



Officer Joyce Bender holds a Master Peace Officer certification. She has served with the San Marcos Police Department since 2004. During her time with the San Marcos Police Department, Officer Bender has been a Field Training Officer, a member of the Collision Investigation Team, and Drone Team. Officer Bender has been a member of the Hays County Crisis Negotiation Team since 2008 and is currently a Squad Leader. In 2016 Officer Bender began her assignment with the Mental Health Unit where she is currently assigned. Officer Bender is responsible for creating and starting the first Law Enforcement Therapy K9 Program in the State of Texas in 2017 with K9 Officer Sheldon Cooper. K9 Officer Sheldon holds the title of the first Police Therapy K9 in the State of Texas. Officer Bender and K9 Sheldon attended a 40 hour Law Enforcement Therapy K9 Training at the Paws and Stripes Academy at the Brevard County Sheriff's Department in Florida. After K9 Sheldon's retirement, Officer Bender was fortunate enough to return to the Paws and Stripes Academy where she met her new partner, K9 Sophie.

Sophie is a 2 year old Shiba Inu mixed with an American Eskimo commonly referred as an Imo-Inu. Sophie was a surrendered puppy to the Brevard County Animal Shelter. The inmates of the Brevard County Correctional Facility assisted in Sophie's training at the Paws and Stripes Academy. During this training Sophie earned her AKC Canine Good Citizen. Sophie and Officer Bender also became a Nationally Certified Multi Discipline Therapy K9 Team on June 11 2021. Sophie is assigned to the San Marcos Police Department Mental Health Unit, where she helps citizens experiencing a crisis. Sophie has the ability to help people in crisis, relax to the point where they are able problem solve. Sophie has assisted the Mental Health Unit on over 200 Calls for Service since being assigned to the Mental Health Unit. Sophie has also been able to respond to multiple SWAT/CNT callouts where she assisted Officer Bender with victims and family members in crisis. While not helping people in a crisis, Sophie spends her time visiting employees of the Police Department and Dispatch Centers. Sophie is also a regular at the local ER in San Marcos where she has been told that she has made the ER Staff day. Sophie also attends community functions such as Coffee with a Cop and SRP drills in the surrounding schools.