



TEMPLE TERRACE POLICE DEPARTMENT NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PROGRAM OFFERS SPECIAL NEEDS TRAINING FOR OFFICERS

TEMPLE TERRACE, FL. – (5/13/16) – The Temple Terrace Police Department is implementing an innovative new program to train officers how to better interact with special-needs residents in the community.

It is believed to be the first program of its kind for law enforcement in the Tampa Bay area, said Jennifer Phelps, president and CEO of Engage Behavioral Health, the company providing the training.

The “Strategies of Engagement” training will teach police officers how to identify and assess persons who have special needs, such as those suffering from autism, schizophrenia, Alzheimer’s disease, Down Syndrome or other behavioral/developmental challenges. They will learn skills and strategies for dealing more effectively with special-needs residents they come into contact with during the course of their work.

Officers, for example, might mistake a “difficult” person’s behavior as belligerence or disrespect, not realizing they’re interacting with someone suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder or another behavioral disability. This training is designed to correct that, resulting in more effective citizen engagement, said Temple Terrace Police Deputy Chief Bernard Seeley.

“Any tool we can give our officers to help them de-escalate a situation makes their jobs easier, and provides a better result for our citizenry,” Seeley said.

The Police Department also will establish a community database of residents who suffer from mental/behavioral challenges, so officers will know when they’re dispatched that they may encounter a special-needs person. Residents will be invited to provide voluntary information about special-needs persons in their household, should that person go missing or otherwise need police intervention.

Phelps said the “Strategies of Engagement” training will explore common behavioral

disorders, levels of severity, how to assess an individual's reactions, common situational encounters, and strategies for successful interaction. Officers will be provided the Big Red Safety Toolkit, a publication of the National Autism Association, which outlines common behaviors and provides a caregiver checklist, eye-opening statistics and other important information.

Temple Terrace's training classes are May 17 and May 19, and more may be added.

Engage Behavioral Health is a leading provider of Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy in the Tampa Bay and Tallahassee areas of Florida. The company is providing this valuable training to the Temple Terrace Police Department at no charge.

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