



Mediation team helps community, reduces police call-outs

-First 911 alternative response in U.S. to be operated by a mediation center-

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A new and innovative way of responding to non-emergency 911 calls is connecting Dayton residents with needed services while reducing the volume of calls directed to police.

Mediation Response Unit (MRU) staff members do site visits or provide telephone referrals for non-violent family or neighbor disputes, roommate troubles, peace officer requests, disorderly conduct, juvenile complaints, barking dogs, and other issues. Most of these service requests would have been directed to the Dayton Police Department before the MRU's work began.

Since its launch on May 23, 2022, the Mediation Response Unit has logged more than 400 calls for service (through Aug. 15), with responses distributed evenly in areas of the city.

The unit is operated by the Dayton Mediation Center (a City of Dayton agency) and is comprised of a team of trained responders with experience and certification in areas such as crisis response, de-escalation, conflict resolution, and community development. The unit operates from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Friday. Program leaders hope to expand the hours of its availability.

When 911 dispatchers receive a call that is deemed appropriate for the unit's services, the caller is forwarded to the MRU office. If a caller's situation can be resolved with a phone conversation, the caller is provided with information and connected to relevant resources, should the caller be interested. If an on-site response is warranted, a two-person team is dispatched to the scene to intervene with the situation that prompted the 911 call. Connection to resources, follow-up and case management services are available to the parties involved.

The proposal for an alternative 911 response emerged from the work of the Community Engagement Working Group of Dayton's police reform initiative, which began in mid-2020 and resulted in more than 100 recommendations for improving police-community relations. The Community Engagement Working Group was co-chaired by City Commissioner Christopher Shaw.

"I'm thrilled that the vision of community members that participated in our police reform process is becoming a reality," said Commissioner Shaw. "The Mediation Response Unit will provide unarmed support to people in non-violent crisis, which will help increase the Dayton Police Department's capacity to respond to the most pressing and dangerous situations in our community. Maybe even more important, the MRU will give Dayton residents new tools to deal with difficult situations without encountering the criminal justice system."

Dayton City Manager Shelley Dickstein added: "We are encouraged by the early success of the Mediation Response Unit in Dayton. The collaboration between the Dayton Police Department, the Mediation Center, and other City staff resulted in an innovative alternative

911 response that brings the special abilities of mediators directly to residents and saves precious resources for our police officers. I believe our program will serve as a model for other cities.”

While there is likelihood that the MRU will respond to calls and situations with mental health components, mental health services are not the program's focus. Callers will be referred to Montgomery County's ADAMHS Crisis Now program when needed.

Dayton residents may call the Mediation Response Unit directly at 937-333-2333 to report an incident or to inquire about assistance or follow-up. MRU can be found online at daytonmediationcenter.org/mru.

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