

Mental Health Intervention Team

January 2008



WHAT IS THE MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTION TEAM?

The Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) is a 24 month pilot program that commenced on 1 July, 2007. The broad aim of the project is to reduce risks to police and mental health consumers by minimizing police intervention in non-criminal mental health incidents, thus reducing the time police are taken away from their core duties.

The Pilot will be trialed in Eastern Beaches, Penrith and Tuggerah Lakes Local Area commands. The project is

Background

The increase in the incidence of Mental Health issues within the community and added pressure on NSW Health Services to cope with this rise, has combined with the closure of 22,000 inpatient beds over the past 30 years to greatly impact on policing in NSW.

The Senate Select Committee on Mental Health (Commonwealth of Australia final report, 2006) acknowledged the large void that police fill in responding to mental health crises by describing the police as frontline mental health practitioners.

carried out on behalf of the Commissioners Executive Team with sponsorship provided by Deputy Commissioner David Owens.

As a result of a study of best practices across the world, the MHIT will form its basis on the Crisis Intervention Team which bears its origin in Memphis, USA and is used throughout the USA in over 200 Law Enforcement agencies. It's now also forming in Canada and is under review in a number of Asian Countries.

The MHIT will form a partnership with NSW Health and other agencies to achieve its objectives, modified from the Crisis Intervention Team, to meet the needs and operating environment of the NSW Police Force.

The Key Stakeholders are NSW Police Force, NSW Health, NSW Governor and Non Government Mental Health Organizations.

The Team:

- *Superintendent Dave Donohue – Commander.*
- *Sergeant Natalie Woodward – Education Officer.*
- *Senior Constable Sarah Murphy – Project Officer.*
- *Sergeant Donna Fitzgerald – Analyst.*
- *Terry Mullane – Senior Project Officer.*
- *Lorraine Anderson – (Psychologist) Project Officer*
- *Darrin Cowan – Clinical Nurse Consultant*

Aims of the Project

- Reduce the risk of injury to police and mental health consumers when dealing with mental health related incidents.
- Improve awareness amongst front line police of the risks involved in the interaction between police and mental health consumers.
- Improved collaboration with other government and non-government agencies in the response to, and management of, mental health crisis incidents.
- Reduce the time taken by police in the handover of mental health consumers into the health care system.

Where are we now?

Where to from here?

The MHIT has been conducting analysis to identify links between Missing Persons, Homicides and other High Risk Incidents that require police intervention and are also related to Mental Health issues, with the aim of implementing strategies to reduce these incidents.

A four day education package is currently under development. The package will address front line issues involving mental health and seeks to develop the skills, knowledge and abilities of frontline general duties police to better equip them with tools to efficiently and effectively manage incidents in which mental health is an issue.

Numerous external health agencies and field experts have contributed to the creation of this package, with many maintaining their relationship with the project by assisting in the delivery of the package.

The primary aim of the package is to educate police with respect to identifying behaviors in the field indicative of mental illness, and providing them with the tools to effectively deal with the situation. These tools will range from Communication strategies, risk assessment, crisis intervention techniques and an understanding of the current Mental Health Act 2007, as well as the Memorandum of Understanding between the NSWPF, Ambulance Service and Department of Health.

YOUTH DRUG FORUM 2007

In July 2007 the New South Wales Police Force, in partnership with Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club, invited parents and children aged between 12 and 18 years to a Drug (ICE) Forum at Maroubra Seals Sports and Community Club. The forum was hosted by then Assistant Commissioner Dave Owens and Superintendent David Donohue. The aim of the forum was to identify the issues faced by children that cause them to take drugs, as well as focusing on the impact of individual and/or family decisions.

A panel of guest speakers including a Drug Addiction Expert, Bipolar Consumer Advocate, Carer of a child with experience in drug abuse, Motivation Coach, NRL Footballer and member of the Police Citizens Youth Club presented to the children.

Members of the panel shared true experiences with the children and also provided graphic photographs depicting addicts before and after they began using ICE.

The forum succeeded in providing the youth with information so that they can make informed and educated decisions about their own lives.

Deputy Commissioner
Dave Owens



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COMMANDER'S PROFILE

Mr. Donohue joined the NSWPF in 1988 and subsequently performed duties General Duties and Criminal Investigation at Local Area Commands before being transferred to the Drug Enforcement Agency.

In 1997, upon leaving the Police Force, Mr. Donohue worked for DHL and Qantas at Executive Management level. Upon returning to the NSWPF in 2001, he again worked in Criminal Investigation at Redfern, and then as a Team Leader and Crime Coordinator at Eastern Beaches LAC.

Mr. Donohue was promoted to the rank of Inspector at Rose Bay LAC in 2005 where he took on the position of Mental Health Contact Officer in 2006. Mr. Donohue was appointed as Commander of the Mental Health Intervention Team in mid 2007. He is also the Corporate Spokesperson for Mental Health for the NSWPF.

Superintendent David Donohue

