

# Police training targets de-escalation techniques

## RPD officers learn skills to work with those in mental, emotional crisis

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A police officer's responsibilities extend far beyond writing tickets and making arrests. As front-line responders in many situations, officers must carry some background knowledge of counseling and psychology to de-escalate situations they encounter.

Four officers with the Ruston Police Department recently completed 40 hours of training at Monroe Police Academy for dealing with the

mentally challenged or persons going through mental/emotional crisis.

RPD Lt. Tim Parker, one of the patrolmen who attended the training, said the skills taught officers to recognize people who are having problems and deal with them in nontraditional police ways.

"In patrol you may run across a situation where a person seems intoxicated, loud and belligerent, but when you start talking to them you find out there is more to it. They are having an emotional cri-

sis," Parker said. "There are a significant number of calls regarding suicide issues and anger issues with juveniles acting out against their family who can't control them."

Parker said the de-escalation techniques taught at the training were similar to those that would be used in a hostage situation to calm a person down.

If police are not properly trained to deal with those who are mentally ill or in emotional crisis, Parker said it could result in unnecessary harm to

the resident or officer.

Nationwide there has been a reduction in the rate of injury to responding officers and people with mental illness in crisis when the methods taught in this training are used, said RPD Public Information Lt. Curtis Hawkins.

During the training, Parker said the officers used role playing, talked to staff at E.A. Conway Medical Center psychiatric unit intake and learned to recognize mood disorders, anxiety disorders and developmental disabilities.

"We have several group homes in Ruston, so we do deal with people with developmental issues," Parker said. "What seems like a criminal act to a regular person, they might not know what they're doing."

In fact, Parker said officers were able to put their newly acquired techniques into action immediately after returning from the training when they encountered a person apparently not taking her medication.

"I ran across a person who went back in a house they used

to live in and didn't understand they couldn't do that," Parker said. "(With the training), you may be able to talk them down instead of letting it escalate and get them help."

Other officers who attended the training included Nathan Scheer, T.J. Doss and Robert Skapura.

RPD Chief Steve Rogers noted, "Our department is excited about this new training and we have already seen some positive results. We anticipate sending additional officers in the near future."