



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).


PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Louisa
Program Title: Project First Responder
Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Chuck Love
Title: Detective
Department: Sheriff's Office
Telephone: 540.967.1234 Website: louisacounty.com
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christian R. Goodwin
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 



THE COUNTY OF LOUISA

2019 Virginia Association of Counties - Achievement Award Submission

OVERVIEW

Learning to interact with first responders is critical. It is just as essential for first responders to understand how to effectively deal with our citizens who are part of the Autism, Alzheimer's, Intellectual & Development Disabilities (AAIDD) community. This is the reason Louisa County Sheriff's Office started Project First Responder; to begin to break the misguided communication between law enforcement, fire fighters or EMT's, and the AAIDD community. It is imperative that all entities involved work together to make these interactions safe, successful and productive.

The Project First Responder program allows family members and other caregivers to provide crucial information about their loved ones to first responders, prior to any reported incidents. The information is utilized by emergency personnel to properly respond to situations involving AAIDD children or adults with details about proper interaction and care. The project provides the basis for training and officer awareness through the use of interaction and incident simulation with the assistance of those afflicted with any type of AAIDD.

PROGRAM DETAILS

During the summer of 2018, a young man named Landon Withrow applied to participate in the Louisa County Sheriff's Office Law Enforcement Adventure Program (LEAP), and the application included a requirement to write a paragraph stating why the applicant should be chosen to participate in the program. Mr. Withrow, age 12, wrote a 2 page letter (included below) stating that he was autistic and wanted to bridge the gap between those with autism and law enforcement to help them feel more comfortable around police. The Sheriff's Office reviewed the letter, recognized the excellent suggestion and the need which had been identified, and developed Project First Responder.



Hello my name is Landon
withrow and I am 12 years old.
I think that I should be selected
for the Law Enforcement
Adventure program ~~not only~~
not only to bridge the gap ~~between~~
between autistic people and police,
but also for me to be able to
feel more comfortable
around police. Here is something
about autism, my autism
affects the way my brain works,
causing me to think and process
things differently than a
typical human brain would,
which is another reason why I
should be selected. Many autistic
people are scared of the police,
including me. Why? Because
we've all heard so much about all
of these officers shooting
people unnecessarily especially
autistic people. A lot of police
know little about autism and that
can be quite a problem because the
officer could think that the
autistic person is not listening, or is
refusing, or is being rude or mean.
We aren't. We just have trouble
communicating with other people,
understanding, and controlling our
feelings and I think I'm speaking
correctly for all of the people with
this disability. Even
sometimes we might say things
we don't mean, just like anyone
else. We often don't have the
ability to calm down

LANDON. :)



On a daily basis, law enforcement officers encounter a multitude of individuals in emergency situations. Just as each emergency differs from the next, so does the individual involved, especially in regards to people with AAIDD. Law enforcement officers are trained to respond to a crisis situation with a certain protocol, but this protocol may not always be the best way to interact with people with AAIDD. Because law enforcement officers are usually the first to respond to an emergency, it is critical that these officers have a working knowledge of autism and the wide variety of behaviors those with autism can exhibit in emergency situations. The following disorders, syndromes, and injuries can also have the same or similar affects: Alzheimer's, dementia, traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy, cognitive delay, Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and more.

Individuals with autism are seven times more likely to come in contact with law enforcement officers than their [neuro]typical peers (Curry, 1993). Coupled with an autistic person's social differences and inability to communicate effectively, these interactions can often lead to misunderstandings or even tragedies.

As children with autism mature, a broader understanding of the disorder and individuals affected by it will be critical for safe and successful interactions within the community at large, as well as in emergency situations. Teaching first responders the classic signs of autism is an important first step toward preventing unfavorable situations.



- A person with autism might among other things:
- Have an impaired or false heightened sense of danger
- Wander to bodies of water, traffic, or other dangers



- Be overwhelmed by law enforcement presence
- Fear a person in uniform (ex. fire turnout gear)
- Exhibit curiosity and reach for objects/equipment (ex. shiny badge, handcuffs, or even firearms)
- React with "fight or flight"
- Not respond to "stop" or other commands OR become angry, agitated, or upset by such "firm" commands
- Have delayed speech and language skills, or have perfect speech but the inability to communicate needs and feelings effectively
- Not respond to his/her name or verbal commands
- Avoid eye contact
- Engage in repetitive behavior/stimming (self-stimulatory behavior - rocking, hand flapping, spinning)
- Have sensory perception challenges
- Have epilepsy or other seizure disorder.

If a first responder is able to identify that a child or adult may have autism, he or she can then respond in a way that best supports the individual.

