

## What's New in the Mat Su? Mental Health First Aid!

The Center for Human Development's Alaska Training Cooperative delivered four Mental Health First Aid courses in December using the Mental Health First Aid for Law Enforcement, Corrections and Public Safety module at the Mat Su Fire Station training room in Wasilla, Alaska. The largest representation in the training was from Alaska State Troopers who comprised 26% of the 103 participants completing the 8-hour certification course.



Evaluation data was collected from all participants on various data points, including satisfaction, overall response to course, strengths, weaknesses and changes in knowledge around mental health and substance disorders, applying MHFA as well as changes in the application of knowledge gained. Of total participants, 93% indicated the training was practical and relevant to their field and 97% would recommend the training to others.

Highlights of individual comments resulting from the training included: “Good extra tools to use for an often-ignored topic; Very helpful for figuring out initial interactions; This course got us to consider and really think about our response to mental health crises; I think it is a great opportunity to improve care of mental health clients.”

When asked how officers would use what they learned, they noted: “I will be looking for signs instead of making assumptions and using force to gain control; “I will approach in a more caring and less judgmental way; I liked learning signs of mental health issues to be aware of and ways to interact so I don't escalate the situation; It corrects a lot of misconceptions.”

More training is planned for the Mat Su and other areas of our state to help our law enforcement and other first responders understand various aspects of particular disabilities and the signs of mental health crisis so that all interventions result in safety and success.



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