

The Salt Lake Tribune

Utah police training to spot mental health crises

By The Associated Press • December 30, 2017

Provo • Orem police Detective Jeremy Jamison is learning to sift crimes from crises.

In recent months, he has carved a role as a mental health officer building relationships with people experiencing issues that can be addressed with medication, therapy, housing or other resources, The Daily Herald in Provo reported Tuesday.

Jamison serves as one of the coordinators for the Crisis Intervention Training, a 40-hour weeklong course for officers.

As part of his duties, Jamison helps other officers understand how to work with individuals having mental health issues and recognize the difference between a medical situation and a criminal situation. He will also come assist officers who are unsure of how to handle these situations.

He recalls a particular call from a man who told him he was at a Walmart with a flat bike tire and was considering stealing an inner tube from the store to make it to an appointment in Salt Lake. The caller was a man who had multiple run-ins with the police department, Jamison said. Before the man could do anything rash, Jamison reached loss prevention officers at the store and told them he would pay for the inner tube the man needed.

“Those are just little wins, and I haven’t had a lot of them because it’s been a few months, but they are adding up and I think there is value to the position,” he said.

The training has taught Provo Detective Nick Dupaix that the most important thing he can do when working with someone having mental health issues is listen.

“The best tool you have is your mouth and if you are able to try and sympathize with people with mental health issues and try to talk to them, the majority of the time you will get compliance and cooperation,” Dupaix said. “A big majority of people suffering from mental illness want to be heard and want someone to listen to them.”

Aside from the training, cooperation between Orem and Provo police departments and mental health treatment providers is also important, said Kip Landon, program manager with Crisis Services at Wasatch Mental Health.

“If they pull up on a scene and think it doesn’t feel right — it’s not a straight black and white case — we can consult with them,” he said.

Another resources Utah County officials have at their disposal is mental health court.

Participants are admitted based on the type of crime they have committed and the treatment available for mental illness.

They are required to go to a process of therapy, medication compliance and regular meetings with a judge.

In exchange, they get to stay out of jail.

Although the program can be difficult for some, Deputy Utah County Attorney Jared Perkins said the program has had successes.

Not only has it helped reduce the number of people in prison and recidivism rates, Perkins said, it has also connected people to the treatment they need.

“They become a healthy functioning member of society that doesn’t worry about police chasing them down,” Perkins said. “They get out of the cycle of instability and incarceration.”