

PEEL Regional Police

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# HOW PEEL POLICE OFFICERS AND CRISIS WORKERS ARE TEAMING UP TO PROVIDE URGENT MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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Peel Regional Police (PRP) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Peel Dufferin are teaming up to better provide mental health services in emergency situations.

The newly launched police service — known as the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team (MCRRT) — pairs officers and crisis workers to respond to mental health emergencies reported through 911 calls.

The MCRRT program provides on-site assessment to those experiencing a crisis, connecting them with community services in the hopes of avoiding unnecessary trips to the hospital.

Despite already having services devoted to mental health, including a crisis hotline, there was nothing in place to respond to emergencies.

For Charlene Heyer, director of crisis services at CMHA Peel Dufferin, the program is bridging the gap for emergency calls.

"We did not have the ability to react in real time," she said.

Instead, when people were experiencing mental health emergencies, police often had to respond to those calls alone.

Police, she said, often don't have the specialized training to gauge a mental health emergency, and mostly end up bringing callers to the hospital —

which is not always an ideal situation.

Not only do these hospital trips make the caller wait for hours to receive help, it also adds to the issue of halfway medicine.

According to Heyer, officers responded to 6,500 mental health issues last year — about 18 calls a day.

With the MCRRT, crisis workers are now able to assess the situation alongside officers and make an on-site decision as to whether the caller needs to go to the hospital immediately, or if they can instead be connected with local resources.

"We want to avoid unnecessary apprehensions," said Heyer. "Individuals don't want to be criminalized for having a mental health crisis."

Crisis worker Angelica Fasulo says the partnership between police officers and care workers has been extremely helpful — despite only launching on Jan. 13, 2020.

She also highlighted the importance of collaboration.

"Although we are a partnership, we have a different lens of what we do," she said.

Before the program launched, officers and care workers went through an extensive collaborative training period.

This allowed both parties to become comfortable with each other and explore the two different skill sets they bring together.

Fasulo explained it as an exchange of skills — po-

% of cases diverted from hospital by MCRRT since Jan. 13, 2020 launch:

70%

In 2019, Peel officers responded to:

APPROX.

6,500

MENTAL

HEALTH-RELATED

CALLS

18

CALLS

A DAY

Source: Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team (MCRRT)

Torstar Graphic

"When we go out on the road, the clients are gravitating to us. We've been able to build that rapport with people; people have said that they are happy to have this interaction."

— Andelica Fasulo, Crisis worker

"We're trying to be proactive and prevent future calls," said Heyer. "We're trying to get a leg-up on this situation."

On the front lines, Fasulo has seen positive community feedback.

"When we go out on the road, the clients are gravitating to us. We've been able to build that rapport with people; people have said that they are happy to have this interaction," she said.

Peel isn't the first region to launch an MCCRT team.

Multiple cities have had this program in place for many years.

The Peel model was based on the Hamilton project — the first in Ontario — and an upgrade on Hamilton's Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST), a two-decade partnership between police and St Joseph's Healthcare.

"The Hamilton program was the gold standard," said Heyer. "It took them 17 years to do what we were able to do in five."

The COAST program was a second-tier response, where officers would call for assistance after attending the scene and assessing a call as a mental health crisis. The MCCRT sends both a men-

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Peel Regional Police photo  
Crisis support worker Angelica Fasulo and Peel Regional Police officer Tyler Bell-Morena are two team members of Peel's new Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team - a program that aims to provide services during mental health emergencies.

NEW TEAM PAIRS PEEL POLICE AND CRISIS WORKERS  
RAPID RESPONSE UNIT WILL RESPOND TO MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES /P18