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CO-RESPONDER PROGRAM LAUNCHED IN SOUTH WOOD COUNTY

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ODC is pleased to announce the launch of a Co-Responder program. In collaboration with the Wisconsin Rapids Police Department and the Wood County Sheriff's Department ODC has developed a Co-Responder Crisis Response Program in South Wood County. The program pairs trained law enforcement officers with mental health professionals to respond to incidents involving individuals experiencing behavioral health crises and general mental health related challenges. This collaborative model provides effective crisis de-escalation, diversion from the criminal justice system, connection to behavioral health services, care coordination and referral to other community resources.

The role of law enforcement in the United States has been characterized by a delicate balance between providing public safety, serving the community, and enforcing laws. Among their responsibilities, police officers have been increasingly tasked with responding to crisis situations, including those incidents involving people with behavioral health conditions. The need for training and resources to facilitate effective responses to these situations are critical.

ODC's mental health team and local law enforcement agencies are excited to develop this Co-Responder program.

Dan Hostens, the WR Chief of Police is from a Department in Illinois that utilized a crisis response unit with great success and is extremely supportive of this effort. He states, "It would be an honor for the WRPD to partner with ODC, the Wisconsin Rapids Fire Department, the Wood County Sheriff's Office, and the many partners in Wood County who provide various services to the citizens and visitors of Wood County. This endeavor's potential for the good of the community is without measure. This program will fill a role that this community desperately needs and will be the missing link between those in need and the abundant services available."

Wood County Sheriff, Shawn Becker states, "This grant opportunity with ODC will make a strong difference in the Wisconsin Rapids Community. We all have been striving as leaders to find ways to help people who are suffering from mental health issues/illnesses. This is a perfect opportunity. Law enforcement officers have noticed the struggle for years with people in our community that need help while dealing with a mental health crisis. We have been training all of our staff to better handle calls like these and connect people with local resources before they are committed to a mental health hospital. However, we know by continuing to work with our key community stakeholders like ODC, we can make even more of a difference. ODC's plan will help take away the stigma when someone calls for help and a law enforcement officer is sent to assist him or her. To be quite honest it can be degrading to the person when we arrive and take them away. Often times having a co-responder assist or even respond will help even more. Once again, this grant opportunity will make a difference in our community while bringing key stakeholders together like ODC and law enforcement. We can't do this alone and need to continue to work together as a team."

The goal of the Crisis Response Unit is to provide crisis de-escalation, enhance civilian and officer safety during interactions, develop partnerships with the mental health system to facilitate diversion, and connect people experiencing behavior health crises to resources and services.

The long-term impact of this program on the community aims to reduce the number of behavioral health crisis calls, the number of emergency detentions and the amount of time officers are involved. The Co-Responder will support the person and the officer by de-escalating the situation, assessing the needs and making appropriate referrals to services, resources and programs to assist the individual on a long-term ongoing basis. The Co-Responder (Mental Health Coordinator) will be the advocate for the individual while supporting law enforcement, Wood County Crisis and the emergency room personnel to ensure a seamless transition from a behavioral health crisis to long term mental health resources and support. The person benefits, the partners benefit and the community as a whole benefits.

Opportunity Development Centers, Inc. (ODC) is a non-profit agency whose mission is to empower people with disabilities to achieve their work and life goals. ODC was established in 1965 and supports individuals in 21 counties in Wisconsin. ODC supports individuals with disabilities from early years to adulthood. ODC provides skills training, employment services, and connects people with their communities. For more information or to learn more about ODC, please call Ann Lepak at 715-424-2712 or email alepak@odcinc.com.

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