

# ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF COMMUNITY DESIGNED CRISIS RESPONSE MODELS: KENTUCKY



**“The community is the source of  
strength and innovation.”**

–Shannon Cambron, Ph.D., Spalding University, Community Engagement Facilitator

## VISION

As Kentucky’s largest city, Louisville has been riddled by the opioid epidemic, the COVID pandemic, and tremendous racial strife resulting from the deaths of Breonna Taylor and David McAtee at the hands of law enforcement.

Protests across the city, exponential increases in calls to the local behavioral health crisis call/text lines and a rise in psychiatric crises point to increased demand for behavioral health crisis response and linkages to treatment. The Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID) used TTI funds to engage community members, Louisville officials, and Seven Counties Services (the community mental health provider), convened by Spalding University to explore the feasibility of a community designed behavioral health crisis response model as an alternative to law enforcement response to mental health calls.

The participation of community members exceeded expectations resulting in a community designed response model and the establishment of a Community Accountability Board to oversee the project.

## JAIL DIVERSION APPROACH

Community members and partners in the projects sought to prevent justice involvement before law enforcement is engaged. They designed an approach that relies on mobile crisis teams that respond to crisis calls independently from police and a crisis respite setting in the community.

## MEASURING PROGRESS

The voices of the community members were sought in this project for their unique perspective and new ideas. The engagement of community members, government and provider agencies as co-equal partners resulted in a co-created crisis response design. The success of community partnership ultimately led to the implementation of a new diversion approach funded by the City of Louisville.

## INTEGRATION WITH CRISIS SYSTEM

In addition to community leaders, the project engaged local government, law enforcement, mental health providers, and state officials involved in designing systems to respond to behavioral health crises. ▶

## NEWS

## Louisville's 911 Diversion Program is Expanding into the West End and Other Neighborhoods

Collectively, they represent the current crisis continuum of the city. Through this collaboration, mobile crisis teams are now enabled to co-respond with police to 911 calls and a crisis respite center has been established on a hospital campus.

### BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EQUITY

Conservative estimates suggest that at least 1 in 4 fatal law enforcement encounters involves an individual with serious mental illness. The statistics are even more pronounced among indigenous and people of color and underscore the urgency to reduce law enforcement involvement in behavioral health crisis response systems. The project engaged a primarily black and brown community to design such a system to reduce justice involvement, injury, and trauma associated with police response to behavioral health crises.

### PROJECT LEGACY

The project demonstrates the value of engaging community members, not just providers, in service design efforts even amid periods of social upheaval. Although consensus was reached on the program design, political and contractual exigencies prevented the full implementation of the group's recommendations. With the success of this project,

DBHDID is considering replicating this approach to engage other community members in designing crisis response models that are unique to them and their needs.

### WHAT CAN EXPLORING THE FEASIBILITY OF COMMUNITY DESIGNED CRISIS RESPONSE MODELS TEACH US?

Service programs that are designed with the input of stakeholders often have greater political momentum and lead to improved effectiveness and sustainability. In addition to stakeholders, this project engaged community members directly to obtain different perspectives and new ideas to solve an entrenched problem that has had traumatic and even tragic consequences. The most direct way to know what communities need to reduce police involvement in crisis response models is to ask them. This project demonstrated that consensus among service providers, community members, and government officials on an effective, non-police involved crisis response model is achievable.

**For further information on this project contact Vestena Robbins, PhD at [Vestena.Robbins@ky.gov](mailto:Vestena.Robbins@ky.gov).**