Learning to interact with first responders is critical. It is just as essential for first responders to understand how to effectively deal with our citizens who are part of the AAIDD community. This is the reason Louisa County Sheriff's Office started Project First Responder; to begin to break the misguided communication between law enforcement and the AAIDD community. It is imperative that all entities involved learn to work together to make these interactions safe, successful and productive.

It seems there are frightening, tragic headlines involving law enforcement virtually every day. For families of people with AAIDD, the concern about their loved one's world clashing with law enforcement can be terrifying. Fear, suspicion, and the resulting increase in violence across the world only make things worse.

These families feel particularly uneasy as they have to deal with the daily stresses of AAIDD, as well as negotiate the unpredictability of the outside world. For many, AAIDD leads almost inevitably to some form of interaction with law enforcement. During a crisis, the difference between aid and tragedy often comes down to a law enforcement officer's familiarity with, and response to all forms of AAIDD. Children and adults who have difficulty processing stressful situations may exhibit



behaviors that are unfamiliar to many creating possible communication problems. The biggest question is, of course, is law enforcement prepared to deal with our loved ones in a way that ensures the best outcome? Unfortunately at this time, throughout the US, the current overarching answer is, no.

The Project First Responder program allows family members and other caregivers to provide crucial information about their loved ones to first responders, prior to any reported incidents. A database allows this information to be communicated and utilized by emergency personnel to properly respond to situations involving AAIDD children or adults with details about proper interaction and care. We are also working to improve training and awareness of our officers through the use of interaction and incident simulation with the assistance of those afflicted with any type of AAIDD.

RESULTS

Project First Responder's results have been significant. Though autism is the predominant Intellectual Development Disability discussed, it is far from the only one impacted by this project. Being deaf or blind, having a traumatic brain injury, having Williams syndrome, or elderly that have dementia, Alzheimer's or even just hard of hearing can experience a much better interaction with law enforcement, fire fighters, or EMT.

Several Agencies throughout Central Virginia have reached out to inquire about starting their own Project First Responder, and several autism resource agencies have praised and offered assistance in the continued proliferation of this concept. Lawmakers have reached out in hopes of promoting a bill to spread it statewide.

There have been AAIDD family members that have reached out to the command staff of the Louisa County Sheriff's Office to describe the difference in the interactions with Law Enforcement, stating that they have been productive in changing the outlook about law enforcement by the AAIDD Community.

Members of the AAIDD Community came together to assist in the organization of an awareness event, the Project First Responder, Special Needs and Autism Awareness Festival on April 20, 2019, which brought over four hundred participants to the event.



The program's results have been noticed by others. The Board of Supervisors passed a resolution honoring Mr. Withrow and the program. Several regional media outlets have picked up the story as well – examples are below:

- <https://wtvr.com/2019/04/09/landon-withrow-inspires-project-first-responder/>
- https://www.fredericksburg.com/news/local/louisa-county-sheriff-s-office-develops-project-first-responder-program/article_c068911d-9cd9-58d5-a5ac-e86acd172772.html
- <https://www.cbs19news.com/content/news/12-year-old-Louisa--boy-leads-the-way-in-autism-education-for-police-505905611.html>
- <https://www.nbc29.com/story/39952927/program-helps-law-enforcement-officers-better-interact-with-people-with-disabilities>
- <http://www.thecentralvirginian.com/project-first-responder-in-louisa-2/>

Louisa County is grateful for Mr. Withrow's intuition and inspiration, and to our Sheriff's Office for developing a much-needed and successful program.





RESOLUTION

Recognizing Landon Withrow for His Inspiration in the Development of Project First Responder

May 6, 2019

WHEREAS, in the summer of 2018, Landon Withrow, a 12 year-old Louisa County citizen, applied to participate in the Louisa County Sheriff's Office Law Enforcement Adventure Program (LEAP); and

WHEREAS, the requirement for the application was to write a paragraph stating why the applicant should be chosen to participate in LEAP; and

WHEREAS, Landon wrote a two page letter stating that he was autistic and not only wanted to bridge the gap between autistic people and law enforcement, but also for him to be able to feel more comfortable around police, and

WHEREAS, Landon explained the difference between how his, a person with autism, brain works differently than a typical human brain and he further explained that many autistic people, including him, are scared of law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, the Louisa County Sheriff's Office read Landon's letter and recognized the need for officers to have training in identifying autistic people and developed a program called Project First Responder; and

WHEREAS, Project First Responder is a program for anyone with an intellectual development disability to provide information to the sheriff's office in advance of calls for service to possibly forego any unfortunate events from happening; and

WHEREAS, Louisa County Sheriff's Office would like to extend their appreciation for Landon Withrow's inspiration in the development of the program.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, on this 6th day of May 2019, that the Louisa County Board of Supervisors hereby recognizes Landon Withrow for his intuitive thought in resolving a national concern.