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Charleston County Consolidated 911 Implements Innovative Partnership with Local Mental Health Center

In August 2020, Charleston County Consolidated 911 Center partnered with Charleston Dorchester Mental Health Center (DMH) to place a counselor in the 911 Center. Since then, 436 callers who were facing a mental health crisis received help from a professional counselor right away.

“Mental health crises are just as scary as a crime, fire or accident, but they require a specialized response. A trained counselor can best understand the problem, de-escalate it, and explore options to connect the caller to community resources,” said Charleston County Consolidated 911 Director Jim Lake. “Many times a trip to a hospital can be avoided if people can access support right away, which is one of the primary reasons this partnership is a priority for us.”

“The value in our partnership with 911 is that we are involved from the start of the call,” said DMH Executive Director Jennifer Roberts. “This lets us be ready to provide services or follow up to existing patients and those reaching out for the first time.”

“I’m proud of this innovative program that provides guidance to first responders and tremendous help to those struggling with a mental health crisis,” said Consolidated Dispatch Board Chair and North Charleston Fire Chief Gregory Bulanow.

911 call takers still take the initial call and gather the facts. If it’s appropriate, the call-taker will transfer the call to an available counselor who will provide immediate support, access to local resources, and help the caller tap their own coping mechanisms. EMS and/or law enforcement are dispatched as needed, and then work together with the counselor to determine what is best for each situation. “We want to encourage people to call 911 for mental health crises when there’s urgency involved. Our program is evolving as we learn more. We are grateful to our DMH and emergency response partners and committed to the goal we have every day – getting the right help to people who call,” said Lake.

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