

The Briefing

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Crime or Crisis?

Crime rate statistics are declining in many cities across this country. However, those numbers don't tell the entire story. The number of calls for service that are related to mental health issues is increasing. The surge in such calls is being driven by the difficult economy, increasing number of veterans returning from conflict overseas, drug abuse, and government cutbacks in providing mental health services.

The Lakeville Police Department classifies such calls as crisis related calls and they are not recorded as crimes. Suicide related events, welfare calls, and other mental health crisis related cases fit into this classification. Chief Vonhof estimates that the department averages over 100 calls per month in this category.

In recognition of the fact that

police are often the first responders for individuals who are experiencing a mental illness crisis, police departments nationally are incorporating specialized Crisis Intervention Training (CIT). The training increases the officer's awareness of mental health issues and equips them to safely and effectively defuse situations involving a person in mental health crisis by using verbal de-escalation skills. The training incorporates scenario based simulation exercises with professional actors.

I attended the CIT course along with a number of other Lakeville officers. One of them described CIT as the best workshop he had ever attended.

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I've responded to several hundred requests from officers to assist during a tragic moment. Certain calls linger in the heart and mind for a long time. One such incident occurred in March when a 14 year old special needs child named Sam Holland passed away at his home from physical complications. Sam's parents, Dale and Lisa, were some of the most loving and incredible people I've ever met.

I had the privilege of officiating at Sam's funeral. His memorial folder contained carefully chosen words of wisdom that touched me. From Dr. Seuss - "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." And then a theological anchor - "I am the child who has come to rest in the arms of the Father who knows him best."

Other notes from Chaplain Bellows

- The continued work of LPCS is made possible by the financial gifts of others. LPCS is a 501c3 organization. Your tax deductible contribution can be mailed to 9623 162nd Street West, Lakeville MN 55044.
- Visit my web site at www.lakevillepolicechaplaincy.org

