

POLICE



**CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG
POLICE DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CMPD Wellness program utilizes the 'whole person' concept. For us, this means addressing physical health and fitness, emotional well-being, spiritual, financial, personal relationships, social connectedness, as well as total career satisfaction. The Department has a dedicated team, via its Wellness Division, using a variety of resources and avenues of communication, to keep focused on effective integration/implementation of the program.

Emotional well-being, or mental health, has become a focus area for the CMPD. In a partnership with Mecklenburg County, the Department has an onsite clinical psychologist who provides organizational consulting in a variety of areas while also providing referrals and individual consultation for all members of the CMPD. Additionally, he provides initial and follow-up training for the Peer Support Program as well as clinical oversight. The Department has a SafeGuard program to provide yearly check-in sessions, via our onsite psychologist, for those individuals involved in positions deemed 'high-risk' for vicarious trauma. The psychologist has been crucial in developing several innovative programs such as the 'Officer Involved Shooting' Peer Support Team. Additionally, the psychologist teaches concepts of wellness and resiliency over the course of four classes in our Academy. This has the additional benefit of ensuring our newest officers have met and are aware of our internal resources.

The Department has used an established Employee Assistance Program for a number of years and, augmented those services with several other mental health resources throughout the community. All organizations provide confidential psychotherapy sessions, a year for any employee of the CMPD and their families. All services are completely free or have initial free sessions and will continue to provide services through insurance, and/or a sliding fee scale for the local outpatient clinic.

Physical health and fitness are vital aspects to any organization and this is particularly true for law enforcement. The CMPD has made a significant investment in promoting physical fitness. All employees have free access to aerobic and strength training equipment at 17 Department facilities. Further, physical fitness and nutrition counseling services are offered to all employees through a combination of a full time staff exercise physiologist, registered dietitians (as part of the City Wellness program), and the Employee Assistance Program. For those with specific needs or concerns, a health coach is available; this program helps with behavior change, chronic disease management, healthy lifestyle, fitness, etc. The program develops a personalized action plan to adopt healthier behaviors to achieve specific health goals.

To care for the spiritual aspect of wellness, the CMPD has used volunteer chaplains in a variety of settings over the years and recently has reinvigorated the program. The Department has 12 volunteer chaplains who serve specific divisions within the Department but also provide on call support, 24 hours a day, for those in need of their services. Within the last year, the Department has made an effort to integrate training between chaplains and peer support personnel with the understanding that there could be significant overlap in their services as well as opportunities to augment.

An area that is not classically thought of in terms of wellness is financial fitness; however, we believe this is an integral part of our overall program. The CMPD addresses financial issues as early as academy training and has followed it up with large class presentations, bringing in a financial counselor for free one-on-one financial fitness reviews, small group debt reduction classes, and by offering resources via EAP. The department has invested significant resources over the last several years to ensure CMPD members have up to date information on their retirement financial outlook. Lastly, "CMPD Hope" was created to assist those employees who find themselves in a financial crisis.

Just as financial fitness is important, so are the personal relationships. Over the years, the CMPD has brought in a retired police officer and spouse to present frankly on the stressors of a career in policing and how it impacts the relationship.

In 2017, the CMPD has established a CMPD retirement organization. The goal is to provide social connectedness for members of the organization after retirement. The group uses social media, as well as their own website, to provide education, resources, information about social gatherings, and opportunities to volunteer in the community.

There is an educational process via weekly "Wellness" emails as well as a monthly newsletter prominently posted through the CMPD buildings.



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Wellness Program

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department is the largest law enforcement agency in the State of North Carolina with approximately 1,900 sworn law enforcement officers and 500 non-sworn employees who serve a population of over one million citizens. The CMPD was formed in 1993 with the merger of the former Charlotte City Police Department and the Mecklenburg County Rural Police Department and has jurisdiction throughout the county.

