



Deputy Mark Hollandsworth, Training Coordinator for the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, sits in the training room of the county's new public safety building. (Photo - Mike Wade/NRVCS)

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CHRISTIANSBURG - Back in 2004, Mark Hollandsworth was anything but an expert on the concept of a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT).

"I went into it kind of blind," recalled Hollandsworth, a Deputy and Training Coordinator for the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office. "I didn't really know what CIT was, or what I was getting myself into."

Hollandsworth - a patrol officer at the time - was among the original group of local officers who joined mental health officials on a trip to Memphis, Tennessee - home of the nation's original CIT program.

"That trip really opened my eyes," Hollandsworth said. "It got me thinking about how many people we deal with on a regular basis who are in some sort of mental health crisis. Not that the training is a fix-all, but what they were teaching definitely made

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sense."

"As an officer, you get educated about mental health and it helps you better identify what type of mental illness a person might have," Hollandsworth added, "but what you learn in CIT can also apply to other situations - not just when you're dealing with people who are in crisis. It helps you with verbalization, active listening and overall communication skills."

Despite its benefits, Hollandsworth ad-

mitted that some officers have been skeptical about going through CIT training.

"There's definitely a bit of a stigma with CIT," he noted. "There were some officers - especially early on - who saw it as a *touchy, feely, go in and hug people* kind of thing...but once we started getting folks trained, many of those attitudes changed."

Hollandsworth is quick to point out that anything taught in CIT training does not supercede officer safety.

"We're not asking officers to take their gun belts off at the door," said Hollandsworth. "It's just another tool for them to have in their toolbox - but to be able to talk and listen to people goes a long way."


Hollandsworth, who also served on the committee that helped establish the program's first assessment center, went on to say that he is proud of what the local CIT program has accomplished.

"It's always a work in progress and you

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New CIT Assessment Center to open in Radford

The facility will be the second location for the New River Valley CIT program



Housed in what was once a garage, the new CIT Assessment Center will be a 24-hour site, staffed by a Radford Sheriff's Deputy and mental health professional from NRVCS. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

RADFORD - The New River Valley Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program will soon have its second Assessment Center, thanks to a recent boost of funding from the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services.

A CIT Assessment Center (CITAC) provides a secure location where CIT-trained law enforcement officers can take an individual who may be experiencing a psychiatric crisis and have that person safely evaluated by a mental health professional. Historically, if the person had to be hospitalized, the process could take several hours – preventing that officer from returning to his normal patrol duties. The Assessment Center, however, allows a custody transfer of the individual soon after they arrive, thereby significantly reducing the amount of officer-involved time. *(See data on Page 3)*

The Radford assessment center will be located on West Main Street, in a building that was once a garage. CITAC-Montgomery, the program's original assessment center, is located at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery in Blacksburg.

According to Program Coordinator Patrick Halpern, the new facility is being located in Radford for two primary reasons: the city's central location within the New River Valley; and the ability to have CIT-trained law enforcement office at the site 24/7. CITAC-Montgomery is staffed by hospital security officers and NRVCS clinicians, but is currently only open 16 hours per day (9:00 a.m. - 1 a.m.).

“While our Blacksburg site has been a tremendous asset to the community, it has been difficult for officers from some of our other jurisdictions in the New River Valley – including places like Radford and Pulaski and Floyd counties - to access that particular facility,” explained Halpern. “Having this second location will certainly help cut down on some of that travel time.”

Halpern pointed out that the new site – which will be available to all New River Valley jurisdictions - would not have become a reality without the support and involvement of Radford Sheriff Mark Armentrout. In fact, by adding five officers specifically for the CIT program, the Radford Sheriff's Office is doubling its number of personnel. Halpern added that CITAC-Radford will also be the first of its kind in Virginia to hire purpose-dedicated sworn law enforcement staff.

“It was important to us that we place the services provided at CITAC where they will be best utilized,” Halpern continued. “With the second facility, we are now centrally located to the agencies that carry out 84 percent of our region's emergency custody orders (ECOs).”

“This creates greater efficiencies to law enforcement and NRVCS, and more importantly, it ensures that we are able to promote dignity and respect for individuals with a mental illness that are going through the civil commitment process,” Halpern concluded.

The CITAC-Radford is scheduled to open later this fall. To learn more about the New River Valley CIT program, visit www.nrvcs.org/cit.



