

**City of Irving, Texas**  
**Public Safety Wellness Unit**  
**Irving Police and Fire Departments**



**Dallas County – City of Irving, Texas**

Dallas County was formed in 1846. It is the second-most populous county in the State of Texas. The county had a total of 909 square miles in 2020 and a population of 2,613,539. Dallas County is included in the Dallas-Arlington-Fort Worth metropolitan statistical area, colloquially referred to as the Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex.

The five largest ethnic groups in Dallas County, TX are White (Hispanic) 32.1%, White (Non-Hispanic) 29.6%, Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) 22.1%, Other 6.38% and Asian 6.14%.

The City of Irving is the second largest city in Dallas County with a population of 256,684, following the City of Dallas with a population of 1,304,379. Dallas has a crime rate of 4,291 crimes per 100,00 people (83% above national average). Dallas is the county seat and largest city in Dallas County and ranks third among the biggest cities in Texas and it's the ninth largest city in the U.S. It's also one of the anchors of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, a huge metro area spreading across 11 counties.

Irving is one of just seven DFW cities with more than 200,000 people and one of the inner ring Dallas suburbs. Additionally, Irving is one of the most diverse cities in the country, also known for being the home of ten Fortune 500 headquarters.

## History

### Irving Police Department

The Irving Police Department's (IPD) first paid patrolman on foot, was paid for by donations from businesses and citizens. The city's population was approximately 1,500. In 1942 the Irving Police Auxiliary was formed. The City Council passed an ordinance granting a charter for these volunteers to become Irving's first reserve officers. In 2014 there were 346 sworn officers and 242 full-time employees. In 2023, the IPD has 636 employees (403 sworn officers and 233 non-sworn employees). The Chief of Police is Derick Miller. (See attachment 1).



### Irving Fire Department

The Irving Fire Department (IFD) was formed in 1925 as a volunteer Fire Department after a fire started in the only schoolhouse. They started with 20 men.



Currently, the IFD has 408 employees (396 employees and 12 fire stations). The Fire Chief is Victor Conley (see attachment 2).



### **City of Irving Public Safety Wellness Unit – Established October 1, 2021**

The establishment of the Public Safety Wellness Unit (PSWU) is to help our first responders develop and maintain healthy habits throughout their career and foster resiliency. City of Irving first responders include police officers, firefighters, detention officers, dispatchers, retirees, and their families.

The City of Irving First Peer Support Program has been active since 2016, initially known as the Irving Police Peer Support Program after one of our officers died by suicide. In 2019, we incorporated the Irving Fire Department. In 2021, the city of Irving formalized the program by establishing the Public Safety Wellness Unit (PSWU). The PSWU oversees the peer support programs, provides crisis intervention 24/7, critical incident debriefings, crisis counseling, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Yoga for First Responders (YFFR), biofeedback / neurofeedback, case management, consultations, and trainings. A full description of our program and services is provided in this submission.

The PSWU ensures mental health services are readily available for Irving's first responders 24/7. The goal is to provide early intervention and stabilization shortly after a critical incident occurs to reduce stress-related symptoms. Additionally, the unit's primary purpose is to ensure the safety and quality of life for first responders - both on the job and in their personal lives.

The unit has an introductory information webpage on the city's website (see attachment 3) that includes a brief description of services provided, as well as contact information. Additionally, the clinical staff developed information brochure, business cards, and leaflets to disseminate the information amongst all first responders. The clinical staff presented at all police briefings and toured all twelve fire stations to provide information about the new wellness unit. Additionally, there was a promotional video presented to all first responders. Lastly, our monthly newsletter also has our clinicians' contact information where we can be reached 24/7. (See January '23 Newsletter – attachment 4).

With the inception of the unit, part of the clinicians' responsibilities is to continually visit the stations and go on regular ride alongs.

Link to the PSWU 3-minute promotional video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76eyoA0\\_hd4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76eyoA0_hd4)

To readily assist Irving's first responders, the wellness unit's staff utilizes a variety of research-based, cutting-edge training and interventions. Through ongoing training, the PSWU has the tools and knowledge to deploy a variety of lifesaving measures.

### **Structure of the Public Safety Wellness Unit**

Another goal of the PSWU is to develop a dedicated unit for our first responders and continue to work with our peer support teams to provide the clinical oversight, trainings, case management, and crisis intervention as needed. The wellness unit strives to eradicate stigma associated with mental health as it relates to first responders. An article from Kaiser Permanente titled, "How Employers Can Help First Responders Stay Mentally and Emotionally Strong," noted that *"7 out of 10 first responders say they'd be more likely to seek professional counseling if a leader in their organization spoke openly about their own experience. Additionally, it stated that 8 in 10 say that if a close colleague spoke up, they would be encouraged to seek help for themselves."* The article also indicates that 57% fear negative repercussions for seeking help (cite article).

To address these concerns, the original peer support policy made all debriefings, defusings, and individual crisis interventions after a critical incident mandatory. This disallows any labeling or singling out any individual for receiving any form of psychological aid after a critical incident. Additionally, all our peer support members are vetted throughout our interview process, and all have a range of experience with critical incidents (due to personal and/or professional events) that enables them to relate to other first responders experiencing acute or chronic stress reactions after a critical incident. Our peer support members also receive mandatory quarterly trainings to equip them with information they can relay to their coworkers such as referral information, counseling interventions, books, and share coping skills. The success of our program is directly related to the work our peer members perform on a day-to-day basis during their one-on-one interactions.

