

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF)

Destination Zero Project

Kevlar for the Mind - Overview

It is widely recognized that life stresses directly or indirectly contribute to most employee misconduct cases and often times unsafe behavior. The CHP, Office of Employee Safety and Assistance, Peer Support Program has developed the four hour resiliency training program "Kevlar for the Mind." This training focuses on helping employees identify stress while providing them with appropriate coping tools. The training aims to reduce employee misconduct both on and off duty, and mitigates some unsafe behavior that could lead to injury or death.

In June 2012, the CHP established a working group to develop a stress management training course specific to law enforcement. The working group was comprised of CHP peer support personnel and mental health professionals contracted with the Department through Mental Health Network. The focus of the core curriculum was identifying stressors commonly experienced in the law enforcement profession and providing coping tools to help employees alleviate stress in a healthy and productive manner. Additional emphasis was added with regard to approaching and talking with colleagues when unsafe work practices are observed. In 2013, volunteer peer support personnel throughout the state were trained as program instructors by a mental health clinician. Beginning in January 2014, these instructors began providing this training to all uniformed CHP personnel. The training was completed by December 2014, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. The CHP continues to provide the training to all new Officers. Presentations are also given during CHP First Line Supervisor training and at area training days throughout California.

DESTINATION ZERO AWARD NOMINATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to mitigate the negative effects of stress unique to law enforcement, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) peer support officers, public safety operators (PSO), and a California licensed therapist developed and initiated a stress resiliency program called **Kevlar for the Mind - Creating Psychological Body Armor for Law Enforcement Personnel**. The CHP Kevlar for the Mind training course has been presented to all uniformed officers and PSOs. Officers and PSOs often experience extreme levels of stress while in their work environment. Stress can cause health problems and deteriorate our intellectual decision-making process. For many years law enforcement culture focused primarily on physical threats to officer safety; suspects, vehicles, weapons, pursuits, etc. Historically, tactical training and protective equipment have been provided to mitigate the risk of physical injury or death. However law enforcement agencies around the world are beginning to realize psychological injuries can take a greater toll on officers than can all other external risks combined. Therefore, reducing stress can improve health and cultivate improved decision-making abilities. The training addresses stress-related issues, hypervigilance, and the negative effects the job can have on the mind and body. The training identifies and quantifies stress factors, and provides tools and guidance on how to overcome negative responses associated with critical incidents and other stressors. The program also emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive balance between our employees' professional and personal lives. In order to fully provide the highest level of officer safety, officer wellness must also be part of the equation. Kevlar for the Mind addresses officer safety and wellness by providing stress assessment and coping tools.

DESTINATION ZERO AWARD NOMINATION

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Description of agency characteristics

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) was formed in 1929 as a branch of the Department of Motor Vehicles. The CHP's original mission was to enforce the traffic laws of the State Motor Vehicle Act. Today, the CHP has evolved into the largest state law enforcement agency in the country, employing nearly 11,000 people. Although its primary objective is still related to enforcing traffic laws, the CHP is also responsible for the safety and security of all California state officials, buildings, and property. The mission of the CHP is to provide the highest level of Safety, Service, and Security to the people of California.

The CHP accomplishes its mission through five departmental goals: Protect life and property; Provide superior service to the public and assistance to allied agencies; Enhance public trust through community outreach and partnerships; Invest in our people; and Identify and respond to evolving law enforcement needs. As an organization, the CHP believes in a strong set of values: Respect for Others, Fairness, Ethical Practices, and Equitable Treatment for All. This overriding pledge serves as the CHP's foundation of providing the public with the highest level of Safety, Service, and Security. Each member of the CHP also adheres to a set of professional values known as CHP PRIDE; **C**ourage, **H**onesty, **P**rofessionalism, **P**rinciples, **R**espect, **I**ntegrity, **D**edication, and **E**sprit De Corps. California Highway Patrol officers have been keeping Californians safe for over 85 years. Since our inception, 225 CHP officers have lost their lives serving the people of California.

Description of the program and its implementation

In 2012, the CHP began the process of developing a new campaign to efficiently cope with the psychological effects of working in the law enforcement profession. "Kevlar for the Mind" was developed as a new and innovative campaign by CHP Peer Support Program personnel and a licensed mental health therapist. The mission of Kevlar for

the Mind training is to create psychological body armor for law enforcement personnel by recognizing various types of stress and stress factors, and how to overcome them.

