responder's primary responsibility is to respond with a law enforcement officer on calls where mental illness is identified as a potential contributing factor. This partnership enables the mental health professional to conduct an immediate face-to-face assessment of the risk posed by individuals involved in a police encounter. Furthermore, the co-responder can provide effective intervention and link individuals to services right away to prevent the over-utilization of jails and emergency rooms.

Through a 2011 Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, the city of Olathe became the first community in Johnson County to embed a Johnson County Mental Health Center co-responder in their police department. In 2013, an expansion grant award allowed the city of Overland Park to begin the co-responder program in their police department.

The Impact

Today, five qualified mental health professionals are working with law enforcement agencies in fourteen Johnson County communities. Since the program's inception, Olathe now has two co-responders; Overland Park has a co-responder; Lenexa and Shawnee began sharing a co-responder in 2016; and as of 2017, Leawood, Prairie Village, Merriam, Mission, Mission Hills, Mission Woods, Roeland Park, Fairway, Westwood and Westwood Hills share a co-responder who is embedded in the police departments serving these communities. In 2018, Overland Park plans to add another co-responder, and Lenexa and Shawnee also plan to add a co-responder so each police department will have their own. This year, Johnson County EMS System has also piloted a Johnson County Mental Health Center co-responder with their Fire/EMS providers.

Since its inception almost 350 community members with mental health needs have been connected to services that allowed them to avoid waiting for help in jail cells or emergency rooms.

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