

*For immediate use*

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## **TRAINING HELPS FIRST RESPONDERS DEAL EFFECTIVELY WHEN THEY ENCOUNTER MENTAL ILLNESS ON A CALL**

Lake County, OH — A training program to help area law enforcement, corrections, and emergency services personnel deal more effectively with situations involving someone with a serious mental illness took place October 26 through 29 at Lakeland Community College. It was spearheaded by the Community Alliance of Law Enforcement and Mental Health Services, with support from the Lake County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

During the four-day training, 22 participants learned about symptoms and behaviors commonly associated with major mental illnesses including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and Alzheimer's. The session also included modules on suicide prevention, adolescent mental health crises, and techniques for deescalating dangerous situations.

Lake County ADAMHS Board Executive Director Kim Fraser is among those enthusiastic about the CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) program. "Our system has made this a priority initiative because it helps keep our law enforcers and citizens safer," Fraser said. "A serious mental illness can be a factor in many calls that police officers and other emergency personnel respond to. Their ability to assess the situation, make good choices, and summon appropriate resources is crucial. It can turn a potentially dangerous — even lethal — situation into one with a much more positive outcome."

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Julie Kalina-Hammond supervises forensic services at Neighboring, a mental health agency in the Lake County ADAMHS Board network. Kalina-Hammond helped coordinate the annual CIT training and “emceed” the training sessions. “If we can identify that a person’s behavior is rooted in an illness, and we can facilitate appropriate treatment, it’s a win-win,” she notes. “We can stop a little problem from growing into a big one, we can save taxpayers money, and we can extend a helping hand to people who truly need it.”

Kalina-Hammond says it’s been gratifying to see an increase in the number of area law enforcement agencies that have CIT trained officers on staff. She adds that one department in particular has made an especially deep commitment to the initiative. “Fairport Harbor’s Police Department has become our shining example of how the CIT program can spawn lasting and positive results,” she explains. “In the five years that we’ve offered CIT, almost every officer in Fairport has been trained. That means there’s a CIT officer on duty every shift, every day. Plus, Chief Kish has gone the extra mile and implemented specific CIT-grounded policies and protocols for his department. That translates to enhanced communication and collaboration between Fairport officers and our mental health system His team members know they can reach out to us 24/7 to help them problem-solve, assess a situation, or connect with resources.”

Established by Ohio statute, the ADAMHS (Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services) Board is responsible for planning, funding, and evaluating Lake County’s mental health and recovery services. Board members — eighteen Lake County residents who serve without compensation — include medical professionals, mental health and recovery experts, consumers (people who need and use services), relatives of consumers, community leaders and business professionals. More information on the services provided through the ADAMHS Board and its network of local providers is available online at [www.HelpThatWorks.us](http://www.HelpThatWorks.us).