



Kiersten Harzewski has been employed as a police officer for the past 26 years. Her first five years were with Santa Fe Police Department and the rest she has been employed with New Mexico State Police. Currently, Kiersten is a Sergeant within the Special Operations Bureau. She is a commander of the Peer Officer Support Team and the Crisis Negotiation Team which encompasses supervising negotiators and crisis intervention trained officers around the state. Kiersten also works with her team to coordinate the mental health training curriculum for the organization. Kiersten also works as a National Trainer for the National Council for behavior health.

New Mexico State Police is building their mental health strategy and working towards ensuring all officers understand how to recognize the basic signs and symptoms of a person in crisis or living with a mental health concern. Recognizing the signs and symptoms ensures officers can communicate effectively and de-escalate situations to coordinate a safe resolution for all people involved.

Kiersten has developed a strategy that builds on the Mental Health First Aid curriculum and into the Crisis Intervention Team method to assist people with finding the appropriate mental health and community resources. For situations where the risk is especially high, New Mexico State Police uses Crisis Negotiators to coordinate a safe surrender to law enforcement. These Crisis Negotiators must have already exhibited an outstanding ability safely resolve a crisis with minimal to no use of force. Kiersten designed this strategy to allow officers to build on their communication and de-escalation skills while moving through the strategy.

All officers within New Mexico State Police use Mental Health First Aid, select officers move on into the Crisis Intervention Team, and at that point officers vested in the process and showing skills in this area move on into the Crisis Negotiation Team. Kiersten believes the conversation surrounding de-escalation has similar skills and traits but as the level of risk increases, so must an officer's level of experience.

Utilizing this model allows officers to build and practice these skills so when negotiating a safe surrender to law enforcement, officers have trained, practiced and developed de-escalation skills enough to coordinate a

surrender to law enforcement in high risk warrant scenarios that is safe for all parties involved. For her work in this area, Kiersten received the Meritorious Achievement Award from New Mexico State Police.

In conjunction with this strategy is the Peer Officer Support Team where veteran and retired officers also use these skills to help their brothers and sisters on the job find the appropriate resources when they themselves are experiencing a crisis or mental health concern. The Peer Officer Support Team strategy is designed to be a confidential resource for officers within New Mexico State Police and surrounding rural agencies intended to guide officers safely and successfully through their law enforcement careers. To support this work, Kiersten and her team received the 2020 COPS Officer Wellness Grant intended to raise awareness and provide training for the Peer Officer Support Team.

Kiersten holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration, Bachelor's Degree in Business and her Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice. She grew up in Santa Fe New Mexico graduating from St. Katherine's Catholic High School. Her husband Thomas Harzewski is also employed with New Mexico State Police. Thomas also serves as a soldier in the United States Army and Kiersten builds on her experience as a military spouse as a way to reach out to officers showing signs of trauma experienced on the job. Daughters are Monica, Kathryn and Amanda and grandson is Andre. Kiersten cherishes time with her family to include either a quiet day at home, a picnic at the park watching Andre play baseball, a hike, mountain biking or skiing in the mountains of New Mexico. She it is the quite peaceful moments with family that sustain the mental health of police officers throughout their career. Whatever those moments may look like.