



**2018-09**

**NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION ENDORSES  
GROWTH THROUGH OPPORTUNITY (GTO)**

**WHEREAS**, positive community interactions are of paramount importance to the Office of the Sheriff and to law enforcement agencies across the country.

**WHEREAS**, information published by the National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability showed that approximately 50-80% of an officer's encounters are with a person with a disability. Responding to calls involving individuals with varying disabilities can pose shifting challenges for law enforcement officers. Additionally, research indicates that people who have developmental disabilities will have up to seven times more contact with law enforcement than a non-disabled member of the public. (Curry et al, 1993).

**WHEREAS**, relevant, specialized disabilities awareness training provides law enforcement officers with a level of understanding and empathy so as to properly and safely handle situations and avoid potentially harmful consequences and liability. Recognizing and effectively responding to common characteristics and behaviors associated with developmental disabilities would reduce the amount of time spent on calls.

**WHEREAS**, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), developmental disabilities are defined as a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas beginning during the developmental period and may last a lifetime. Recent estimates in the United States show that about one in six, or about 16%, of children aged 3 through 17 years have one or more developmental disabilities, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, hearing loss, intellectual disability, learning disability, vision impairment, and other developmental delay.

**WHEREAS**, according to The Arc of the United States, the nation's leading community-based advocacy organization operating nearly 700 chapters across the country for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families, and as the premier provider of the supports and services people want and need, the majority of adults with I/DD are either unemployed or underemployed, despite their ability, desire, and willingness to work in the community. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) regularly reports the percentage of working-age people with disabilities in the labor forces is about one-third that of persons with no disability.

**WHEREAS**, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute published a report indicating young adults with autism had lower employment rates and higher rates of complete social isolation than people with other disabilities. Autism spectrum disorder, a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges, is believed to affect 1 in every 59 children in the United States (CDC, 2018).

Between 75-85% of adults with autism are unemployed.

**WHEREAS**, an individual with a disability may have a limited capacity to protect themselves, avoid or escape victimization, seek assistance, or to report crimes in an articulated manner.

**WHEREAS**, building safer communities is a responsibility that must be shared through collaborative efforts including local law enforcement, other public safety agencies, the disabilities community and the larger community.

**WHEREAS**, Growth Through Opportunity (GTO) is a non-profit organization operating a National Award-Winning Apprenticeship Program which trains law enforcement, firefighters, and/or civilians as job coaches providing vocational skills training within public safety facilities and courthouses. GTO's unique training model creates opportunities for GTO Cadets with I/DD to develop long-term relationships with first responders. First responders and GTO Cadets grow immensely in their respective levels of understanding by being partnered together in various settings, drastically decreasing negative encounters during future, real-life situations.

**WHEREAS**, the GTO Cadet Program provides a unique opportunity for law enforcement personnel to work alongside individuals with varying disabilities while sharing information related to the use of calling 911 for assistance, drugs, personal and internet safety, and how to recognize and avoid bullying, exploitation, victimization, and other related crime prevention measures.

**WHEREAS**, Growth Through Opportunity (GTO) operates with a unique approach to creating enriched communities by increasing socialization, communication, and vocational skills for program participants, and by exposing participants to various real-life experiences, leading to increased cultural and personal awareness.

**WHEREAS**, Growth Through Opportunity (GTO) utilizes a replicable training model incorporating best practices for learning including: making sure the material presented is engaging, relevant to the GTO Cadets' lives, and will have immediate usefulness. The training environment is safe and welcoming, allowing GTO Cadets to have an opportunity to share their knowledge, skills, strengths, and experiences.

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Approved by the Board of Directors of the National Sheriffs' Association on June 18, 2018, at the Annual Conference of the National Sheriffs' Association, New Orleans, Louisiana. This resolution to remain in effect until June 24, 2022, in accordance with Article XIII, Section 6 of the Constitution and Bylaws of the National Sheriffs' Association.

**WHEREAS**, Growth Through Opportunity (GTO) is endorsed by the National Down Syndrome Society and The Arc of the United States. GTO was proudly featured by the United States Department of Justice C.O.P.S. Office, Special Olympics, Autism Speaks, and Project Lifesaver International.

**WHEREAS**, the National Sheriffs' Association supports programs designed to foster understanding and respect for the law by individuals with disabilities and to combat unlawful behavior and victimization of some of society's most vulnerable citizens.

**WHEREAS**, the safety of all members of our communities, including people with disabilities, is top priority for law enforcement.

**WHEREAS**, employment plays a critical role in the everyday lives of individuals with disabilities by expanding their access to community resources, commerce, medical care, housing and recreation while boosting local economy and enriching their lives.

**WHEREAS**, the National Sheriffs' Association supports the creation of safer communities which uphold community awareness, acceptance, and inclusion of people with disabilities.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, the National Sheriffs' Association acknowledges and actively supports the efforts of Growth Through Opportunity to significantly and positively impact the lives of law enforcement and people with disabilities, and their caregivers, by increasing positive interactions between law enforcement officers and the disability community.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, the National Sheriffs' Association endorses and strongly urges law enforcement across our nation to utilize the Growth Through Opportunity (GTO) Cadet Program in their local communities.