

Today's weather  
  
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**LOW: 49**  
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Sunset: 8:26

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## Local mental health organization recognizes Wadsworth police

**Scott Kriska**  
The Gazette

WADSWORTH — The Wadsworth Police Department has received an award from Alternative Paths recognizing the department's responses to individuals with mental illnesses.

The department is the recipient of this year's Crisis Intervention Team award for Police Agency of the Year.

Alternative Paths CIT coordinator Gail Houk said the team was started primarily as a four-day training period for local law enforcement officers to learn about the unique needs of individuals suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders.

"It talks about local resources that are available to help people," she said. "We talk about de-escalation skills, using verbal de-escalation. We do role play with the officers where we put them in different scenarios and then they have to work through the sce-



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Wadsworth Police Department receives this year's Crisis Intervention Team award for Police Agency of the Year from Alternative Paths.

nario to help de-escalate the situation."

Houk said this is the third year her organization has presented this award. She said Alternative Paths looks for departments that embrace the training they have received when it comes to interacting with the mentally ill.

"We have what we call a CIT portal at the agency," she said. "The officers can refer people to us through that portal and it goes right through our website. If an officer is out on the scene and someone doesn't need to be arrested and they don't need to go to the hospital, but the officers want a

mental health person to follow up with the individual, then we get that information through our portal and one of our mental health clinicians follows up with that person in the community to see what we can do to link them to services."

See **POLICE**, A2

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# POLICE

From A1

Houk said the Wadsworth Police have done an excellent job in using their mental health training, identifying people in crisis in the community they serve and making good decisions in whether an individual should be taken to the hospital or be referred to Alternative Paths.

"When we do ride-alongs with the officers, we get to co-respond with them firsthand and we get to kind of watch them in action," she said.

Police Chief Dan Chafin said this award is one of the reasons why he is proud of the men and women who serve on his department.

"It represents our officers on a regular basis taking the extra steps that they need to really try to find the best way to handle situations, the best way to actually care for people and hopefully the best way to have a positive impact

on people in the community," he said.

Chafin said mental health issues lie at the core of much of what his officers respond to on a regular basis.

"On one hand, we're trying to make sure that everybody's safe, whether that is other people in the home, other people in the area, but also the subject that we're called to deal with, whether or not they were engaged in crimes against others or whether we're just checking to make sure that person is okay," he said. "We want to make sure that we try to get at that root issue and we want to make sure that we're getting them in contact with resources and with care that they need to hopefully change the dynamic of that situation."

Chafin said one thing that is unique to his agency is the fact that all of the officers on the force are CIT certified and have gone through the training in properly interacting with mentally ill individuals.

"Once an officer starts here, as soon as we have the opportunity to get them enrolled in this Crisis Intervention Team coursework, we're going to do that," he said. "I know a lot of people that are familiar with the program and, in the past, people have requested a CIT officer."

Houk said Alternative Paths works with people of all ages in both group and individual settings covering various aspects of mental health and substance abuse.

"One of our largest services is crisis intervention," she said. "We take care of managing the 24/7 crisis line for Medina County and that's where we interact probably the most with law enforcement."

The organization's crisis and behavioral health help line can be reached at (330)-725-9195. Alternative Paths will work with all insurance companies and with those who do not have insurance as well.

"We will work with people whether they have insurance or whether they are indigent because we receive funding through the ADAMH (Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health) Board in Medina County, so there's really no reason people can't seek services," Houk said.

Houk said she has seen a great amount of momentum with mental health professionals and law enforcement working together to better serve people experiencing a mental health crisis.

"I think that there is a very strong partnership between mental health and law enforcement and first responders in general now and I've seen that grow tremendously over the past, I'd say, three to five years, there's been a lot of movement in that direction," she said.

Additional information on Alternative Paths can be found at [alternativepaths.org](http://alternativepaths.org).

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