

County Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team First Final Report January 1996

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The reason for this investigation was to determine whether the Mobile Crisis Teams of Ventura County Mental Health Department are being used to full advantage and whether the present number of Crisis Teams is adequate to serve the entire county.

BACKGROUND

- The county employs twenty mental health professional counselors who are available by telephone on a twenty-four hour basis. They work twelve hour shifts, keeping the phones staffed every day of the week. The shifts over-lap so that there are two or three teams on duty at all times. When necessary, a team of two counselors leaves the office and goes out to assist in crisis situations.
- At any one time, there are three teams based in the County Mental Health facility in Ventura and one team housed in the East Valley Sheriff's Station. The team in the Sheriff's Station has been in place since June, 1995. It is the first time such a County Mental Health Crisis Team has been in residence in a police station in Ventura County. This location serves the cities of Moorpark, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks and unincorporated areas.

PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

- Visits to the County Mental Health Department.
- Interviews with Mental Health Administrators and Crisis Team personnel.
- Visits to the Crisis Team Office in the East Valley Sheriff's Station.
- Interviews with the Mental Health Administrator in charge of training the Crisis Team personnel and presenting training programs to police officers.
- Visits to the Simi Valley Police Department, the Ventura Police Department, the Oxnard Police Department, the County Sheriff's Department in the East Valley Station and the Sheriff's office in the County Government Center.
- Interviews with city police chiefs, high-ranking officers, the County Sheriff and Under Sheriff.
- Examination of records of the number of calls for assistance received by Mental Health personnel and police departments, and the number of times these calls resulted in the cooperative handling of the case.

FINDINGS

- Mental Health Crisis Team professionals are called by the police to deal with persons

who are threatening suicide or who are disoriented. They are not called if the situation is dangerous or if the person is subject to arrest. When a call is received by the police, an officer is sent out to investigate. After the situation is "stabilized" or made safe, the Crisis Team may be called.

- In some situations, where there are no weapons involved, a Crisis Team can assist the person in trouble and thereby free the officer for more demanding police duty.
- The problems most often encountered by the Crisis Teams are teenage runaways, disoriented persons who have lost their way, irrational persons who are disturbing the peace, homeless persons in difficulty and persons who are threatening suicide. About 60% of their calls require referral to another agency.
- The evaluation of a person for appropriate referral or for observation at the Mental Health facility can be made by either the Crisis Team or the police officers. According to section 5150 of the State Welfare and Institutions Code, a person who is thought to be a danger to self or others may be held involuntarily in a mental facility for up to 72 hours for evaluation and/or treatment.
- Crisis Teams can also be called on a 24 hour "hotline", by private citizens and other agencies. The teams may ask the person calling to come into the office, offer to meet him/her at a hospital or go out to the location of the problem.
- Housing the Mobile Crisis Team of the County Mental Health Department in the same building with the East Valley County Sheriff's Department is an attempt to solve the problem of distance and travel time between the eastern portion of the county and Ventura. Calls for the crisis team have increased steadily. Whenever the Crisis Team can transport person to a mental facility, a police officer is freed for regular patrol duties.
- There is no local back-up Crisis Team for a second crisis situation when the primary team is out on a call. The telephone calls are automatically transferred to the Ventura office where it would take another team 30-60 minutes to drive to the eastern part of the county to respond to an emergency.
- For coverage of the cities in western Ventura County, including unincorporated areas, the Mobile Crisis Teams and the other counselors are housed in the Mental Health Department building in Ventura.
- The Mental Health Department reports that the counselors and Crisis Teams received a total of 1,810 calls a month during the past thirteen months ending October, 1995. They respond to problems/emergencies on an average of 123 times each month, either by phone or in person.
- Of the total, an average of 86 referrals to the Mental Health Department have been from the police departments during the past twelve months, ending October, 1995.
- The City of Ventura Police Department reports that it uses the Mobile Crisis Team frequently and has placed an average of eight persons per month into the Mental Health Unit for observation during the past five months, ending in October, 1995. There has been a long history of working together and a new program was started a year ago that includes regular meetings between officers and counselors. The Police Department considers the expertise of the Mobile Crisis Team a valuable asset.

- Four out of the five police departments interviewed said that the Crisis Teams could provide valuable assistance in preventing crime and fostering neighborhood cooperation.
- While the police departments generally feel that the Crisis Teams are a valuable resource, they are concerned that they may not be available on a permanent basis due to lack of funding by the county. This adversely affects developing programs of cooperation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1995/96 Grand Jury recommends:

1. Due to recent tragic situations resulting in death and injury to both officers and mental patients, permanent Crisis Teams should be set up. When the police receive a call that is designated "a 5150" (danger to self or others), it should trigger an immediate call to the Mental Health Department Crisis Teams.
2. The Mental Health Crisis Teams should continue to provide training to police departments and make sessions available to police personnel at mutually convenient times.
3. The police departments (city and county) develop a program of cooperation and training with the Crisis Teams in order to use both agencies efficiently. The program that is now being implemented between the City of Ventura and the Crisis Teams can be used as a model. Meetings between the Crisis Teams counselors and the police officers can be scheduled on a regular basis and also as situation arise.
4. The Crisis Team supervisors should set up meetings with police officers and counselors in order for the counselor to learn more about how the police can handle persons who are in trouble.
5. The Mental Health Department should set up a system that will record the number of times that the Mobile Crisis Teams are used in conjunction with the police in each jurisdiction.
6. Funds for the Mobile Crisis Teams should be provided on a permanent basis. The Board of Supervisors should find a method to provide funds and designate Crisis Teams as a matter of public safety.
7. Law enforcement agencies should also seriously consider providing Crisis Team funds under this designation as a function of public safety.
8. Funds should be provided immediately for a back-up team to be put "on alert" for the East Valley when the primary team is out on a call.
9. Funds that were deleted last year should be replaced for the support staff of a half-time Office Assistant III.

