

# IN THE NEWS!

## Coon Rapids PD partners to help with mental health issues

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Contributing Writer

A partnership between the Coon Rapids Police Department and Lee Carlson Center for Mental Health and Well-Being aims to help people struggling with mental health issues.

A spike in mental health-related calls to which Coon Rapids Police officers have responded in recent years prompted Coon Rapids officer Tanya Harmoning, then a COPPS (Community Policing and Problem Solving) officer, to research options for offering assis-

tance, especially to those residents who have made frequent mental-health related calls.

According to Harmoning, she found programs in which the police officers themselves received training to provide the follow-up, but she felt that a mental health

professional should be involved.

She received support from her supervisor, Capt. Jon Urquhart, and Police Chief Brad Wise and contacted the Anoka County Social Services and Behavioral Health Department, which recommended she get in

touch with the Lee Carlson Center. Harmoning did and found a willing partner, she said.

Focusing on residents who have made numerous calls, the program can recommend a meeting with a COPPS officer and

**Continued on 8A**

## Coon Rapids Police Department seeks to help those with mental health needs

**Continued from Page 1**

a Lee Carlson staff member, Harmoning said.

"The program is entirely voluntary," she said. If the resident agrees, a meeting takes place at the resident's home to assess what help and resources can be offered through the Lee Carlson Center.

The program was initiated in the beginning of April and a dozen visits have taken place.

Harmoning, a 16-year veteran with the Police Department, returned to patrol officer duties recently after four years

as a COPPS officer. Her role has been taken over by the new COPPS officer, Justin Hovorka, who now meets with residents along with the Lee Carlson staff member.

"Many individuals welcome the warm and inviting approach and have already opted into receiving services with the potential to impact their mental health wellness and overall well-being," wrote Grace Allen, development associate, on the Lee Carlson webpage.

The program is funded by the adult mental health grant Anoka County receives from the Minneso-

ta Department of Human Services and through the contract the county has with Lee Carlson to provide adult mental health services.

This is the first partnership between a police department and an agency to address mental health needs in the county, according to Jerry Pederson, county director of social services and behavioral health.

"It's very exciting," Pederson said.

According to the Coon Rapids Police Department 2017 annual report, there has been a 91 per-

cent increase in mental health-related calls for service since 2007, coinciding with a national trend of an increase in police contacts with individuals with mental illness.

From 2016 to 2017 mental-health related calls jumped more than 200, Urquhart said.

And when Wise checked the number of calls for one recent day this year, he said he counted 10 mental-health related responses by the department May 7.

The Lee Carlson Center for Mental Health and

Well-Being, headquartered in Fridley, has clinics in Coon Rapids and Fridley.

According to its website, its mission is to

"provide exceptional and affordable mental health services for families, children, youth and adults in our community."