

Olathe Police Department

Officer Wellness

Policing with purpose: Our journey to officer wellness and safety

In 2006, the Olathe Police Department authorized a Critical Incident Stress Management Policy recognizing the harmful effects of stress caused by critical incidents. This policy and program utilized a multi-dimensional approach via a proactive and reactive format. This program was proactive by educating members of the department about critical incident stress and stress management techniques and was reactive by activating Critical Incident Stress Team members during a critical incident to provide emotional support and professional referrals for those impacted by the magnitude of events.

In 2007, additional research was conducted on Peer Support Programs and a survey, which had been completed in late 2006, was reviewed and analyzed. The survey revealed that while some officers who had been exposed to traumatic events were healing normally, others were using maladaptive behaviors to cope and compensate for the trauma they had experienced. Many stated that if there was a person to talk to or program to take advantage of they would. The information was compiled, and a recommendation was made to launch a Peer Support Team within the Olathe Police Department. Also, at this time, the Olathe Police Department began working with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation on this important effort and would eventually partner with them for the initial Peer Support training. While the initial selection process was completed, and training was conducted, the Olathe Police Department received devastating news that Cy Middleton, a K-9 Officer with our agency had been diagnosed with cancer. Absent a policy, the Peer Support team was activated and maintained an almost 24-hour support network with Officer Middleton, his family and our extended police family, both at the hospital and his residence.

Each Peer Supporter attends a 40-hour basic Peer Support training program. The training is full of intense learning, introspection and mental exhaustion.

In Cy Middleton's honor the department hosts the Cy Middleton Basketball Tournament annually and have raised over

On January 15th, 2008, the Peer Support Program policy was approved for the Olathe Police Department and was launched. As with most new programs in law enforcement it was met with some skepticism, however, quickly grew in reputation and the Peer Support Team (PST) was now being requested by outside agencies and various groups to either come speak to them to provide an inoculation against trauma or to debrief those teams that had experienced trauma. Our team has assisted outside agencies struggling with the loss of fellow first responders in line of duty deaths, suicides, illnesses and accidents. Since the team's inception in 2007, the peer support program has grown on a regional level and basis. There are now more than 50 agencies that have employees' training in peer support in the Kansas City metro area alone. This group meets to receive training, updates and most importantly to build relationships with each other. In addition, if the employee needs exceed the capabilities of the Peer Support Team, a referral can be sought for an employee to see a psychologist at no cost to the employee.

On April 2nd, 2010, the Olathe Police Department authorized a Special Duty Assignments/Military Deployments policy providing requirements, conditions and process for the return of active duty military personnel to full duty as a commissioned officer or civilian employee with the Olathe Police Department. This policy has grown over time to include employees who participate in disaster relief efforts, prolonged military deployments and officers/detectives exposed to child abuse (physical and sexual) and child pornography investigations. It mandates and provides access to a department approved

psychologist for those employee's exposure to harmful effects or those transitioning from military service back to traditional employment within a police agency.

In 2010 as well, the Department launched their voluntary fitness incentive. This program awarded additional time off (up to 8 additional hours off) for performance on the Cooper Fitness Program. For those who need to continue to work on their overall fitness additional time could be earned by tracking their fitness efforts.

In 2008 and 2011, Command Staff members of the Olathe Police Department met Supervisory Special Agent Sam Feemster. Mr. Feemster was an instructor at the Federal Bureau of Investigations National Academy and had taught classes on Stress Management and Spirituality, Vitality and Wellness in Law Enforcement. Mr. Feemster's experience and insight was thoughtful and researched based with additional research and analysis conducted in concert with the Behavioral Sciences Unit of the FBI.

In 2011, the Olathe Police Department staff began asking themselves these two questions. 1) Are police an essential good or a necessary evil? 2) What is our duty/obligation to our employees? These questions provided a launching point for what would become the Olathe Police Department BeSTOW (Beyond Survival Toward Olathe Wellness) program.

In 2012, the Olathe Police Department began a year-long journey with Feemster Linkins Consulting LLC to educate 12 volunteers for a new internal wellness-related assignment. Agency leaders understood that for a culture of wellness to take hold, it had to be developed from the ground up and not the top-down. After a two-year study was completed, a holistic philosophy and plan were developed.

