

The Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) News

The BHU has continued to refine its operating procedures. In December, the Unit had numerous conversations centered on data needs and the collection and analysis of information. The BHU is constantly looking at ways to better respond to the DOJ proposed Settlement Agreement and improve outcomes in the field.

The BHU Advisory Committee (BHUAC) meets monthly to discuss various topics related to the day-to-day operations of the BHU. Recent focus has centered on providing feedback and recommendations related to the Enhanced Crisis Intervention Team (ECIT) training program that they attended. The BHUAC is in the midst of completing its first annual report containing that input for submission to the command staff.

On December 19th, Federal Court Judge Michael Simon held a status hearing regarding the DOJ Settlement Agreement. After listening to statements of the attorneys, the Judge set a Fairness Hearing for February 18, 2014, at 9:00 a.m. At that time the Federal Court will take testimony from all interested persons, either orally or in writing, on the following topics: (1) Is the Agreement **fair** to everyone affected? (2) Is the Agreement **reasonable**? (3) Is the Agreement **adequate** to solve the problems identified in the Complaint? The public is invited to attend the hearing. At the conclusion of that hearing, future court dates will be set for the parties. The BHUAC submitted a letter in support of the Agreement to the court and some members will be in attendance.

Please visit the BHU website (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/62135>) for more information on the BHU or the Fairness Hearing.



BHU Stories From The Field

Officers were dispatched to a call involving a naked individual, possibly armed with a knife, and acting as if he intended to jump off a parking structure at Southwest 15th Avenue and Yamhill Street. Enhanced Crisis Intervention Team (ECIT) Officer, Jennifer Pierce, was asked to respond to the call from her district in Southeast Portland. As Ofc. Pierce arrived on-scene, she and cover officers made contact with the individual. They saw that an individual was sitting on the ledge of the structure, cutting his body, and threatening to jump off the building. Acting as an ECIT Officer, Ofc. Pierce took the lead on the call and stated that “My first goal was to have the individual’s attention on me. I was trying to keep everyone out of sight, and at the same time, control the environment. My main goal was to deescalate the situation and build a rapport with him.”

As Medical and Portland Fire & Rescue (PF&R) were staged, a Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) rope team leader came on-scene as a precaution. Also, a Crisis Negotiation Team (CNT) member was on the phone giving guidance to one of the Sergeants as Ofc. Pierce began engaging more with the individual. She began to try different strategies that she had learned during her ECIT and CNT trainings to establish some trust. The individual, however, was not interacting with the police in any meaningful way.

“I did not want to do anything to further upset the individual, Ofc. Pierce said. “I began to personalize the conversation, stating that ‘My name is Jen,’ not Ofc. Pierce, and that, ‘I am here because I care about you and want to see you safe.’ It was after that the individual’s behavior started to deescalate.” As the conversation continued, Ofc. Pierce learned that the individual wanted a hamburger. Officers were able to obtain a grilled sandwich and fries from a nearby business. However, when presented with the sandwich, the individual was still reluctant to move away from the ledge.

BHU Stories From The Field (cont.)

"I could see that the individual was very hungry and the two things he was focused on were the weather and food; mostly food," Ofc. Pierce describes. "The individual was not offering up any personal information that the team could use to deescalate the situation, so I began telling him that his food was going to get cold and describing how good the food smelled. After awhile we were able to use it to move the individual away from the ledge of the parking structure."

Pursuant to the team's response plan, the officers approached him from behind and took him into custody. This was accomplished without incident. Ofc. Pierce had explained to the individual that once he was in custody, he would be able to eat the sandwich. However, the individual was in handcuffs for his and the officer's safety and thus could not hold the sandwich himself.

"I ended up hand feeding the sandwich to the individual while he was in handcuffs. The individual was totally compliant after he had a couple of bites of food. His attitude and demeanor turned 180 degrees from when we first responded."

"I am glad the situation ended as it did." Ofc. Pierce stated. "Here we had an individual who was escalating quickly, defiant, and non-compliant. At the end of the call, the individual liked the idea of going to the hospital and getting help. The training and scenarios that I have gone through in my years at the PPB, and the knowledge that I have gained around crisis situations and HIPPA laws, has given me the confidence and abilities to help deescalate these types of crisis situations."

The individual was placed on a hold for evaluation at an area hospital. Special thanks to the Hotel Deluxe for providing the food which helped resolve this situation without anyone being injured.

Meet Ofc. Tom Pennington



Tom Pennington

**BHU
MCU Officer**

Officer Tom Pennington has been with the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) for about six and a half years. Tom has spent time working in both Central and East Precincts; while also working the Entertainment District Detail, which runs from 10pm-3am on Friday and Saturday in the Downtown/Old Town neighborhoods. Prior to coming to work with the Portland Police Bureau, Tom was in the United States Navy for four years and spent two years working for Portland Patrol Inc (PPI). Tom came to the Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) in August of 2013.

Tom is assigned to Mobile Crisis Unit 1 (MCU1), teamed up with Mental Health Clinician Averyl Growden. Tom and Averyl are primarily responsible for interacting with individuals in North Portland. Some of the roles and responsibilities Tom has within the BHU are identifying resources and connecting BHU clients to appropriate services. Tom also states that often "We provide a law enforcement perspective to resource management with various City mental health providers." Tom further states that in order to be successful in his position, one must be a patient communicator.

Tom explains that some obstacles that he has encountered while working for the BHU are systemic issues that make mental health treatment options difficult to obtain; also, even when someone is involved in the mental health system, Tom has found that it is often hard to find long-term, sustainable solutions.

As far as working in the BHU, Tom notes that the most rewarding aspect of his day-to-day duties is being part of a team that finds ways to help people who often do not have the capacity to help themselves. An example of this was an attempted suicide on a bridge to which Tom responded where he talked with the individual for over an hour. With the help of the CNT and North Precinct, the individual eventually came down off the bridge. Tom hopes the BHU can continue to grow and he thinks that, "Police involvement in mental health treatment can provide additional options and ideas which will ultimately keep police and clients safe within the community."