The Department has dedicated staff and resources to create a Wellness unit within the CMPD. Wellness is a partnership with the Mecklenburg County Health Department through their Trauma & Justice Partnerships division. Part of this effort is externally focused, for example, Wellness directs our Crisis Intervention Team, which ensured that 40% of our officers on patrol had completed the initial training and had been certified as CIT officers. Additionally, the Wellness unit is our liaison with an innovate program designed to assist children exposed to trauma. The Child Development – Community Policing (CD-CP) program is directed by the County's Health Department and has a trained mental health clinician stationed in each of the 13 patrol divisions within the CMPD. Together with a CMPD officer, they provide resources and supportive interventions to children, and their families, exposed to violence. Both of these programs provide opportunities for members of the CMPD to assist the external community but Wellness has an internal focus as well. The unit trains and coordinates our Peer Support/Officer



Involved Peer Support and Chaplain Programs while also developing a myriad of other resilience focused outreach opportunities. The CMPD has committed a command level officer, an analyst, and Sergeant supervisor to this unit with the County dedicating a police psychologist to support Department.

Several researchers have well documented the negative impacts of stress and policing. The CMPD is making a concerted effort to mitigate those negative stressors using a 'whole person' concept. By this we mean we want to focus on the interplay between each aspect of wellness. One's physical health can, and does, impact one's emotional well-being. In the same way financial concerns, social isolation,

and/or relationship turmoil can create a cascading confluence of negative events. It is imperative to the success of our program that we offer practical resources as well as education. We want to be able to provide these resources in a way that makes sense to our consumers and we want to ensure that each employee realizes they are a valued part of our CMPD family.

While most of the research has focused on police officers, our Wellness program is designed to reach out to all of our employees. Essential to this effort is our commitment to our non-sworn employees who serve in a variety of operational roles to include communications (dispatch and 911), crime scene search, animal care & control, lab technicians, and forensic media analysts. Each of them is exposed to varying levels of violence and/or disturbing images outside the realm of normal human experiences. An example of this is our Peer Support Program. While many law enforcement agencies have a similar program, the CMPD has ensured we have non-sworn members who specifically work in units at higher risk for vicarious trauma.

Peer Support: Participation in Peer Support is multi-step effort; volunteers have to be endorsed by their commanders and then interviewed by members of the Community Wellness Unit for suitability. If accepted, they participate in 16 hours of training, based on the International Association of Chiefs of Police guidelines. The in-house psychologist provides clinical oversight and ensures quarterly training to update skills and provide an opportunity for collegial consultation. Communication with a peer support member is privileged and confidential based on North Carolina law. Tri-fold handouts were created to be given to an officer when they interact with a peer support member in their official capacity. In addition to offering resources, we have found this eliminates confusion as to the role of a peer support member, as well as the exceptions to confidentiality. As previously stated, it is essential to our program that sworn and unsworn CMPD members be involved in our Peer Support Program. Additionally, we ensure there are employees at various levels of management so that we can, as closely as possible, truly give the person a peer with whom they can interact.



OIS Peer Support: The CMPD has created an “Officer Involved Shooting” Peer Support Program to augment our ‘standard’ Peer Support Program. This team consists of law enforcement officers who have had to take a life in the course of their duties. The program was created at the request of our Chief to assist officers who have a very distinct set of concerns and

questions. In addition to the requirements and training of other peer support members, those in the OIS team must be past all administrative and legal issues surrounding their event and be at least one year post incident. Also, during their interview we discuss their approach to dealing with the event to gauge their level of insight into how it impacted them and how they did, or could have, effectively managed the multiple stressors associated with the shooting. Those on the OIS Peer Support Team have a third day of training where they interact with representatives involved in OIS investigations. Each step of the investigative process is laid out and the rationale explained. Via interviews of all officers involved in an OIS over the last 10 years, we discovered most did not understand what was happening and why throughout the majority of the investigation. This lack of understanding caused anxiety for most and, in addition to emotional support and offering resources, we have found over the last year that the



ability to explain what is happening, and why, has significantly reduced the reported stress levels of the officers. While it has only been one year since the program's inception, our greatest mark of success is that each officer served has reported great satisfaction with their OIS peer support member, quite the opposite of what we had experienced previously, and has stated that they too, would like to be on the OIS Peer Support Team as soon as they are eligible.

