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By Marlei Martinez

Alabama Jail Training Mental Health Corrections Officers

Jail Officers Learn to Help Inmates with Mental Illness

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Etowah County, Ala. — With the lack of mental health centers statewide and the influx of inmates suffering from mental health issues, one Alabama jail is taking matters into their own hands.

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“County jails have become the new de facto mental health centers and mental health hospitals,” said Dr. Scott Hassell. He is the Chief Deputy of Corrections at the Etowah County Jail. “And we realized early on that we weren’t going to find any help.”

The Etowah County Jail is now training their corrections officers to be certified mental health officers as well.

“Realizing that sometimes you’re dealing with people who seem to be irate or have issues and those issues are not really their fault,” said Officer Bruce Word. “They’re dealing with something far more than

they can deal with.”

Officer Word is one of the first four certified mental health corrections officers in the state.

“I think it’s very important everyone else get training to better help the people we’re dealing with every day,” he said.

According to Chief Hassell, the Etowah County Jail is the only agency that participates in the program run by the American Correctional Association. He said the certification requires at least two years of preparation that culminates in a four-hour, 300 question exam.

“The old mindset of locking up the criminal and throwing away the key, that don’t work anymore,” said Chief Hassell.

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