The Olathe Wellness program is entitled BeSTOW (Beyond Survival Toward Olathe Wellness). The program is open to all police department employees both civilian and sworn. The BeSTOW Initiative includes the following:

The mission of the Olathe Police Department's wellness initiative is to provide the environment and tools to promote holistic wellness to all employees in support of a balanced life, both personally and professionally. Holistic wellness focuses on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness so that employees will be better prepared to more effectively process the health issues, stress and emotional trauma prevalent within their chosen profession.

The department recognizes that traditional training has primarily focused on the physical and mental and can neglect the core of what makes us all human: our emotions and spirit. We recognize the importance of training employees in all four dimensions of wellness, so we can move beyond the mindset of just surviving toward a life in which we can all thrive throughout our careers.

The BeSTOW initiative has identified the following four key phases in an employee's career: recruitment, training, retention and retirement. Initial and continued focus on holistic wellness as every employee progresses through these career phases is critical to maintaining a balanced and healthy life. Multiple programs, concepts and training topics exist within each of these career phases that can aid every employee in achieving holistic wellness. Below is a non-exhaustive list of examples in which employees can maintain or improve their holistic health throughout their career.

Recruitment (pre-hire) Recruiting employees who reflect the community that we serve, as well the standards we represent within our components of holistic wellness and law enforcement.

Training (post-hire through release) • Selection of trainers • Mentoring • Seminars on health/financial investments

Retention (probationary period through retirement) • Career development • Shared workload • Collateral duties • Mental health debrief • Meal breaks • Teamwork • Volunteering to establish relationships within the community • Physical fitness testing • Wellness clinic

Retirement (pre- and post-hire) • Seminars on health, financial investments, emotional health, thriving, survival • Retiree involvement — mentoring/continuing involvement

Recruitment

How we care and take care of individuals during their pre-hiring/recruitment phase is where our agency continues to receive a great deal of praise from applicants and now employees. It is not uncommon for applicants and new employees to tell us that how they were treated and cared for prior to being an employee is why they eventually became an employee with our department and not another agency. At the beginning of their career, new officers (both recruits and lateral officer) meet with the Chief of Police, Deputy Chiefs of Police, member of Peer Support and a Psychologist for lunch where we discuss career survival and introduce Peer Support, BeSTOW program, expectations and mentors are assigned to each officer. These mentors can last an entire career with an officer, should they desire. At this meeting we provide them with two books, *The Nobility of Police, Guardians of Democracy* and *Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement*. The “mentors” are all members of the Peer Support Team or BeSTOW Team who are required to check in on their mentee at least once a month (even when at the academy) and throughout their training program and perhaps their career.

Training

Throughout an officer’s career multiple opportunities are afforded for training. Within those internally developed training opportunities wellness and safety is incorporated. External training includes *Below 100*, *Officer Survival* and a multitude of other opportunities. In addition, in-house experts, officers who

have battled addiction have put on seminars to explain the process of identification, recognition, treatment and battle the stigma in our profession of “if I admit I have a problem, I will get fired.” These officers validate the philosophy and show employees that they can survive some challenges in the career and can continue to be a police officer.

Retention

At the two-year point in time with the Olathe Police Department the Chief of Police checks in with officers again along with a Psychologist for an informal session on how well we are doing as an agency, any new officer pitfalls and dialogue about promises made promises kept.

Officers at the 7 to 10-year point in their career are assigned to attend the Blue Courage program with all expenses paid by the Olathe Police Department.

Officers at any stage of their career are offered the opportunity, annually, to attend the Badges of Hope Conference with expenses paid by the Olathe Police Department. Additional information on Badges of Hope can be found here: <https://www.badgeofhopeministries.com/>

Retirement

Officers from 15-20 years of service are encouraged to attend financial seminars, burn-out seminars and planning for retirement opportunities that are available. The Department has hosted the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University and number of times. Annually, we host a retired employee’s luncheon that is typically followed by a retired officers qualification course for weapons qualification.

