



## CIT INTERNATIONAL, INC.

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*More than just training*

### CIT INTERNATIONAL POSITION STATEMENT ON PROVIDING CIT TRAINING IN THE PRE-SERVICE ACADEMY

The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model (also known as the Memphis Model) is a model of collaboration that includes specialist CIT officers as a core element. Rather than being a part of a special unit that only responds to mental health crisis calls; these officers serve general patrol duties until called on to respond to mental health related calls. According to the model, officers volunteer for the training, and are selected based on maturity and experience in order to be eligible to complete the training and become CIT certified. There is sound reasoning behind these criteria. Here, we specifically address the recommendation that officers have adequate on the job experience prior to completing CIT training and becoming certified.

While there is limited research specific to this issue, one peer reviewed published study did find that more experienced officers retained CIT related knowledge better than their peers with less time on the job.<sup>i</sup> This finding is consistent with adult learning theory and the andragogical approach<sup>ii</sup> to adult learning, which maintains that adult learners accumulate a reservoir of experience that is a resource that trainers can capitalize on to facilitate learning. Given the advanced nature of CIT training content, it makes sense to allow officers to develop a reservoir of basic policing knowledge and experience before engaging with the more advanced material. Recruits or officers with no or minimal street experience are less likely to have encounters to draw on in relation to the material presented in the 40-hour training. Additionally, recruit training largely focuses on teaching officers to utilize an authoritative approach to take immediate control of a situation when they arrive on the scene. However, intervening effectively with a person in crisis generally requires returning some sense of control to the distressed individual in order to bring about a safe outcome. This can be difficult distinction for a recruit or new officer to comprehend or implement and has the potential for creating delay and confusion in the officer's response which could lead to negative outcomes for officers and/or citizens.

A level of comfort with the handling routine police encounters such as that gained by more than a probationary period of patrol work enables experienced officers to make quick decisions about when it is appropriate to proceed with business as usual versus when CIT tactics are more likely to bring about a safe and satisfactory outcome. It is precisely because experience and the right motivation and disposition are necessary for a CIT officer, that CIT International recommends that applicants for CIT training are screened prior to being approved to take CIT training.

Additionally, from a cognitive load perspective, providing too much new information to recruits in pre-service training, when they do not have schema to anchor it to in their long-term memories, limits their ability to retain the material.<sup>iii</sup> New recruits in the academy are overwhelmed with learning the basics of being a police officer and officer safety from a tactical perspective. While de-escalation tactics and techniques should be incorporated in every basic academy, many recruits (and in some cases, veteran officers) will continue to have a difficult time developing the empathy, skills and partnerships with their community resources that will allow them to transform into the “expert” officers that CIT Officers are meant to be.

Furthermore, agencies have experienced poor results after moving CIT training content to their pre-service academies. For example, several agencies have entered into consent decrees or settlement agreements with the US Department of Justice following findings of pattern and practice of excessive force against persons experiencing mental health crisis AFTER moving CIT training to the pre-service academy [[see http://citinternational.org/Investigative-Reports](http://citinternational.org/Investigative-Reports)].

Thus, while at face value, it may make sense to provide CIT training to all officers prior to their working independently on the street, as we want them to be as prepared as possible, there is some solid reasoning and emerging evidence that suggest this is not an optimal approach. While all should receive robust mental health awareness and de-escalation content in the academy, officers likely benefit more from the specialized CIT training after they have mastered the basic skills of being a police officer. More experienced officers are better able to incorporate the new knowledge and skills and move more fluidly between CIT skills and other strategies as situations require. This increases safety for the officer, the person in crisis and the community.

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<sup>i</sup> Compton, MT &Chien, VH (2008) Factors related to knowledge retention after crisis intervention team training for police officers. *Psychiatric Services*, 59 (9) 1049-1051.

<sup>ii</sup> Knowles, M (1990) *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, Houston TX: Gulf

<sup>iii</sup> Kirschner, F., Paas, F. and Kirschner, P.A. (2009) A cognitive load approach to collaborative learning: united brains for complex tasks, *Educational Psychology Review*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 31-42.

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