



County, police agencies applying for iPad funds to assist in mental health response

Local groups applying for equipment to communicate during certain calls

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BATAVIA — A call to police may not start out as a mental health call, but may end up that way.

“We handle a great deal of calls for service related to mental health, not all calls result in transports for mental health evaluations,” Batavia Police Chief Shawn Heubusch said. “In 2020, our department handled 280 calls for service specific to mental health, However, there are other calls we handle that do not start as a mental health call but wind up in a mental health arrest or voluntary transport.”

The Batavia and Le Roy police departments, along with the Genesee County Sheriff’s Office and Genesee County Mental Health and Community Services, are applying for an iPad program.

“The goal is to reduce the amount of transports and get individuals the assistance they need sooner for those meeting certain criteria,” Heubusch said.

County Director of Mental Health and Community Services Lynda Battaglia said the three law enforcement agencies and she attended an educational webinar on the iPad program and then collectively decided to submit an application to the state Office of Mental Health.

“I collected information and data from all three departments. We submitted it collectively — one application representing four organizations. We all worked together on the project,” Battaglia said. “Whether or not we get that (the equipment) is unknown at this time. There’s a lot of counties, I believe, that submitted applications for it.”

Battaglia said it’s unknown how many iPads her department and the three police agencies will get if their application is accepted.

“What was requested was iPads for each department, including Mental Health, and that those would be available for all the shifts. The main goal is to provide mobile access for police, for the individual in crisis,” she said. “Police go out to the call and instead of transporting an individual... let’s say they don’t need to go to a hospital, but need to speak to Mental Health, police would connect to Mental Health with the iPad. Ontario County does this, Seneca County does.”

Getting all the agencies on board and the application submitted are the first steps, Battaglia said. She said the iPads wouldn’t be usable for DWI or driving-under-the-influence cases. Training would be needed across the board.

Heubusch said each call is unique.

“Some require little effort and some require intervention services beyond our capability that are referred to Genesee County Mental Health or a crisis team, or in some instances psychiatric services.

“The current communication process is that officers on scene can call the Mental Health Department during business hours for assistance, if the incident does not rise to the level of a mental health arrest and transport. After hours, the officers can call an on-call service to respond if necessary,” he said. “Having access to the iPad program will greatly enhance the services we can provide the individuals that do not qualify for a mental health arrest. Having the iPads should make services more accessible to the individuals, hopefully resulting in better outcomes for law enforcement and the individuals we are responding to.”

Aside from the potential for taking advantage of the iPad program, county Mental Health and Community Service has been dealing with a number of new patients in 2020-21.

“New clients are folks coming into Mental Health and the mental health system who haven’t engaged with Mental Health in the past,” Battaglia said. “I would expect that we will see lingering effects of the pandemic. That will impact those who are on the front line providing services to those who were impacted by the pandemic. That could be medical personnel ... hospitals trying to provide medical care and treatment. I would expect there to be some lingering effects for them regarding their mental health. That really goes for all front-line workers.”