The CHP addressed the issue of stress within the law enforcement culture after an epidemic of officer suicides over a three-year time period (2005-2007). After extensive research, CHP peer support officers, PSOs, and a licensed contract therapist recognized trends within the Department and a need to address the issues associated with on-duty and off-duty stress. Kevlar for the Mind uses the principals of resistance, resilience, and recovery to drive home the message and to promote a healthier psychological culture within the Department. The most tenured peer support officers, PSOs, and a licensed contract therapist were handpicked to become instructors of Kevlar for the Mind. Powerful videos, photography, and firsthand accounts of critical incidents were produced, developed, and implemented into the Kevlar for the Mind training program to create an emotional connection with those attending the training.

Law enforcement careers are highly demanding and can compromise an individual's mental health. Kevlar for the Mind training identifies, discusses, and brings to the forefront topics including general stress, critical incident stress, burnout, and post-traumatic stress. This training not only identifies these different types of stressors but also provides coping tools for employees to become resistant and resilient, and how to recover more effectively from the stress of a law enforcement career.

In 2014, the CHP presented Kevlar for the Mind training to all uniformed officers and PSOs within the Department. This training consisted of a four-hour training course taught by one or more of the hand-selected instructors. Throughout the course, there are approximately ten exercises that employees can complete to determine their personal stress level and coping mechanisms. Instructors also share their own stories, weaving them into the training. Also included in the course instruction are CHP produced videos of critical incidents, narrated by the employees involved.

Description of research activities

While researching stress in the law enforcement culture, the CHP employed a licensed professional therapist and analyzed documented cases of law enforcement employee misconduct, unsafe practices, performance evaluations, and officer suicides from within the Department and other law enforcement agencies across the nation. In addition to this research, the CHP has continued to enhance and expand its peer support program for the last 20 years. Each year, peer training is conducted at the CHP Academy. Recently guest speakers, including Dr. Kevin Gilmartin, Dr. Bobby Smith, Mr. Jimmy Bremner, Ms. Beth Dansie, Mr. Jason Schechterle, Mr. Tony Pediferri, and others have provided information regarding stress resiliency and how to survive critical incidents both physically and psychologically.

This research was compiled and developed into what has become known as “Kevlar for the Mind, Creating Psychological Body Armor for Law Enforcement Personnel.”

What impact has the program had on the staff within the agency?

Kevlar for The Mind training provides CHP uniformed employees and PSOs the opportunity to recognize different types of stress. The training gives employees coping mechanisms and tools to effectively and efficiently deal with their stress. It provides employees with insight on how to live a healthier and happier lifestyle. The training not only provides employees with tools to live a healthier life, but also reduces agency liability. This training and ongoing efforts will continue to have a positive impact on the health, wellbeing, safety, and conduct of our employees. Following the conclusion of each Kevlar for the Mind training session, course evaluations were issued, collected, and evaluated by the CHP Office of Employee Safety and Assistance. The vast majority of these course evaluations reflected positive comments.

Is there evidence of success?

Although it is difficult to quantify prevented mental health damage from the law enforcement profession, the CHP believes its efforts have had a positive impact in improving the mental and physical health and safety of its departmental employees. This success is validated by an increased use of the Department's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), subsequent to this department-wide training. Expanded use of the EAP system is an indication more employees are willing to address their health and wellbeing.

Can the program be replicated by other agencies?

Kevlar for the Mind can be replicated by other agencies. Agencies of any size with trained peer support employees, in conjunction with a licensed clinical therapist, can teach this training course in one four (4) hour training period to a group of officers and/or PSOs. The materials used for this training course can easily be updated or changed to fit any agency program. The CHP believes it is in the best interest of the agency replicating this program to use a licensed clinical therapist to assist with the development and implementation. If only one misconduct case, unsafe practice, divorce, lawsuit, or suicide is avoided as a result of this training, this program will have demonstrated its value for the agency. As law enforcement agencies across the nation educate their officers and PSOs about the cycle of hypervigilance, stress and positive coping mechanisms, law enforcement culture will evolve by being more receptive to mental health care and maintenance. The mental health of all employees, especially those who are entrusted to enforce laws and regulations, should be at the forefront of every department's strategic objective. Kevlar for the Mind training is an excellent course any law enforcement agency can replicate and offer to those who put their lives on the line each and every day.

Contact the California Highway Patrol, Office of Employee Safety and Assistance, at (916) 843-3320 for more information on Kevlar for the Mind - Creating Psychological Body Armor for Law Enforcement Personnel.