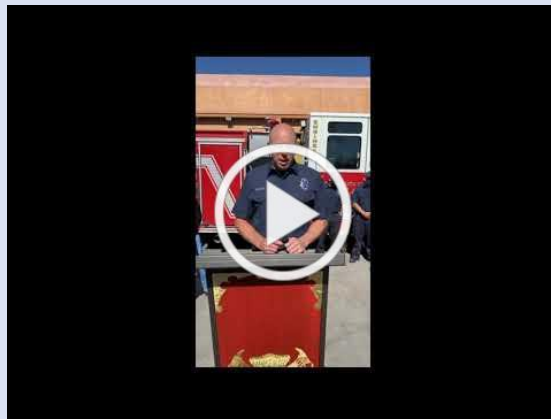




Innovative, Compassionate Health and Safety Solutions



City Launches Alternative Response Unit for Social Service and Behavioral Health Needs

APRIL 19, 2021 — Today the City of Santa Fe introduced the new Alternative Response Unit (ARU), a project under the new Community Health and Safety Department that was established in the reorganization of City government last year. The unit is a collaborative effort between City Fire and Police Departments, and Community Services; it will be staffed by a paramedic, a police officer, and a case manager, all trained in Crisis Intervention.

The ARU will provide an appropriate level of response to a variety of calls that come in through the dispatch center, which are non-violent and involve people in need of social and behavioral health services. These calls have historically utilized police cars, fire trucks, and ambulances in the response, which is inefficient and can be counter-productive for people in mental health or substance abuse crises.

The ARU will not only improve outcomes for community members but also “right-size” our public safety response and help reduce overall calls for service for the Police Department.

The launch event was held this morning at Fire Station 1, near Ft. Marcy, and included statements by several ARU members. Hear their enthusiastic comments in the attached video.

Mayor Webber says: “Santa Fe should be proud of the Alternative Response Unit and what it means to our families. We’re showing innovation and flexibility in how we help people who have mental and behavioral health needs. At the same time, we’ll allow our police officers and fire fighters to respond to calls for service that better match their training and skills.”

Kyra Ochoa, Acting Director of the Community Health and Safety Department, added: “We are getting people who are suffering the help they need, to make the whole community safer.” She emphasizes that Santa Fe Fire and Police have a reputation for providing humane and compassionate responses in an evidence-based way—and that this unit builds on that by applying the appropriate response to behavioral health crises so the PD and FD can do what they do best. “This exciting City project builds on the longstanding work we’ve been doing with our partners at Santa Fe County, and with our local clinics, hospitals, and advocacy groups to ensure people with behavioral health challenges are treated with dignity and connected to the help they need. The purpose is to make our whole community a healthier, safer place for everyone.”

Fire Chief Paul Babcock said: “My goal is to right-size our response model, but more importantly, connect the people we respond to with the right service. This will allow the larger fire apparatus be in a state of readiness for the appropriate call types that they were designed to respond to. Having this option will benefit the community.”

Police Chief Andrew Padilla said the cross-departmental Alternative Response Unit represents the evolution of law enforcement and out-of-the-box thinking about community policing. Although the first phase begins with Police as part of the response, it can ultimately liberate the police force from responding to basic calls for service that don’t require a law-enforcement solution, so they can focus on crime and community engagement.

The first Alternative Response Team will hit the streets May 4, 2021, and pending Council approval of the Community Health and Safety budget, another team will be added this summer.