Critical Incident Debriefings: One-on-one debriefings are conducted by our in-house psychologist. This is not a psychotherapy session but rather an opportunity for the employee to talk about the experience, review any concerns they might have, gain knowledge about how the body reacts during times of stress, and to get resources as necessary. Resources vary from a wide selection of books to referrals to a mental health professional. A referral for one-on-one critical incident debriefing is based on the severity of the event and the recommendations of the supervisor. As an example, an OIS incident requires a mandatory debriefing while seeing a mutilated body might result in a referral based upon the person's experiences and reactions.

Every employee who participates in one-on-one debriefing signs a consent form detailing the nature of the meeting, explaining how it is voluntary, and the limits of confidentiality. They initial the three areas where it must be breached (danger to self, intent to commit a crime, child/elder abuse). As long as none of those three areas is breached, a single page report is produced stating the person attended the meeting. Following the IACP's



guidelines, the employee is scheduled to follow-up three months post incident.

Group Debriefings are held when an incident involves several employees; this can occur with or without one-on-one interviews depending on severity of the incident. Group debriefings are short and focused on psychological first aid, information about common reactions, suggestions for effective coping, and ensuring all participants are aware of additional resources if needed. Group debriefings can be held by the in house psychologist or senior peer support members depending on situational demands.

Operational Psychologist: Operational psychology is a concept that has been around for several decades but has been in the literature more as they become more involved in military, intelligence, and law enforcement. Operational psychologists are trained clinical psychologists who seek to establish relationships with their clients and understand the culture of the clients' organizations, with the goal of applying the psychologist's knowledge through the eyes of the client (in this instance, law enforcement).

The CMPD operational psychologist is instrumental in eliminating barriers to seeking out mental health assistance. In addition to his role in Critical Incident Debriefings; over the course of a typical year he sees approximately 150 – 200 CMPD members who personally request to meet with him for consultation and/or referrals. Additionally, he consults supervisors on individual or group concerns. He is also available to intervene with separate units who are experiencing group dynamic challenges. Further, the psychologist teaches concepts of wellness and resiliency over the course of four classes in our Academy. This has the additional benefit of ensuring our newest officers have met and are aware of our internal resources. The psychologist also teaches these concepts at our Command College (for lieutenants and captains) as well as our training officers' course.



Having a psychologist on staff has enabled us to have an expert in the field talk about a great variety of issues; from individual and group dynamics when attempting to deescalate a situation, to training in crisis negotiation tactics, and assisting in training of sexual assault responses, and talking with upcoming retirees about successful transitioning from the Department. The beneficial side effect is exposure to these trainings has been the exposure of almost every one of our employees to the psychologist. This breaks down several barriers of seeking consultation as he is seen as 'one of us.'

“SafeGuard” Program: The operational psychologist meets with units involved in work considered higher risk for vicarious trauma (e.g., homicide, crimes against children, cybercrime). He discusses ways to identify symptoms and talk about effective coping strategies. While this was well received information, it was clear that several employees were experiencing some level of vicarious trauma and had been dealing with it on their own for significant periods of time. This led to the development of our own version of the “SafeGuard” program – modeled after several other law enforcement agency programs. The concept is to meet with individuals, when they start working in the job to discuss what they will encounter, how to identify if exposure to the negative aspects of the job is causing them problems, effective coping strategies, and clear access to resources as needed. Each member of the unit follows up once a year with the psychologist to continue to provide support and resources.

