

April 17, 2014

Administration

Senator Dick Durbin
Senate Chairman, "Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights"
Dirksen Senate Office Building Room 226
Washington, D.C. 20510

Attention: Owen Reilly

Senator Durbin and members of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee,

RE: "Law Enforcement Responses to Disabled Americans: Promising Approaches for Protecting Public Safety"

For over eight years, the University of Nebraska's Munroe-Meyer Institute (Nebraska's federally designated University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities-UCEDD) has been providing first responder training to police officers and others enrolled in a Crisis Intervention Class facilitated by the Community and Government Relations office from Alegent Creighton Health Behavioral Health in Omaha, Nebraska. The class is currently in its 22nd year and has a total of 586 graduates. Most of the focus of this week-long class is on mental/behavioral health. However, one hour is given to provide information about "Developmental Disabilities" (DD). In this hour, we provide an overview of DD, including the causes, incidence and resources to assist first responders, should they encounter someone with an intellectual or developmental disability. We also include statistics which show that typically, *individuals with DD are more likely victims of crimes rather than the perpetrators of crime*. Recently, we added a 30-minute "Parent Panel" to provide firsthand knowledge and 'lived experience' of disability and also experiences with law enforcement. This panel has been met with much enthusiasm and we have been encouraged by the facilitators and officers to continue the panel.

We have been told that officers are getting increased calls from parents having young children with autism- which only recently is covered under employer-sponsored insurance. This past year, our state legislature held a hearing looking at the services for individuals having 'dual-diagnosis.' State Senators reported they have been getting increased calls from their constituents about their inability to obtain services for their family member having a developmental disability and mental health condition. In addition, two of our panelists have adopted children who were exposed to alcohol and drugs in utero. Having these parents describe their child's strengths and also provide a background on why they might act-out has changed many of the first responder's perspectives. One parent panelist is a "frequent flyer" with calling law enforcement and is often recognized by the officers. Her take-away message to officers is that not every call that they respond to is a criminal call. Officers have visited with her after the session and have stated that they have a better understanding of her daughter's behaviors and are so grateful for having heard more about her medical condition and the steps that she has gone to advocate for her daughter. (Including losing her house to pay for her daughter's medicines.) Included are the comments from the parent panelists as well as the last round of satisfaction surveys from our session conducted on April 10, 2014.

Providing this information to law enforcement, as well as incorporating the 'lived experience' of families who have tried to access these services, can give the first responders an entirely different perspective when they encounter a crisis situation. We have found this training to be very helpful and have gotten positive feedback of the past participants. However, we feel that this training needs to be expanded and incorporated across the state of Nebraska and in every state. We feel that enhancing the knowledge of first responders to recognize an individual with a DD and know how to adequately respond is very important. We encourage the committee to look toward organizations that have expertise in developmental disabilities including to the structure provided to each state from the Administration for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; specifically the network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD- one in every state).

If we can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Sarah Swanson, Family Support/Outreach Specialist
985450 NE Medical Center
Omaha, NE 68198-5450
sarah.swanson@unmc.edu
402-559-4573 or 1-800-656-3937 ext. 94573



Mark Smith, Family Support/Outreach Coordinator
985450 NE Medical Center
Omaha, NE 68198-5450
msmitha@unmc.edu
402-559-5744 or 1-800-656-3937 ext. 95744

3 Enclosures

Crisis Intervention Training

Comments from parents of children with developmental disabilities and special healthcare needs:

"One of my greatest fears as a parent of a child with special needs is being separated from them. In my instance, my son relies on an augmentative communication device to communicate his wants and needs. First responders are called in to help in emergency situations or when a child is lost or separated from their family. I rely on them to be able to identify and use their intuition to help when I am unable. So, if I can help first responders better know how to assist kids of all kinds of abilities, I feel better and I hope that I am helping not only my child but others' as well."

- Jenny

"Being the parent of a child with special needs I feel that I have to be a strong advocate for her. I want to simplify and make her life safe and as "normal" as possible. Participating in the Crisis Intervention Training allows me to voice what a parent goes through having a special needs child and the concerns and situations we often experience when individuals do not recognize our child's behaviors or lack of communication for what it truly is. The child's disability; specifically their lack of being able to adequately communicate or even understand the situation is not often understood. I feel the more educated people are in the community whether it be family, friends, professionals or co-workers it will allow my daughter to be safe, and participate in her community as she is capable."

I went away from participating in the CIT parent panel believing that the officers who participated in this training had a better understanding of why I might need assistance and that not every call that they go to is a criminal call. By informing the 911 communication dispatch center of my daughter's needs, the officers responding to the call are more prepared and are able to accommodate her and my needs. Participation on this panel made me feel like I advocated for not only my daughter but all individuals with disabilities who may encounter police or first responders."

- Mary

"I adopted my son, Tyler when he was five years old. I did not know that his mother had used both drugs and alcohol while she was pregnant until after the adoption was finalized. We realized that he most likely had an intellectual disability and global developmental delays. Once we got his medical records, we learned that he tested positive for cocaine at birth and that his birth mother had been giving him ADHD medications as early as 18 months old. Initially, his behavior was manageable and we could get assistance. However, after the birth of my twins-when the attention was not focused solely on him we started having more violent outbursts including aggression towards his siblings."

