

Erica Harris from the UCCEDD partnered with the Erie County Board of Developmental Disabilities (ECBDD), Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services, and retired police sergeant Tracey Susana to offer the ***Interacting with Individuals Who Have Disabilities*** training. The training was attended by officers, chiefs, and detectives from three police departments. Prior to COVID, this partnership trained the officers from the Sandusky Police Department with plans of expanding to additional regional police departments, the juvenile detention center, fire and EMS staff. After the COVID “pause” the team re-evaluated the training, sent out a survey to all first responders in the area to assess their experience with interacting with people with disabilities and also their experience with available resources to help them assist these individuals as a possible diversion to arrest and/or jail. Using the survey results allowed the team to revise the training content, this time including Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services to address concerns related to mental health disabilities.

The training topics included a general introduction to intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), disability data including background detailing representation of those with I/DD within the criminal justice system, facts for law enforcement, communication with a person who has I/DD in different situations, accommodations, mental health considerations, and resources provided by the ECBDD to assist officers and to share information about their services in the community.

Feedback from the training participants was very positive and the interaction and discussion was productive. Officers stated that the training was very informative and they were appreciative of the ability to be connected to local resources. Many participants stated that they would like the training to be extended beyond the current three hour timeframe. Officers expressed interest in learning more and hearing more from individuals with mental health and intellectual/developmental disabilities and their experiences and personal stories.

The training team plans to continue to work with local law enforcement and first responders and offer ongoing training to current and specifically new officers. This training was the first time many of the participants reflected on their professional interaction with people with different disabilities. The UCCEDD continues to work on both the national and local level to train and inform members of law enforcement about communicating with and understanding the behaviors related to those who have mental health and intellectual disabilities.