COLLABORATION OF CARE: LewisGale Hospital Montgomery's Emergency Department Director Lisa Edwards (left) staffs a case with NRVCS Emergency Services Clinician Angela Martin at the Crisis Intervention Team Assessment Center (CITAC) located at the Blacksburg hospital. (Photo - Mike Wade/NRVCS)



ROLE PLAY EXERCISE: CIT Program Coordinator Patrick Halpern (left) plays the role of a person potentially in crisis as he speaks with Officer Jason Miller of the Virginia Tech Police Department (center) and Officer Aaron Lusk with the Christiansburg Police Department. The exercise was part of the CIT training conducted September 21-25, 2015.

Data shows first CITAC having positive impact

Officials with the New River Valley Crisis Intervention Team opened the first local Assessment Center (CITAC) at Lewis Gale Hospital Montgomery in Blacksburg back in January 2013. Since that time, more than 1,000 individuals have been assessed at the CITAC-Montgomery site.

Data provided by the CIT program shows that the facility has proven to be effective in serving the behavioral health needs of the community while also benefitting local law enforcement.

In fact, CITAC has reduced law enforcement involvement in the emergency custody order (ECO) process by 80 percent. According to CIT data, the average amount of time New River Valley law enforcement spends on an ECO that is not transferred to the CITAC is just over four hours. Officers that transfer custody to CITAC are involved in the process for approximately 45 minutes.

“Better understanding of resources have facilitated better services to the patients needing psychiatric care.”

“The collaboration and support offered among New River Valley Community Services, LewisGale Hospital Montgomery and the law enforcement agencies in the region has been a testament to the dedication each agency has to our community and the people we serve,” declared Paula N. Mitchell, Vice President of Behavioral Health Services for LewisGale Regional Health System.

Utilization of the CITAC is also increasing, up 34% in Fiscal Year 2015 compared to the previous year. Of those individuals served at the site, 76% were hospitalized at a psychiatric facility.

“The collaborative nature of this partnership has opened up additional opportunities for working together,” Mitchell added. “Better understanding of resources have facilitated better services to the patients needing psychiatric care. We problem solve together on issues as they come up and strengthen an already strong relationship among each of the partner organizations and agencies.”

“This is all the result of a team of dedicated professionals serving their communities by working together in partnership,” concluded Mitchell.



FEEDBACK: Officer Shannon Cannon of the Blacksburg Police Department (left) critiques her own performance during the role play exercise with CIT Instructor Sergeant Danny Ratcliffe of the Pearisburg Police Department.



SPECIAL GUESTS: State officials visiting from Richmond observe role play exercises at the most recent CIT training. Pictured are (from left) Victoria Cochran, Deputy Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security; Brian J. Moran, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security; and William A. “Bill” Hazel, Jr., Secretary of Health and Human Resources.



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TRAINING

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learn as you go - especially with the number of agencies we have involved with our program.”

The New River Valley CIT program was the first rural, multi-jurisdictional program in the nation. Along with NRVCS and LewisGale Hospital Montgomery, there are more than a dozen law enforcement agencies involved with the local CIT - including departments from all five localities, as well as the police departments at Virginia Tech and Radford University.

“Going to Memphis and seeing the problems that a city that size faces, it makes you appreciate what you do have here,” said Hollandsworth. “We’ve been able to bring that program back here and mold it into what we wanted it to be.”

“The way the mental health laws have changed and our communities have changed, we have to be flexible,” Hollandsworth added.

More than ten years after it started, Hollandsworth believes the CIT program is as important to the community as it has ever

been.

“Unfortunately, with the number of tragedies our area has been through in recent years, we’ve all had to face the realization that we’re not in a perfect community,” Hollandsworth explained. “The danger is real and we’ve all seen that bad things actually do happen here.”

Fortunately, Hollandsworth added, CIT has a positive and ever-growing reputation in the community.

“Other CIT programs in the state are looking to us as a leader and I think that’s a real honor,” Hollandsworth declared, “but when a family member of someone in crisis calls and asks for a CIT officer...that speaks volumes.”

“A lot of times, people will even ask for specific officers to respond,” added Hollandsworth. “So, while the program overall is great, it really comes down to the work that our officers are doing individually. That’s what is really making a difference and having an impact on our community.”



New River Valley Crisis Intervention Team Partners

- Blacksburg Police Department
- Christiansburg Police Department
- Dublin Police Department
- Floyd County Sheriff’s Office
- Giles County Sheriff’s Office
- LewisGale Hospital Montgomery
- Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office
- Narrows Police Department
- NRVCS
- Pearisburg Police Department
- Pulaski County Sheriff’s Office
- Pulaski Police Department
- Radford City Police Department
- Radford City Sheriff’s Office
- Radford University Police Department
- Virginia Tech Police Department