
2021-2023 Mental Health Unit Report



MENTAL HEALTH UNIT

In February 2021, the Clearwater Police Department created its Mental Health Unit. The Mental Health Unit is a pilot program that focuses on addressing calls for service involving citizens who suffer from mental health issues. The Clearwater Police Department's unit consists of two officers, Cheryl Wood and Carissa Costello. Both are paired with a civilian Crisis Response Specialist to meet with citizens in a mental health crisis that may warrant intervention. As a team, they contact the citizen and evaluate their mental state to determine their willingness to receive help. Before this unit was created, law enforcement had limited resources to adequately address the calls for service the police department received regarding these types of calls for service.

In the two years the Mental Health Unit has been operational, they have responded to 3,740 total calls for service. Collectively, these officers assisted with 1,977 mental health-related calls for service. This benefits the police department for many reasons, but the primary benefit includes the clients receiving the care they may desperately need before the problem manifests into a serious or potentially violent encounter. In some instances, the Mental Health Unit has been asked to be preemptive and reach out to a citizen whose behavior appears to be escalating. This allows the client to avoid a potential criminal charge or Baker Act.

Below is the call for service data provided by the department's Crime Analysis Unit:

Clearwater Police Department -Total Mental Health Related Calls for Service

2021 calls for service	3,250
2022 calls for service	2,746
2023 calls for service	402
Total	6,398

Officer Carissa Costello – Mental Health Related Calls for Service

2021 calls for service	811
2022 calls for service	416
2023 calls for service	50
Total	1,277

Officer Cheryl Wood – Mental Health Related Calls for Service

2021 calls for service	349
2022 calls for service	303
2023 calls for service	48
Total	700

Officer Carissa Costello – Total Calls for Service

2021 calls for service	990
2022 calls for service	1,024
2023 calls for service	180
Total	2,194

Officer Cheryl Wood – Total Calls for Service

2021 calls for service	710
2022 calls for service	701
2023 calls for service	135
Total	1,546

When asked, both officers advised they have noticed a significant increase in successful law enforcement contacts with their clients since the team's creation.

Below I have highlighted some of their "success" stories.

In 2021, the Mental Health Unit assisted a 14-year-old juvenile with a long history of suicidal ideation. This juvenile was a frequent runaway who previously attempted to take her own life. The juvenile was placed into a group home and away from an unstable family life, which was a constant trigger for her. The Mental Health Unit involved the Department of Children and Families, and the Suncoast Center before additional problems arose. Since implementing these resources, the Mental Health Unit has not had contact with the juvenile in over a year.

CW21-32765, CW21-62066, CW21-83822, CW21-86648, CW21-93703, CW21-95502, CW21-108186

In 2021, the Mental Health Unit assisted a 49-year-old female who was residing in a U-Haul in her driveway. The female had previously been the subject of numerous law enforcement contacts before this incident without success. The Mental Health Unit initiated a Baker Act at the time, and the citizen spent over three months in a local hospital for treatment. Once she was released, she was provided with a PIC (Pinellas Integrated Care) case manager. The client is now medicated, able to care for herself, and employed.

CW21-119221

In 2021, the Mental Health Unit assisted a 44-year-old male who was subject to numerous civil and criminal complaints. The client was previously Baker Acted and criminally charged for assaults, disturbances, and threatening neighbors. The Mental Health Unit worked with the client's property management team, attorney, and family to resolve the constant complaints from other citizens. As a result of their tireless work, the client was sentenced to probation and mandated mental health treatment. Since then, the Mental Health Unit has not had contact with the client since January 2022.

SO21-35765, CW21-134789, CW21-155347

In 2022, the Mental Health Unit assisted a 34-year-old male who suffered from a long history of Schizoaffective disorder. The male had previously been Baker Acted numerous times and was the subject of an Ex Parte order. The unit became involved and continuously monitored him while providing resources such as a PIC Team case manager. Since May 2022, the client has not had contact with the Mental Health Unit.

CW22-18226, CW22-21477

Over a two-year period, the Mental Health Unit assisted a ten-year-old female and her family in getting the help the juvenile desperately needed. The client had previously been Baker Acted more than ten times and been the subject of numerous law enforcement contacts. The Mental Health team successfully linked the client to the Suncoast Center for in-home treatment and care. The juvenile is currently receiving counseling, and she is under a medication management program.

CW21-18615, SO21-44335, CW21-15454, CW22-90261, CW22-93089

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that the team has had a significant impact on our community, specifically as it relates to those who suffer from mental health issues. The purpose of this unit is to mitigate potentially violent situations from occurring, provide valuable resources to enhance the lives of their clients, and to ensure the best possible outcomes. In 2021, the MHU teams handled approximately 35% of the mental health related calls received by the department. When comparing 2021 and 2022, the department saw a 15.5% reduction in mental health related calls. The department attributes this to connecting people to services more efficiently and reducing the number of repetitive calls for the same person having a recurring crisis. In 2022, the MHU teams handled 26% of the mental health related calls received by the department.

While I have provided some statistics and success stories, I cannot quantify the work these two officers do daily. The relationships they have built throughout the community have undoubtedly saved lives. The police officers in the field provide positive feedback of the program, indicating in the past they had no alternatives to assist people in crisis other than to use the Baker Act. Without the Mental Health Unit, the department would be putting the officers behind the proverbial curve when dealing with citizens who receive the benefits of such an instrumental team.