

Dear City Commissioners,

8-7-17

Please consider incorporating the Homeless Committee with the Mental Health Board. The City continues to deal with many issues related to the homeless population. As a social worker for over 40 years and a member of the homeless task force years ago, I would like to offer some suggestions. This is a summary of a prior letter that I sent to Mike Eglinski related to the police city audit in December 2016. I also sent it to the CC and City Manager in June 2017.

“Nearly 1 in 5 people (18 percent) booked in the Douglas County jail were found to have serious mental illness in a study of 4 months of data. Most of the people with serious mental illness (77 percent) had a co-occurring substance use disorder and most (80 percent) were not charged with a violent offense. Source: Serious Mentally Ill Persons in the Douglas County Jail, Douglas County, KS. Huskey & Associates, June 29, 2015.”

There is, as you (Mike Eglinski) mentioned, difficulty identifying those with mental illness, how serious is it? Does one have to be psychotic to be deemed serious? Many people may not be psychotic but still have a serious mental illness. Key to me is that of those arrests, 80% were not charged with a violent offense. To my mind most all arrests non-violent, or otherwise, have some element of mental illness. Violent offenders have serious issues. Any arrest by the police should make use of “mental health first aid”, or just good mediation practices. Mental health first aid should not be aimed primarily at community members. All police officers should be exposed to this whether someone is deemed mentally ill or not. Tracking success of **1, 2, 3** could be accomplished by a general reduction of arrests and/or incarceration, labeling MH not required. Suicide calls may not fit into the reduction of police responses and should not be included in the study.

1“Mental health first aid- Mental health first aid is an 8-hour course designed to teach people skills to help someone experiencing a mental health crisis or problem. Participants learn about recognizing symptoms, helping people in crisis, and helping refer people to services. Mental health first aid training is broadly aimed at community members, with some courses focused on law enforcement officers.”

2“Crisis intervention team (CIT) -CIT training is a 40 hour course designed to teach skills to de-escalate crises, decrease the use of force, and understand law associated with mental illness. The training involves collaboration between law enforcement, mental health professionals, consumers and their families. CIT training is aimed specifically to law enforcement.”

3“Mental health squad and co-responder -Trained police officers work together with an assigned mental health professional to provide specialized response and follow-up. The team provides a high level of training and knowledge to help in crises, to connect people to community services, to follow-up, and to encourage communication and collaboration among different organizations.”

Ideas:

- CIT training is important to enlist the help of mental health professionals. It seems to me that this is a skill all police should be exposed to. The 8-hour, #1, may not be enough to evaluate the seriousness of mental health needs. #3, good for follow up.

- A day center for homeless people to have a place to go during daytime hours that is closer to downtown. This could provide a place to receive mental health help, triage for services, follow up contact with police mental health squad.

- Affordable meds are needed and a place for distribution.

- A detox center is critical in Lawrence as well as a crisis stabilization center. (What is a social detox, pg3 of the audit)

- Adjust court proceedings for those with serious mental illness, determined by a MH professional. Less incarceration more helpful resources.

These ideas are grounded in common sense and prevention. If any would be helpful, please pass them on to the appropriate committee. City funding decisions are always tough issues.

Thank you for your continuing efforts to improve our City, Candice Davis LSCSW