

Acton Police Department

Jim Cogan,
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, March 20, 2023

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Acton Police Department Shares Ongoing Success of Clinical Responder Program

ACTON – Interim Chief Jim Cogan wishes to share the ongoing success of the Acton Police Department's clinician outreach program.

Bethany Van Emburgh joined the Department as its first full-time clinician in January 2022. She uses a trauma-informed and person-first model to de-escalate crises, and offers ongoing support and advocacy for all she comes into contact with.

Van Emburgh, an Acton native, is a full-time non-uniformed Department member. The position is funded through a multi-year grant from the state Department of Mental Health.

In the first year of the clinician program:

- Referrals to a Jail/Arrest Diversion Program totaled 508, with 155 in the final three months of 2022.
- Van Emburgh followed up on 427 cases. Follow-ups can include visits to the home, phone calls, meetings with the individual and other collaterals, or a mixture of these. Out of the 508 cases that were referred to the clinician, 427 follow up activities were completed, with the others either being referred to other agencies or just declined follow-up services.

- The number of individuals referred by the Department to a general or psychiatric hospital for evaluation decreased from 110 in 2020 and 95 in 2021 to 81 in 2022.

Van Emburgh assists with a wide variety of community-based services. She connects residents with mental-health and substance misuse programs, coordinates with local and state service organizations, and ensures services are accessible and equitable.

She trains officers to provide new skills when responding to mental-health calls, and serves as a co-first responder when needed. She also works to proactively intervene in situations that may not require a public safety response.

Chief Cogan and Van Emburgh cited the case of a resident who became disconnected from their usual support network, and began calling the Department regularly for assistance. While the resident was in no immediate danger the responding officer could spend 45 to 90 minutes at their home, diverting that officer from other duties.

Van Emburgh worked with the resident over several months to reconnect them to their support systems and allow the resident to access the more appropriate services and supports to meet their needs.

Acton had been part of a consortium with a single co-responding clinician shared among several police departments. Then-Chief Richard Burrows decided Acton needed its own dedicated clinician.

“I’ve been a big supporter of this since it started in 2015, and felt we were getting so much out of it,” Chief Cogan said. “Today, with expanded services, we’re seeing a major difference.”

Chief Cogan is exploring ways to expand the clinician program and increase its impact in the community.

Community members interested in the clinician program, or who would like to connect with Van Emburgh, are asked to contact her at 978-929-7515 or bvanemburgh@actonma.gov.

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