



POLICE DEPARTMENT
Vincent Niski
Chief of Police

Destination Zero Selection Committee,

The City of Colorado Springs is the 39th largest city in America with an estimated 2020 population of nearly 490,000 people. The Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) has a staff of 1088, between sworn civilian employees; they cover an area of nearly 200 square miles answering over 300,000 calls a year.

In 2015, members of the CSPD took part in a study around mindfulness. 74% of the CSPD employees who took part in the survey reported being connected to technology causes some level of stress. With 76% reporting, they do not practice any form of mindfulness (yoga, meditation, etc.). Conversely, 76% also stated that they would be happier and healthier if they could slow down life and have time to disconnect. Employees were looking for a way to disconnect.

We know that stress in the workplace is not just a CSPD issue and is something the profession has struggled with for years. The CSPD understands the immense physical, mental, and emotional demands that are placed on officers daily. The job of a police officer is extremely stressful and takes a toll on officers' mental and physical health. Studies have found that officers are at greater risk than the general population of developing a range of physical and mental health ailments, including sleeplessness, suicide, and cancer. (Goldbaum, 2012).

In 2017, more police officers died by suicide than because of on-the-job hazards (including violent assaults and/or car accidents!). As an article in USA Today points out, while deaths of first-responders in the line of duty grab headlines, the personal dramas faced by police officers and firefighters often remain invisible or under-reported. Sadly, this trend is continuing as the number of suicides increased in 2018 and 2019.

Departments across the country have been working to confront this "epidemic" and are discovering that there is not a one size fits all approach to improving mental health. Over the years, the CSPD recognized that and through a Northwestern University Center School of Police Staff and Command Staff Study, they looked at this "epidemic". They specifically studied ways of "Implementing Mindfulness into an Officer's Life". Through the research "The Mindful Officer" class was developed. The class teaches officers about the hidden impacts of the job and teaches them several mindfulness techniques that they can incorporate into their daily work and personal lives.

The class has been taught in the CSPD Training Academy and is now part of the self-care portion of the department's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Program. Making the class part of the CIT program was a strategic move, as over the years we have seen how important and successful CIT programs are, which is evident by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) One Mind Campaign. The community depends on its officers in times of need, at times making split-second life-altering decisions. We know that before officers can successfully take care of others, they need to first be able to care for themselves. Over the last four years, The Mindful Officer Class has been taught to a 1000 plus officers and civilians, with feedback such as *"Without a doubt. I can't thank you enough for your class. It has changed my life and work-life for the better"*, *"long overdue for law enforcement"*, and *"I felt like there was a giant load taken off my shoulders. I wish my family could have been here for this presentation"*.

As the benefits of mindfulness training were being felt by many within the CSPD, word spread and the CSPD was asked to be a speaker/presenter with its Mindful Officer Class for the Carson J. Spencer Foundation, El Paso County Sheriffs Officer, El Paso County Public Health, Psychotherapy Associates Winter Symposium (2017), National Crime Victims' Rights Week (2018), Colorado Association of School Resource Officers Annual Conference (2017 & 2018), Iowa State University CIT Program [in partnership with Ames Police Department, Central Iowa Community Services, National Alliance on Mental Illness Central Iowa and the Story County Attorney's Office] (2018), and at the Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police Annual Conference (2019).

In 2018 and 2019, the CSPD Stetson Hills Division Shift II implemented weekly wellness line-ups, talking openly with officers and sharing personal experiences and even practicing mindfulness breathing techniques and some guided meditations. The supervisor talked about how seeking help did not harm their career and had only enhanced it and their personal life. It worked; in the two years, dozens of officers reached out to the supervisor to talk more about mindfulness, support, and counseling. We saw on that one shift alone, how the narrative started to change around mental health.

As an agency, we value the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of our employees and know that we must continue to look for ways to improve the overall health of our employees. An employee wellness program must be fluid and ever-changing to reach the demands placed on our employees daily. The CSPD continues to learn and grow and as we move into 2020, we look forward to the redevelopment of our wellness program, revamping counseling, peer-support and continuing to find unique opportunities, such as The Mindful Officer Class to improve the overall health of our employees.

Thank you,

Jason Newton
Community Relations Sergeant/Mindfulness Instructor
Colorado Springs Police Department



"Safeguarding our Community as our Family"

705 South Nevada Avenue
Mailing Address: Post Office Box 2169 • Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901-2169

