

Police train to look for autism

BY CHANEL DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

A local nonprofit is working to make sure first responders are equipped to handle calls that involve someone with autism.

iCan House hosted a customized training for law enforcement officers, security personnel and fire fighters, educating them on how to recognize autism and how to respond accordingly.

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder that often inhibits those with it from forming relationships and effectively communicating with others.

"Individuals that have a form of autism process information differently. The first key component of autism is social impairments. They are socially challenged and communicate, process or interpret information differently," said Kim Shufran, executive director of iCan House, a nonprofit that helps supports those with social challenges. "In a situation where there would be an emergency or safety encounter, the person would not respond the same as you would expect and that would require someone who can be there to notice that."

Shufran said the training is necessary because those with autism can easily be misunderstood, perceived as threats, wrongly detained and/or injured in crisis settings.

"Police officers receive crisis intervention training, but the element of understanding autism has really not been addressed," she said. "I liken it to a computer system. There is a variety of them. We all process things differently and when we are talking about autism it's the pro-



Photo by Chanel Davis

Dennis Debbaudt, author, led the session and presented materials and information designed to help first responders solidify their policies and procedures when dealing with someone who has autism.

cessing of all information." Members of the Winston-Salem Police and Fire departments, Forsyth County Sheriff's Office, High Point Police Department and Greensboro Police Department were joined by security personnel from local colleges, universities and grade schools at the Tuesday, Feb. 3 training.

Dennis Debbaudt, author of "Autism, Advocates and Law Enforcement Professionals," led the session and presented materials and information designed to help first responders solidify their policies and procedures when dealing with someone who has autism.



Phelps

Debbaudt has been in law enforcement for more than 30 years and has an autistic son. The course placed emphasis on behavioral de-escalations techniques and restraint, arrest and incarceration options victim and offender trends, and interrogation and interview tips were also discussed.

Lt. Tyrone L. Phelps of

the Winston-Salem Police Department said the training was helpful.

"If I was to go on the scene and come into contact with an autistic person, instead of jumping to conclusions and not knowing what this person would do, a light bulb would go off, and I would know to slow down, ask simple questions and see if they have any characteristics that would show they were autistic. I wouldn't escalate my use of force," he said.

Shufran is hopeful that with the training, first responders will not jump to quick conclusions. She said that with one out of 58 people being diagnosed with some form of autism, it's time to talk candidly about the disorder.

A separate educational session was held for 75 parents, teachers, caregivers and others at the Goodwill on University Parkway. The session, led by Debbaudt, discussed the risk that someone with autism would face and the safety needs that a caregiver would encounter.

"We need to take the conversations out of the doctors office, clinics and psychiatrists office and bring them into the community. It's time to have these group conversations instead of silos," Shufran said.

Harrison Davis, a secu-

rity associate at Carter High, a special needs school, said that he is glad to see some one sharing useful information to help the students he deals with everyday.

"I deal with everything that we've seen today on a daily basis. It was great reinforcement to see that we are doing something right," he said. "I'm so happy that we are involving the police. That's our biggest concern: having the police understand the needs of our kids, to know them and recognize them when they meet them on the street or in unpleasant environments. This has been a long time coming."

Shufran said that the feedback from the event has been good.

"A lot of people have said that it's been eye-opening. I had a retired police officer shake his head and say, 'It makes me think about all the mistakes we've made in the past because we didn't have the training to have a more positive impact in certain situations.'"

That means something," she said.

The nonprofit partnered with Goodwill, the Autism Society of Forsyth County, the Mental Health Association of Forsyth County and CenterPoint Human Services to present the event.

Urban League, City of W-S unite for job fair

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The Winston-Salem Urban League is partnering with the city to conduct an information session regarding employment with the city on Friday, Feb. 27 at 10 a.m. at the Urban League office, 201 W. 5th St.

Human resources representatives will make presentations regarding available positions, application process, job requirements and hiring procedures.

Human resources representatives Saroya Ceasar and Erin Hudson of the City of Winston-Salem will attend.

Persons interested in employment with the City of Winston-Salem should attend the session and bring resumes.


The Urban League Workforce Development and Employment Services sponsors Employer Presentations to bring company human resources representatives to the commu-

nity for face to face interaction with job seekers. The Employer Presentations are aligned with the Urban League's mission of empowering the unemployed or underemployed to gain employment with livable wages.


The Urban League Workforce Development and Employment Services include a Job Link Center in partnership with Forsyth Technical Community College in both the downtown location and North Winston location on Patterson Avenue (former Piedmont Federal Savings Bank).

Community residents have opportunities to visit the computer labs to get assistance with resume building, electronic job searches and electronic job applications to set up email accounts.

For additional information contact Patricia Sadler at (336)-725-5614 or psadler@wsurban.org.



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