

Minding Your Health

Chester County's Mental Health Newsletter

November 2017

Second Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Class Graduates in Chester County

Chester County's second Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training of 2017 was held at the West Goshen Municipal building last month. A dozen law enforcement and corrections officers completed the intensive, five-day training and graduated on October 27.

CIT is a model for community policing, proven to increase public safety, divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system, and decrease officer injuries. The training has been implemented in communities across the country for decades.

"CIT isn't just important, it's completely necessary. I believe it should be mandatory," said Claire Lang, one of the new CIT graduates. A police officer for 18 years, Lang said as much she appreciated the skills she learned, she also appreciated finding out about resources available to law enforcement, both on and off duty. "I have already utilized some resources for those in need."

Robert Detweiler, a 21-year veteran in law enforcement, said the recent CIT training gave him a new perspective on mental health crises and the importance of non-judgemental listening. "One of the important items I took from CIT training is the realization of how prejudging others has a great affect on the encounter."

[Read more.](#)

Don Altemus, New Program Manager for Compeer Chester County

Don Altemus began his new position this summer, but his first involvement with Compeer Chester County was almost 10 years ago. Compeer is the organization that connects adults living with mental health conditions in friendships with caring, trained volunteers. In 2008, Altemus was first matched in a one-to-one friendship, which he says he still cherishes.

"In addition to that friendship, I also got to know other people through Compeer events, and those people are friends of mine to this day," said Altemus.

The power of friendship can make all the difference in the life of someone in recovery. Studies have shown that having encouragement and support increases resiliency and self-confidence. Compeer Chester County, an affiliate of the national nonprofit organization Compeer, Inc., which is based in New York, has 43 active friendship matches. There are an additional 12 friendships that connect through regular phone calls and seven e-buddies matches, which connect through email. Altemus says the organization also has three new volunteers waiting for their matches.

With his focus on outreach, Altemus has a lofty long-term goal of making sure every Chester County resident knows about Compeer. To start the organization's [website](#) had been updated and they have created a new [Facebook page](#).

Youth-Led Community Conversation About Mental Health Held in Coatesville

On Saturday, November 4, approximately 200 young people from across the county attended the Coatesville Youth Initiative's annual Youth Conference. The event was held at the Coatesville Area High School, and an important part of the program that day was gathering youth to discuss mental health in their own lives and their community. These conversations were led by young people trained to facilitate the conversations. Chester County's department of Mental Health recognizes this topic of interest to young people, and collaborated with the Coatesville Youth Initiative for the day. The Coatesville Youth Initiative plans to continue giving young people opportunities to learn and talk more about this vital part of their well-being.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) In Chester County

Trauma may be a very individual experience, but it is also a universal experience. We all have something in our past that has helped to define who we are today.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) were first studied more than 20 years ago. Data was collected from more than 17,000 people, and the study showed the significant impact trauma can have on our lifelong health and opportunity.

What kind of trauma would be considered an Adverse Childhood Experience? There are ten identified, from physical abuse, to emotional neglect, or having a parent with a mental illness or addiction. The more of these experienced by a young person, the greater the increase of toxic stress and negative outcomes in that person's life. But there is hope.

Chester County's ACEs Coalition is working to increase awareness and understanding about ACEs. Building resiliency and fostering hope can offset the cycle of trauma and contribute to long-term health benefits.

Find out more about [ACEs](#) and [Chester County's Coalition](#).

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, **SAMHSA**, has tips for talking with and helping children and youth after a traumatic event. Parents, teachers or caregivers can be a supportive presence for a young child. [Click here](#) for more information.

Finding Gratitude

Years of research has shown that the art of gratitude has positive effects on one's overall health and well-being, including improved sleep, self-esteem and personal relationships. Even during difficult times of stress, loss and personal crises, there are steps we can take to cultivate an attitude of gratitude and find true happiness.

We can begin the habit of gratitude with simple exercises, like creating lists of things for which we're grateful, or writing weekly entries in a gratitude journal. Re-framing life's more manageable challenges as opportunities may feel insincere at first, but the practice is worth the effort.

Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California has written extensively on the topic and is considered one of the scientific leaders in positive psychology. He notes that gratitude, even in tough times, reminds us to not take things or situations for granted, gives us perspective, and helps us become more resilient. When we consciously practice gratitude, we can actually build our "psychological immune system" to give us strength when we need it most, Emmons says. [Learn more here.](#)

A breakfast gathering for Chester County's Mental Health First Aid community was held on Wednesday, November 4 at Freedom Village, a Brookdale Senior Living facility in West Brandywine. Approximately 35 MHFA-ers attended the event and heard about various disaster response groups in the county, including the Disaster Crisis Response Team (DCORT) which provides a compassionate presence and resources in a disaster situation.

The MHFA-ers also learned about ACEs, Adverse Childhood Experiences, which can significantly impact a young person's lifelong health and well-being. Gatherings for the MHFA community are held twice a year, and individuals who have been certified are invited to attend. Check the [MH/IDD website](#) for upcoming classes.

Stay Connected!

[Trauma Trainings are back!!](#) Chester County Department of Human Services offers free trauma trainings.

[Addiction 101](#) is being hosted by ChescoLife on Nov. 14 from 9:30 AM - 12:30 PM at the Exton Library.

[Mental Health First Aid Training](#) is still free in Chester County. Check out the MH/IDD website for fliers on upcoming classes.

[Calendar of Events](#) - info on monthly meetings and support groups.

Chester County Department of Mental Health/Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities - www.chesco.org/mhidd
Chester County Commissioners
Linda Cox, Administrator, MH/IDD
Candy Craig, Deputy Administrator

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