

## Mental health advocates ask why NYPD doesn't dispatch newly trained officers to respond to people in emotional distress

The city has given 4,000 officers crisis intervention training since June of last year, but still relies on its Emergency Service Unit to respond to mental health episodes

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Dustin Grose, who spoke at Monday's rally, said he was beaten by NYPD officers when they responded to his parents' 911 call about his erratic behavior in 2007. He settled a lawsuit with the city for \$17,500.

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When Deborah Danner, 66, was shot in her Bronx home by a police sergeant while she was in the midst of a mental health crisis last month, Mayor Bill de Blasio said the officers at the scene should have waited for the Emergency Service Unit to arrive before taking action. Members of that unit, which employs such tactics as wrapping people in "mesh restraining devices" that look like body bags, are routinely dispatched in response to 911 calls regarding "emotionally disturbed people."

In the wake of Danner's death, mental health advocates are asking why the NYPD is continuing to send ESU officers to respond to those calls instead of utilizing the more than 4,000 officers who have completed the department's four-day crisis intervention training since its launch in June 2015.

At a rally on the steps of City Hall Monday, they also called for 10,000 more officers to receive crisis intervention training (CIT) so that it's more likely that someone trained in appropriate de-escalation tactics will arrive on the scene when a call comes in.

"If they had sent a CIT officer [to Deborah Danner's house] the problem could have been resolved in a much better way," said Carla Rabinowitz, advocacy coordinator at the supportive housing provider Community Access, and a leader of the coalition that pushed for crisis intervention training in New York City.

Crisis intervention training, used in cities around the country, is currently given to all new NYPD recruits, according to the police department. For other officers, it's voluntary, a measure Rabinowitz said is useful for weeding out people who don't have a genuine interest in learning new policing tactics.

Rabinowitz, who has sat in on several of the crisis intervention trainings, said she has seen police officers in the classes work through fictional scenarios in which they have to respond to a distressed person who is armed

without using force. They have also had the chance to speak directly with people who have mental health diagnoses while they're well, she said.

"These are all people who have had encounters with the police, been handcuffed, Tasered or some other traumatic event, so having them come and talk to officers about what that felt like and the consequences of that is powerful," said Rabinowitz.

About 97% of the officers who have been trained said they would recommend the program to others in the force, according to a report released by the city in June.

The NYPD acknowledged in an email to Crain's that "CIT policing brings together the criminal justice and mental health systems with the joint goal of reducing the risk of injury to police officers and mentally ill persons," but the department contested the claim that officers who went through the crisis intervention course are the only ones qualified to respond to situations like Danner's.

"All NYPD officers are trained extensively on how to recognize and respond to emotionally disturbed persons, and that training continues throughout their careers and includes workshops taught by experts in the field of psychiatry," said the NYPD in the email. "Moreover, Emergency Service Unit officers and our Hostage Negotiation Team members receive intensive training from mental health professionals on how to manage the various behavior traits of individuals suffering from any potential mental health issues."

The NYPD acknowledged that the ESU sometimes uses mesh body bags "when an emotionally disturbed person is violent and may cause harm to themselves or others."

On Monday, Dustin Grose, 31, recalled being wrapped up in such a device when police responded to a call his parents made to 911 in 2007 because he was acting erratically. "I was mumbling about not wanting to go to the hospital and then I was sucker-punched, taken down, handcuffed, wrapped in a mat and beaten," said Grose, who sued the city over the incident and settled for \$17,500, according to the 2009 settlement agreement.

Grose, a certified peer specialist at Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens who works with other people with serious mental illnesses, said he thinks police officers should be accompanied by mental health professionals when responding to calls like the ones his parents made.

"Up to this day there's still a little fear in me when I'm approached by a police officer," Grose said.

Advocates at Monday's rally some held signs promoting the city's new mental health hotline, 888-NYC-WELL. But it's unrealistic to expect people to use alternatives to 911 when someone's in crisis, said Rabinowitz.

"As someone who suffers from mental health issues and has been an emotionally distressed person, when a family member sees someone out of control, they're going to call the police," she said.

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