



St. Paul police partner with mental health social workers

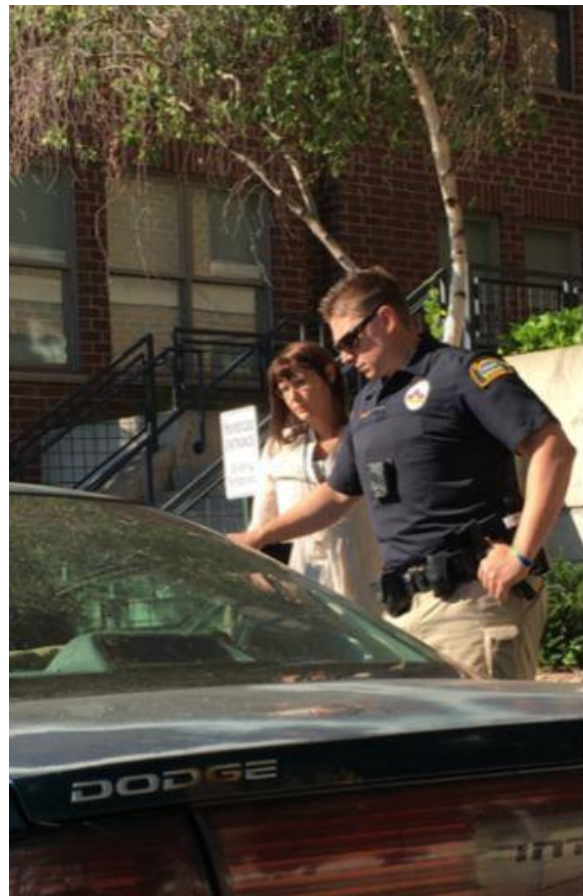
By Chao Xiong, August 1, 2018

St. Paul police are adding licensed clinical social workers to the roster in an attempt to better serve people in crisis.

The social workers will work in tandem with the department's Mental Health Unit, which launched in March, to respond to active police calls and provide follow-up care.

"What we have found is engaging an embedded social worker with police and having a combined response increases the likelihood that the person will get connected with resources and decreases the likelihood of future police contact," said Sgt. Jamie Sipes, the unit coordinator. "They don't need the police, they need some type of service, but we are the first call."

Licensed clinical social worker Amber Ruth from People Incorporated began working with St. Paul police in mid-July. Her position is funded by the organization.



People Incorporated Social Worker Amber Ruth and Saint Paul Police Officer Justin Tiffany, both of whom work in the police department's Mental Health Unit, went out on a call at 8:40 a.m. July 17. They responded to a call of a person in crisis. It was her second day on the job. (Courtesy St. Paul Police)

Ruth has reviewed about 100 cases, responded to about 10 calls and connected a homeless man to transitional housing. "It was great to know that we were able to get him in the moment . . . and get him the services he needed in a short amount of time," Ruth said.

The St. Paul City Council voted Wednesday to approve adding a second social worker who would be funded by Regions Hospital. That social worker is expected to start in August.

Activist Trahern Crews, an organizer with Black Saint Paul, said the move was a step forward in saving lives.

Crews pointed to [the case of Philip Quinn](#), who was fatally shot by St. Paul police in 2015 when he ran at them with a screwdriver. Quinn's wife and mother both had called police and said that Quinn had stabbed himself, was schizophrenic and suicidal and hadn't taken his medication.

"With this initiative, we think a mental health professional can go in . . . and get [people] what they need instead of death," Crews said.

Different iterations of the mental health worker/police team exist throughout Minnesota and the country. St. Paul's model differs, Sipes said, because the social worker is both embedded with officers at active calls and also provides case management afterward.

Ruth identifies how calls are handled, what could be improved and what follow-up is needed, from mental health services to housing to a visit from the social worker.

"If it leads to somebody ending up in a hospital or a therapy facility instead of jail . . . then that would be a tremendous win," said People Incorporated spokeswoman Kristen Felegy.