Mental Health Partnerships: The CMPD employees, through the City of Charlotte, have access to an Employee Assistance Program that offers up to ten sessions of mental health counseling with a licensed provider, free of charge to them or immediate family members. In addition, we have a behavioral health consultant available, free of charge, via the City’s medical network. Further, CMPD has networked with a local outpatient mental health facility with a large group of providers, including a former CMPD officer. They offer six free sessions to any CMPD employee and/or their family. Services continue if needed through insurance and/or sliding fee scale for the local clinic. The local outpatient clinic invites our operational psychologist to present in-service trainings about the culture of law enforcement and the day-to-day events with which they are exposed that are outside the realm of normal experiences for those who are not first responders. Most recently, CMPD has contracted with three local mental health facilities to see any CMPD member who is experiencing psychological trauma because of an on-the-job incident. In these scenarios, the operational psychologist assigns the employee a number and they can choose any of the three clinics. No one in CMPD or the City will know the person is seeing a mental health professional. The clinics bill via the assigned number and thus, only the Operational psychologist knows the identity of the individual. We have found that this greatly encourages therapeutic participation after critical incidents.

Chaplain Program: To care for the spiritual aspect of wellness, the CMPD has used volunteer chaplains in a variety of settings over the years. The Department has 12 volunteer chaplains who serve specific divisions within the Department but also provide on call support, 24 hours a day, for those in need of their services. Additionally, a chaplain is usually invited to be present in group Critical Incident Debriefings. Our chaplains come from a variety of backgrounds and denominations. Because each has assigned divisions/units, they provide a known presence. We have found that in addition to support and counseling; they have become marriage officiants and officiated at funerals.

The Department has made an effort to integrate training between chaplains and peer support personnel with the understanding that there could be significant overlap in their services as well as opportunities to augment. It is certainly understood that privilege and confidentiality must be protected but within those constraints we make a concerted effort to ensure care is provided to all in need.

Physical Fitness: The CMPD has made a significant investment in promoting physical fitness. All employees have free access to aerobic and strength training equipment at 17 Department



facilities. In addition, officers are required to participate in a mandatory job performance physical ability test. The test is being phased in as a minimum standard over the next two years.

Physical Health: Physical fitness and nutrition counseling services are offered to all employees through a combination of a full time staff exercise physiologist, registered dieticians (as part of the City Wellness program), and the Employee Assistance Program. For those with specific needs or concerns, a health coach is available; this program helps with behavior change, chronic disease management, healthy

lifestyle, fitness, etc. The health coach develops a personalized action plan to adopt healthier behaviors to achieve specific health goals.

Financial Health: Financial well-being is not commonly a component of many wellness programs, but we strongly believe that it should. Our department's Wellness Program has focused on the financial wellbeing of our employees since its inception five years ago. A recent poll of law enforcement throughout the U.S. found the number one concern amongst 72% of all officers was finances. The CMPD starts at the academy with classes on financial responsibility, budgeting, and planning for retirement. We have augmented this with classes about money management open to any CMPD employee. Because of Covid restrictions, an innovative approach taken in 2020 was to have online classes with a national financial institution. For the last four years, CMPD has brought in a financial consultant, at no cost to the employee, who had a confidential meeting with the employee (and spouse if desired) to go over their entire financial outlook and come up with achievable, step-by-step instructions, on how to achieve their goals. An anonymous survey afterwards has consistently brought glowing reviews – 100% agreed or definitely agreed that they meeting was helpful and, while all reported making changes, 84% had made “significant changes” in how they managed their money. The comment below is a typical example from the survey --

“ I thought my situation was a lot worse than it really was. Such a burden lifted having a plan and knowing my goals are within reach within a reasonable amount of time.”

CMPD has offered nine Financial Peace University seminars over the last two years. For those in debt and want to learn how to manage their money more effectively, the required books are purchased by CMPD and each employee is allowed to attend the sessions during their standard duty day. Reported debt reduction is hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Another key aspect is “CMPD HOPE.” This is a non-profit organization with a mission to assist employees and family members of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department with timely resources in the face of financial hardship due to circumstances beyond their control. Examples include debilitating illness, injuries and unexpected job loss. In 1016, CBS News reported that over 80% of Americans live ‘paycheck-to-paycheck.’ One of the greatest concerns for many Americans is what would happen if we had an unexpected emergency. CMPD HOPE, started by one of our then captains, now an assistant chief, helps to remove at least one aspect of that concern and allows the CMPD to take care of their own. (<http://cmpdhope.org/>)

Relationship Health: Another aspect of well-being not often considered is the health of the personal relationship. Several books have been written about the stresses of law enforcement and their families and we have certainly made those available to our employees (and their spouses). Additionally, over the years, the Department has brought in a professional speaker, a retired law enforcement officer and his spouse, for a day-long presentation on the stresses of the job on family and how to counteract them.



