The Frankfort Police Department Driver Awareness Program

The Decision to Drive

Teens and young adults typically consider a driver's license an essential step towards independence. The desire to drive is no different for people with disabilities, but the decision is more complicated. A recent study revealed that two-thirds of people with high functioning autism currently drive or hope to drive someday, but the subject raises numerous concerns for the potential driver and his/her family. Common difficulties for people with autism, such as multitasking, reading cues, flexibility with rules, and sensitivity to light or sound, are frequent factors of the driving experience. Deciding to drive is a decision that should not be taken lightly by anyone, but for the person with autism, that decision requires an even deeper consideration of one's strengths and needs.

Interaction with Police

People desiring a driver's license ought to consider that at some point in their driving they will have an interaction with a police officer. Officers are increasingly being trained to understand autism, but there is no guarantee that an officer encountered in a traffic pullover or an accident has received such training or truly understands behaviors exhibited by people on the autism spectrum. Miscommunications and misinterpretations in that circumstance can have a disastrous outcome. While considering such scenarios, a potential driver who has autism must evaluate their ability to cope and communicate under stress.

The Frankfort Police Department program:

The FPD program aims to provide an interactive and educational experience that enables people with autism and Asperger's Syndrome (or other disabilities) to have positive interactions with law enforcement should the situation arise. The department hopes to accomplish this goal in three parts:

Safe Interactions Class:

Taught by Frankfort Police Officer Leanne Bender, attendees will learn the perspective of police in a traffic investigation situation. Police officers are trained to keep themselves and citizens safe, and certain body gestures will prompt an officers to take measures to protect themselves. Attendees will learn the basics of body language and behavior that may alert police officers to potential dangers and

thereby can avoid behaviors that could lead to misunderstanding. Also, the class will give step by step instructions on what to expect during a traffic stop and during other interactions with the police.

Traffic Pullover Simulations:

The second part of the FPD program consists of simulated traffic stop scenarios. Real police officers will conduct the traffic stops with lights flashing and will guide the participant through the steps discussed during the classroom portion. Getting pulled over by the police raises anxiety in most drivers, but for the person with autism, further stress occurs from communication and sensory difficulties. The scenario may seem overwhelming, but fear and anxiety is often reduced by understanding the process. This experience will teach participants what to expect at a traffic pullover and help them evaluate their stress when considering driving. We will also practice providing officers with your ID card and scenarios that are not necessarily traffic related. ***Please note: Attendants do not need a driver's license to participate. Simulations are performed in stationary vehicles.**

ID card:

Attendees of the FPD program will receive a personalized ID card and vehicle sticker that can be used to assist communication with police officers. The optional ID card will have individualized information to communicate the card holder's special needs or possible response to stress.

The program will close with refreshments for the attendees and the officers involved in the training. This is an opportunity to get to know Frankfort Police Officers and to ask any further questions.

To register for this FREE training session, please contact Officer Bender at (815)469-9435. Please note that space is limited. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to attend.