



Rick Staly, Sheriff

FLAGLER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

"An honor to serve, a duty to protect."

NEWS RELEASE

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FCSO's Behavioral Response Unit (BRU) Offers Mental Health Assistance in Dual Response with Deputies

BUNNELL, FL – The Flagler County Sheriff's Office's (FCSO) Behavioral Response Unit (BRU) provides dual response with deputies in mental health situations to individuals incurring a mental health episode.



The Behavioral Response Unit (BRU) offers a variety of preventative mental health assistance programs and follow up services for individuals in crisis.

The BRU was established through a grant last year and since then the unit has responded with deputies

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to mental health calls, assisted in crisis negotiations with distraught individuals and even helped training K-9 handlers to quickly find missing endangered persons.

Last fall, BRU Mental Health Specialist, Megan Ionadi, joined patrol units at the scene of a suicide threat in which a female had discharged a firearm inside a residence while she was extremely intoxicated and threatening to commit suicide. A member of FCSO's Crisis Negotiation Team (CNT) tried to make contact with the woman, but she said she was not willing to speak with Law Enforcement. With the assistance from the CNT member, Ionadi was able to talk her out of the residence. The woman specifically requested to go to detox as she had relapsed with drinking alcohol. Once she exited the residence, deputies placed her in protective custody under the Baker Act. "Sometimes people facing a mental health crisis are more willing to speak with a Mental Health Specialist than a Deputy Sheriff," said Sheriff Rick Staly. "This is one of the reasons we created the BRU."

During another incident, BRU Mental Health Specialist, Teresa Shaw, assisted deputies at a trespassing call involving a schizophrenic man that was having an episode. Shaw was able to de-escalate the individual, enroll him in mental health services, and has since been following up with him. During initial contact, it was discovered the subject did not have insurance and was not receiving any psychiatric services. Today, he is now stable, insured, on medication, and has housing.

"My mother was a mental health counselor and implemented the Baker Act law for Orange County [Orlando] when the law was first passed," added Sheriff Staly. "Dual response is being implemented across the country because we know mental health problems manifest in to criminal acts if they're not addressed in time. But thanks to the grant and our Behavioral Response Unit and community partners, we are able to help provide mental health assistance to people in crisis instead of just locking them up."

The Behavioral Response Unit (BRU) was created in June of 2022 by Sheriff Staly and funded under the Criminal Justice, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Reinvestment Grant. The unit responds in unmarked vehicles with FCSO deputies to assist with mental health and/or substance abuse crisis calls. Since inception the BRU has responded to more than 500 calls for service and provided care coordination for over 60 individuals. BRU clients are provided follow up services in person and over the phone, along with care coordination, case management, and referrals for services. BRU also meets with Flagler School Student Services to staff cases monthly to coordinate services, and has established partnerships with FCSO's CNT, K9 units and patrol deputies.

You can learn more about BRU's services by clicking on [this link](#).

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