

■ WHEELING

## YSS, Wheeling Police Hope Knowledge Of Crisis Intervention Will Help Save Lives

**From STAFF REPORTS**  
Youth Services System Inc. (YSS) teamed up recently with the Wheeling Police Department to train law enforcement officers on how to respond to a person experiencing a mental health crisis.

The ultimate goal of the weeklong training at the Highlands Event Center, Wheeling Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger said, is to save lives.

“There are too many tragedies occurring each year during encounters with persons experiencing mental health crises,” he said. “Crisis Intervention Team is a relevant training and significant way to alleviate those tragedies by educating and empowering officers to make a positive difference, not only in the communities but with the individuals.”

During the 40-hour training, presenters covered a slew of topics, including how to recognize and respond to people with different mental disorders

– from autism to psychosis

– as well as pertinent, up-to-date information on various populations, including youth, veterans, people with substance use disorders and people experiencing homelessness.

The final session on Friday included de-escalation training and a role-playing session led by Crisis Intervention Team trainers Elizabeth Atwell, a licensed social worker, and retired Blue Ash Chief Paul Hartinger, both from the Cincinnati area.

Twenty-two law enforcement officers attended the training, most of them from the Wheeling Police Department. Others attended from the Hancock County and Wood County sheriff’s departments.

Although it is not mandatory, Wheeling Police Cpl. Bryan Hails said the goal is for the majority of the Wheeling force to be trained. About 25 percent attended this training.

“The way we look at it is, it’s that many more tools in their toolbox,” Hails said.

“They’ll leave here with a list of resources, that, even if the officer isn’t in a position to immediately change the outlook of the person in crisis, they could at least put them in touch with the right resources to better their chances of turning things around for themselves.”

Hails indicated one of the more enlightening sessions was led by Stephen Pownall, YSS Regional Adult Intervention Specialist. Pownall works as a liaison between the community – including law enforcement – and people who have substance use disorders. His region includes all of Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Marshall and Wetzel counties. Many of Pownall’s clients are experiencing homelessness.

He said he was pleased that the officers asked questions and were open to receiving his assistance.

“They’re very interested in working with us,” Pownall said.



Photo Provided  
Austin Richardson of Youth Services System Inc. presents a session on suicide prevention to law enforcement officers attending the recent Crisis Intervention Team training at the Highlands Event Center.