Social Relationships: We established a CMPD retirement organization. The goal is to provide social connectedness for members of the organization nearing and/or after retirement. The group uses social media, as well as their own website, to provide education, resources, information about social gatherings, and opportunities to volunteer in the community. The organization was officially formed in October of 2017 and its first ‘official’ meeting was in February of 2018 (<https://www.facebook.com/cmpdretirees/> & <https://www.cmpdretired.com/>).

Retirement Classes: The ending of a possible 30 – 40 year career in a law enforcement organization brings with it the potential for significant loss. A loss of purpose, prestige, social contacts, financial resources, and just overall sense of self, are all potential negatives to retirement. For those who want to continue to work, the majority of them have not applied for

a job in decades and may have no idea how to translate their skills outside of law enforcement. To mitigate those concerns, we developed a series of classes aimed at those retiring in 12 – 18 months. The series of three, three-hour, classes which discuss; keys to achieving an active and satisfying retirement, extensive information about



their post-retirement benefits, budgeting, fitness concerns after 50, social relationships post retirement, and how to apply for a job in the digital era. In addition, professionals sit down with each person, one-on-one, to go over their resumes (both hard copy and electronic media driven). Lastly, practical interview tips are provided and every student practices interviewing skills via role-play scenarios.

The Department also hosts a semiannual retirement fair explaining various aspects of retirement funding, health insurance, and retirement associations.

Innovative Interventions: The Department has used a variety of interventions to assist units experiencing frustration and/or burnout. A few examples; we used a cognitive reframing technique to help deal with the frustration of nonemergent calls. We call this “Nuisance call Bingo.” Crime scene technicians have their own version of the Bingo game as well. Prizes are awarded but the main benefit is making the frustrating aspect into a game.

Another innovate intervention has been instituting the concept of gratitude exercises. Dr. Martin Seligman has long researched this concept and, consistent with his research, we have found that it has a protective factor for employees mental health.

Additionally, CMPD is teaching the benefits of diaphragmatic breathing techniques. This is being taught at all levels from recruit training to Command College. The ability to calm oneself and engage the parasympathetic nervous system as quickly as possible after a physical encounter is key to good decision making and, just as importantly, preserving positive physical health.

Outreach and Education: Via interviews, surveys, and research, we have identified focus areas that we address via in person classes but also via a weekly wellness focused email, a monthly newsletter, and occasional unit specific emails. The newsletter is posted above each urinal and in every bathroom stall with the obvious intent of a ‘captive’ audience. Both the newsletter and weekly email address wellness issues, how to identify pitfalls, and how to achieve success in various realms of overall wellness. Focused emails discuss one topical issue.



The CMPD wellness program embraces the “motivation for change” model which accepts that each person is at a different stage when it comes to understanding or believing in the need to change a behavior. Because we understand this, our approaches are multimodal using supervisors, mandated and optional classes, electronic media, and flyers. Additionally, we use repetition in a calculated fashion to increase the likelihood of being ‘heard’ and motivating the person to move to the next stage of the desire for change.

External focus: CMPD has been invited to present our program to the Chicago Wellness Summit in 2019, IACP’s annual conference in 2019, IACP’s Wellness Conference in February 2020, and in 2019, was featured in the Department of Justice’s report to Congress as one of 10 model departments for law enforcement wellness.

(<https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P371>).

In addition to our local Charlotte stations, CMPD’s Wellness program has been featured via Scripps media to over 50 news outlets throughout the United States. Also, an article by our Operational Psychologist was published in IACP’s Police Chief Magazine. Lastly, our operational psychologist has created a mentoring group for five, recently placed, embedded mental health professionals.

