



Halton Regional Police Const. Kevin Bochsler and mental health worker Barbara Bell are members of the new Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team. Submitted photo

Halton Police launch special pilot Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team

By Eamonn Maher
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The Halton Regional Police Service introduced a new unit of the force earlier this month to respond to mental health crisis calls and the teams have already been kept busy with dozens of incidents.

Since the launch of the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team on Dec. 7, officers and mental health workers have attended 70 crisis calls during that two-week span.

"Unfortunately, that has become very normal for us. To say that they are busy is an understatement," said Sgt. Mark Dienstmann, who has supervised the HRPS's COAST (Crisis Outreach and Support Team) for the past two years.

Sgt. Dienstmann said the MCRRT is a one-year pilot project that was established in time for the holiday season, when statistics have shown an increase in the number of crisis calls.

Since 2012, the HRPS has noticed a 37-per-cent rise in the number of crisis situations they've responded to and as a result

specially trained uniformed officers are teaming up with mental health professionals from Hamilton's St. Joseph's Hospital to be better prepared for such situations.

"A health care professional has the ability to de-escalate a situation and communicate with an individual in a crisis perhaps in a different approach than an officer, whose priority is the safety of the health care partner," St. Dienstmann added.

"Maybe a hospital isn't the best place to get the treatment they need. There might be other resources in the community, so they might be diverted from the emergency room. The benefit is twofold. For the police service, it helps us reduce the amount of time that front-line officers have to deal with crisis calls, and for the health care system, it has the ability to divert whenever possible away from the most expensive health care, which is the emergency room."

The teams are part of the regular seven-day platoon shift rotation and will be available to respond specifically to calls involving people in crisis, with a focus on risk assessment, Safe Talk training and Assist training.

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