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Sheriff adds mental health clinician to county's crisis negotiation team

Submitted photo

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MEDINA – Medina County Sheriff Terry Grice has furthered the partnership with Medina County's behavioral healthcare organization, Alternative Paths, Inc. by adding an experienced mental health clinician to the county's multi-jurisdictional crisis negotiation team.

Sheriff Grice speaks highly of the relationship between the Medina County Sheriff's Office and Alternative Paths and said, "Adding a skilled clinician from Alternative Paths to the crisis negotiation

team makes sense for everyone ... our deputies and officers, Alternative Paths and the citizens we serve."

The Sheriff's Office has had a long-standing relationship with Alternative Paths, which is an ADAMH Board contracted provider that provides behavioral health services to inmates in the Medina County Jail. Alternative Paths provides 7 clinicians and one support staff, to provide mental health, chemical

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dependency, and prevention services at the jail. The agency also partners with the Sheriff's Office for the Opiate Response Team which links persons with opiate addiction to needed treatment. Gail Houk, LPCC-S, Director of Forensic Services at Alternative Paths, has been working with Sheriff Grice to assess ways mental health professionals and law enforcement can increase collaboration. Houk stated, "Over the past year we have started new initiatives such as clinicians riding out with deputies weekly to co-respond for calls involving mental health concerns. Adding a clinician to the crisis negotiation team will be another step in enhancing how we work together to help the community as well as our first responders." Houk will serve as the initial clinician on the crisis negotiation team, serving alongside the other negotiators comprised of Sheriff's Office deputies, correction officers, dispatchers, and a Wadsworth Police officer.

Most often, the crisis negotiation team works in conjunction with the county's multi-jurisdictional SWAT team. Sergeant King, the SWAT Team's Commander, is excited to see a mental health clinician added to the crisis negotiation team. King said, "Many incidents involve a person in some state of crisis. Having someone who can bridge the gap during a critical incident is crucial." Beyond providing services to the community, King stated, "Houk will also be a resource for first responders at an incident." Dep. Stephanie Kain, Crisis Negotiation Team Leader added "This addition has been a long term goal of the Sheriff's Office and I'm pleased to see that we are moving forward with this vital resource."

Sheriff Grice added, "Medina County law enforcement agencies and the ADAMH Board are continuously evaluating ways to provide the best possible service to our community, and we feel this new collaboration demonstrates that fact."