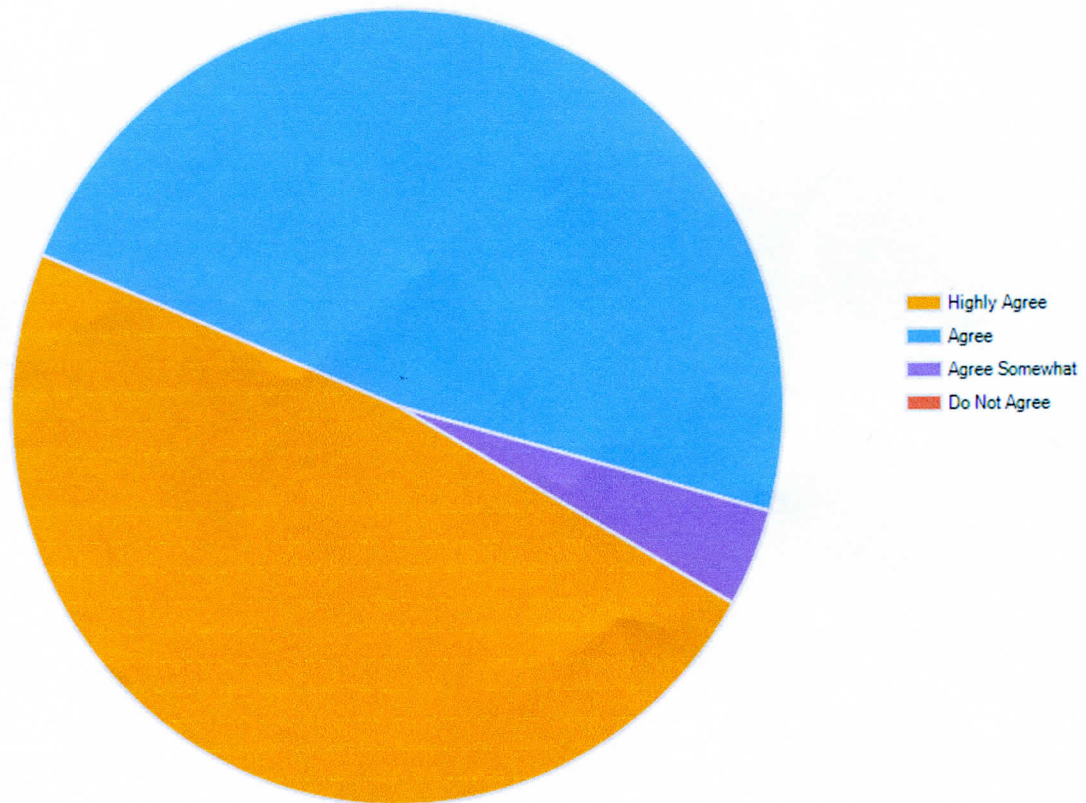
I have had to call the police in the past for assistance. Having the opportunity to educate police and first responders is very important to me. I want them to understand that I have tried to access various systems for support but have gotten doors shut because my son does not 'fit' into a specific system. He has a co-occurring disorder- an intellectual disability and mental health issues and because he does not 'fit' into one system he is restricted access to services. Sometimes a call to 911 during a crisis is necessary but from my experience police need to understand the context of the situation. Specifically, that sometimes we have to 'enter the system' (in this case through 911) simply to get the support we need."

- Tara

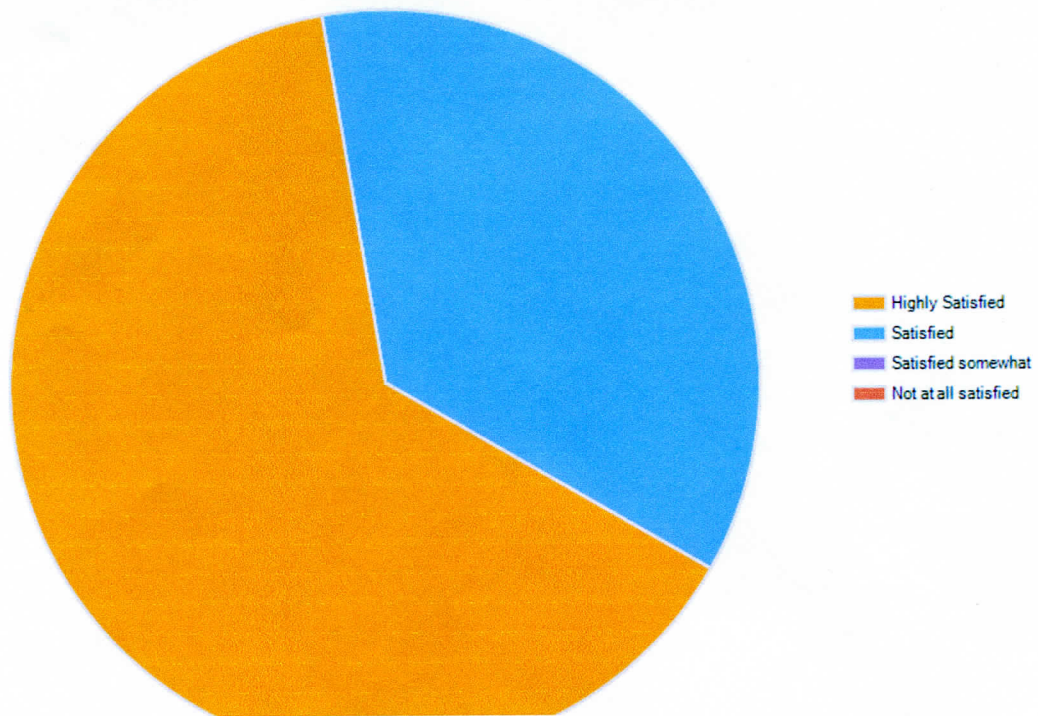
Crisis Intervention Training Omaha, NE

Survey responses from 25 participants in April 10, 2014 C.I.T class:

My understanding of developmental disabilities improved as a result of this presentation.



Overall, my satisfaction with this presentation was:



If I encountered someone with a developmental Disability or special healthcare needs, I would know how to respond.