RESPONSE

Due from elected officials within 60 days and from public officials within 90 days.

Response: Ventura County Mental Health

On behalf of the entire Mental Health Department and especially the manager and staff of our Crisis Team, we would like to thank the Grand Jury for their interest in mental health crisis services and our interface with local law enforcement. We strongly agree that this partnership is very important for our community and should receive priority for planning and support.

This written response will focus on those recommendations and actions within the authority and responsibility of the Mental Health Department. Recommendations related to County budget priorities or the policies and procedures of the Sheriff's Department or local police agencies require a response beyond the authority of the Mental Health Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Due to recent tragic situations resulting in death and injury to both officers and mental patients, permanent Crisis Teams should be set up. When the police receive a call that is designated "a 5150" (danger to self or others), it should trigger an immediate call to the Mental Health Department Crisis Teams.

Ventura County Mental Health has established a permanent Crisis Team as recommended, including the East County Satellite Team. The Crisis Team assigns a priority to any police request for assistance and responds immediately within the limits of available personnel.

2. The Mental Health Crisis Teams should continue to provide training to police departments and make sessions available to police personnel at mutually convenient times.

The Mental Health Department is involved in a number of initiatives with local law enforcement agencies to provide information and training to front line police officers. They include the following:

- The Supervisor of the Crisis Team participates monthly in the two day COPPS Training (Community Policing) Program for local law enforcement personnel conducted by the Sheriff's Department. Since September, 1995, the Crisis Team Supervisor has delivered a monthly one hour presentation about the Crisis Team and mental health crisis intervention services to law enforcement officers as part of these trainings.
 - The Supervisor and other staff from the Crisis Team have initiated meetings with police chiefs and senior police executives from Ventura, Oxnard, and Simi Valley to provide information and promote collaboration. Similar meetings for the other city departments will occur during the coming year. This is an ongoing commitment to develop, maintain, and expand lines of communication.
 - Crisis Team staff have also attended "role-call" meetings, most recently in Simi Valley, and in April in Oxnard. These meetings occur during day and evening shift and enable our Crisis Team staff to communicate directly with all line officers. These outreach efforts will be ongoing during the coming year.
3. The police departments (city and county) develop a program of cooperation and training with the Crisis Teams in order to use both agencies efficiently. The program that is now

being implemented between the City of Ventura and the Crisis Teams can be used as model. Meetings between the Crisis Teams counselors and the police officers can be scheduled on a regular basis and also as situation arise.

The Mental Health Department will continue to cooperate and promote opportunities for partnership and collaboration between the Crisis Team and local law enforcement agencies. If police departments develop new training opportunities our staff will be glad to participate.

4. The Crisis Team supervisors should set up meetings with police officers and counselors in order for the counselor to learn more about how the police can handle persons who are in trouble.

The Crisis Team Supervisor and staff have met and will continue to meet with the Sheriff's staff and senior police officers to learn about police policy and procedures. New staff on the Crisis Team participate in "ride-alongs" as part of their orientation and training. This is in addition to the other examples of collaboration and communication referred to earlier.

5. The Mental Health Department should set up a system that will record the number of times that the Mobile Crisis Teams are used in conjunction with the police in each jurisdiction.

The Mental Health Department will initiate a data collection system to identify the number of law enforcement referrals and contacts by jurisdiction. This information will be shared with the Sheriff and Police Chiefs.

6. Funds for the Mobile Crisis Teams should be provided on a permanent basis. The Board of Supervisors should find a method to provide funds and designate Crisis Teams as a matter of public safety.

Budget decisions for all services are made by the Board of Supervisors. At the department level we have assigned a high budget priority to the Crisis Team and will protect this vital service to the extent possible.

7. Law enforcement agencies should also seriously consider providing Crisis Team funds under this designation as a function of public safety.

This policy recommendation calls for a decision by the Board of Supervisors and is beyond the level of department policy or action.

8. Funds should be provided immediately for a back-up team to be put "on alert" for the East Valley when the primary team is out on a call.

We currently have six staff (two three-person shifts) from noon until midnight seven days per week, based at the East Valley Sheriff's Station. Provisions for backup staff from Ventura to work shifts at the East County site during times of illness or vacation are in place. A fourth person on each shift is scheduled for assignment to the East Valley Sheriff's station when additional space can be identified. If space is not available this year within the Sheriff's Station which is ideal, we will have to explore alternatives at another 24 hour site but within the East County. Ventura based staff do remain "on alert" and screen all calls, including those from the East County, to assess risk and respond to the highest priority need.

9. Funds that were deleted last year should be replaced for the support staff of a halftime Office Assistant III.

Budget decisions are made by the Board of Supervisors. The Department will continue to collect essential program and financial data using available Crisis Team staff not occupied with a current emergency.

CC:

Sheriff Larry Carpenter

Chief Bob Brooks

Commander Bruce McDowell

Lt. William Boyd

Pierre Durand