Spouses/Significant Others

In addition to these phases and sessions listed above we include an annual spouses/significant other night is held to discuss helping families through critical incidents, explaining a law enforcement career and building a good support system for officers.

Each employee will ultimately determine how to best achieve his or her highest level of holistic wellness and is encouraged to use those aspects of the Wellness Philosophy that provide the support, assistance and resources that are most beneficial to him or her. It is understood that not every component will be applicable to each employee; however, the intent of the Wellness Philosophy is to serve the needs of a diverse work group.

In 2013 members from the Olathe Police Department attended a week-long retreat in California called the West Coast Post Trauma Retreat (WCPR). This retreat is for first responders dealing with the effects of trauma from work related or personal trauma they have experienced. The retreat is a peer-led program with clinician oversight that offers intensive treatment and follow-up care for those suffering from work or personal stress related injuries. What was initially thought to provide some advanced peer support training for their respected teams turned into a revelation of new ways to help their first responder co-workers. For the next 3 years multiple agencies worked together to develop a retreat of their own and network with other first responder programs. In the fall of 2017 the group hosted their first mid-west post trauma retreat. The response was overwhelming, and they continue to host the retreat with the oversight of WCPR. Also, during this time, the group has formed an organization called FRST (First Responders Support Team). This organization is comprised of first responders from Police, Fire, EMS, and dispatch groups whose mission is the same in helping those who are affected by critical incident stress. The FRST organization provides response to critical incidents providing immediate resources, response to provide Critical Incident Stress Debriefings after the incidents, help with line of duty funeral planning, help to provide peer support training throughout the state of Kansas and the Kansas City metropolitan area, and has a network of clinically competent psychologists that can help those who need professional assistance. The organization is in its infancy, but plans are big to provide a host of peer support services to all first responders in the state and metro area.

In July 2018, the Mid-America Regional Council launched a Command Staff Peer Support pilot program.

As the nonprofit association of city and county governments for the Kansas City region, MARC has managed the region's 911 system since the early 1980s and coordinated regional homeland security efforts since 2003.

With guidance and support from MARC's Regional Homeland Security Coordinating Committee, emergency services agencies across the region are working together to advance the region's ability to respond and recover from intentional attacks that result in casualties and fatalities — potentially among both civilians and responders. One goal of this work is to strengthen our capacity to help those who are affected by these incidents, including survivors, families, responding agency personnel and the community as a whole. The idea of building a regional capability around command staff peer support training resonated with leaders in fire, law enforcement and emergency medical services.

The pilot program — believed to be the first of its kind in the nation — is testing the feasibility and functionality of a command-level peer support program. A 12-person group consisting of senior level police, fire and EMS staff, including Major Wade Lanphear from the Olathe Police Department, who was a pilot member of the OPD Peer Support Team in 2007.

In the first quarter of 2019, the Olathe Police Department plans to partner with the Heartland Trauma Response Network (TRN). This network provides trauma therapy to communities that are devastated by critical incidents. Part of their response is to provide Eye Movement Desensitization Reprogramming (EMDR) therapy. The TRN has been involved with the first responders retreat providing EMDR therapy and has been looking for a first responder subgroup to provide more therapy options. They have selected the Olathe Police Department to pilot this program which will offer up to 6 EMDR therapy

session to first responders. Just another example of how the Olathe Police Department continues to find innovative ways to provide wellness options to its members and to lead the region in this area.

In conclusion the significance of having holistic wellness and robust peer support networks and policy cannot be overstated. These programs can save the life of a colleague or friend, salvage a career, save a marriage or keep a family together and, potentially, keep an agency out of the headlines. These programs can aid and assist officer in understanding that while they have many built-in coping mechanisms, they may need help from an outside resource.

Leadership Captain Jeff Bragg
 Major Wade Lanphear
 Deputy Chief Shawn Reynolds
 Chief Steve Menke

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<https://www.emsworld.com/article/1221675/healthy-commanders-make-healthy-agencies>

<http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/officer-safety-corner-policing-with-purpose-a-journey-to-officer-wellness-and-safety/>

<https://public.ntoa.org/AppResources/publications/Articles/2411.pdf>