

Heart of a Tiger: Changing the way law enforcement manages potential conflicts

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan - In the aftermath of the tragic murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, the urgent need for effective de-escalation techniques within law enforcement became painfully clear. During this time, the National De-escalation Training Center (NDTC) emerged as a beacon of hope, providing comprehensive training programs to reduce use-of-force incidents and save lives.

Dr. Tamara Lynn, Chair of the Criminal Justice Program at Fort Hays State University (FHSU), leads the charge. Driven by the desire to make a difference, she wasted no time in seeking information about joining the NDTC as a regional center. With FHSU's centralized location, the university became the ideal hub for coordinating training across the central United States.

Dr. Lynn's vision extended beyond law enforcement careers to encompass diverse fields within the criminal justice system. She recognized the value of de-escalation training for students pursuing careers in corrections, probation and parole, juvenile services, and other roles where tensions can escalate rapidly.

The goal is to equip current and future students with de-escalation techniques, ultimately reducing use-of-force incidents and the needless loss of life. Driven by a relentless passion, Dr. Lynn aims to make a difference, not only for her students and the criminal justice professionals they will become but also for communities nationwide.

Today, the NDTC is making significant strides in its mission to provide essential de-escalation training to law enforcement agencies across the central United States. The Fort Hays State University Criminal Justice Program acts as the Region 2 headquarters for the NDTC, allowing for coordinated efforts in seven states: Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Wyoming.

The program offers a range of training modalities, ensuring that law enforcement officers receive the necessary skills to effectively de-escalate high-pressure situations. From face-to-face courses to online training, the NDTC leaves no stone unturned in its efforts to shape a culture of de-escalation within law enforcement agencies.

The impact of the NDTC's work has not gone unnoticed. Recently, the program received two federal grants totaling \$2.75 million to support its training initiatives. The community recognition and financial support prove the relevance and importance of the NDTC's mission.

Collaboration has been another key driver of the NDTC's success. Through partnerships with agencies like the Tampa Bay Police Department, the program has secured grants specifically tailored to de-escalation training. This collaborative spirit was recently rewarded with an esteemed award, underscoring the impact of the NDTC's expertise.

The NDTC has made strategic appointments within its administrative team to sustain its growth and development. Dr. Tamara Lynn and Morgan Steele, distinguished faculty members at

FHSU's Criminal Justice Program, now hold crucial positions within the NDTC, enhancing the organization's strength and expertise.

Since its inception, the NDTC has successfully trained over 1,000 law enforcement personnel across its seven-state region. Participants from California, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, and New York have also completed these indispensable training programs facilitated by trainers from FHSU.

The testimonials from officers who have completed NDTC courses speak volumes about the impact of de-escalation training. Numerous officers express gratitude for the knowledge they have gained, often noting how they wish they had acquired these valuable skills earlier in their careers. The de-escalation techniques taught by the NDTC have empowered officers to defuse potentially dangerous situations without resorting to force.

Looking ahead, the NDTC has ambitious plans to enhance its training programs further and expand its reach. A grant application has been submitted in collaboration with New York University to integrate Virtual Reality into the training curricula. This innovative step would provide officers with realistic scenarios to practice and refine their de-escalation skills.

Additionally, the NDTC is focused on improving officer encounters with autistic individuals. Dr. Lynn and her colleagues are seeking grants to fund a specialized training program tailored to these encounters' unique needs and challenges. Such initiatives demonstrate the NDTC's commitment to continuously advancing law enforcement practices.

In June 2024, FHSU and the NDTC will host an Evidence-based Policing Symposium in Denver, Colo. This symposium will bring together academics and practitioners to discuss effective strategies and policies in law enforcement, fostering collaboration and innovation in the field.

The achievements of the NDTC, alongside FHSU's Criminal Justice Program, are a testament to the dedication and passion of the faculty and staff involved. By cultivating a culture of de-escalation and accountability, they are making a lasting impact on communities across the United States.

As our nation grapples with issues surrounding law enforcement and community relations, the work being done by the NDTC and the FHSU Criminal Justice Program offers a glimmer of hope. Through their emphasis on de-escalation techniques, they are helping pave the way toward a safer, more just future. With each training session, collaboration, and grant received, they are transforming law enforcement practices for the better.

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