The Wellness Unit also seeks to promote safety in the workplace and facilitate accessibility of services. The PSWU's offices are located at a location separate from any city-owned building to ensure the privacy of our first responders. Additionally, unit's clinicians are on call for emergency 24/7 and work rotating schedules to actively engage within the first responder's culture and work environment.

Our full-time wellness unit promotes the principles of psychological first aid which are safety, efficacy, calmness, connectedness, and to foster hope and optimism. The dedicated clinicians will perform critical incident needs assessments in the workplace by implementing a pre-clinical, multidisciplinary team, identify high-risk individuals, target mental health, resilience, distress, and risk behaviors, identify barriers to care and services, offer health education for prevention, assessment, and referral, hold informational briefings, offer grief counseling, and integrate family support.

The PSWU's structure consists of three staff members: a senior manager and two clinicians. The senior manager functions as the program coordinator, oversees clinicians, coordinates Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) interventions, develops trainings, acts as liaison between police and fire peer support groups, and coordinates assistance to other police and fire department through the DFW CISM Network. This is a full-time salary position which requires a licensed psychologist with a Ph.D. or PsyD. in clinical or counseling psychology. The other two clinicians are also full-time salary positions which require a minimum of a master's degree in counseling or related field and licensed to include LPC or LCSW.

### **Clinical Staff Minimum Requirements:**

The PSWU clinicians' minimum requirements, in addition to their clinical credentials, respective licensures, and clinical experience, must fulfill the following requirements:

- Critical Incident Stress Management Certification (CISM) or be eligible to obtain it.
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) trained (Minimum).
- Certified First Responders Counselor (CFRC) or possess prior experience working with first responders.
- Biofeedback training, or the ability to obtain training.

The Wellness Unit is a separate division under the City Manager's Office. It operates separately from public safety departments to safeguard the reality and perception of privacy and confidentiality for our first responders. Additionally, the PSWU created an advisory committee to engage primary stakeholders to give advice and support in a collaborative structure by contributing strategic thinking and access expertise or connections that are not readily available via other means.

The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to advise the City Manager on the PSWU effectiveness in meeting the needs of first responders and their families, provide insights into how well the Program is meeting the mental health and policy analysis needs, and provide knowledge of current trends on mental health issues regarding first responders; including but not limited to suggestions for keeping the program current with best practices and pioneering interventions and trainings. The committee will also provide input on the Senior Manager's overall performance related to the management of the unit. The committee functions solely in an advisory capacity whose primary responsibility is to provide advice and recommendations to the City Manager and the PSWU Senior Manager. The committee has no managerial control and cannot direct the staff to act on its recommendations or feedback.

The members of the PSWU Advisory Committee includes a group of carefully selected Advisors from within and outside of the organization, such as:

- Finance department representative
- Risk Management representative
- Fire Department Peer Support representative
- Police Department Peer Support representative
- External Mental Health Clinician with at least 5 yrs. minimum experience developing policies & procedures for peer support teams and/or first responders wellness unit; the provision of direct services to first responders; and EMDR trained/certified.

## Mission Statement

The Public Safety Wellness Unit is committed to promoting quality educational awareness, interventions, trainings, and self-care to reduce physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health issues for our first responders.

## Vision

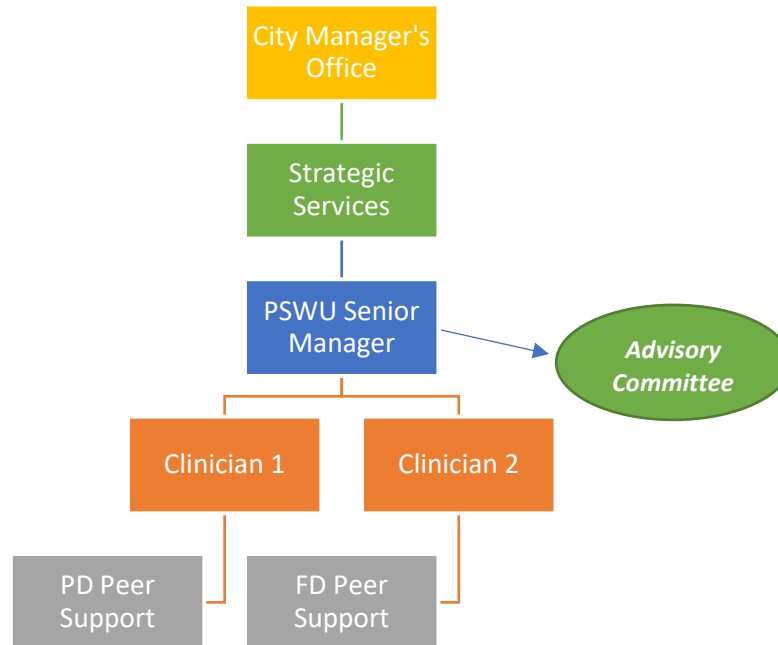
The Public Safety Wellness Unit will deliver quality, research based, and cutting-edge mental health interventions through individuals who are committed to reducing first responders' injuries and deaths through a common set of core values.

## Core Values

As a program we value:

Core Values	Definition
Accountability	Each of us is responsible for our words, our actions, and our results.
Confidentiality	Respect confidentiality information entrusted by individuals.
Commitment	We provide excellent services and support.
Compassion	We are dedicated to respect and improve the lives of the first responders, and we serve with compassion and care.
Excellence	We are driven to consistently deliver superior results and outcomes.
Integrity	We hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards. We are fair and honor our commitments.
Teamwork	We achieve more when we collaborate and all work together.

## PSWU Organizational Chart



### Project Scope

The expansion of our original peer support program (reactive services) to a holistic wellness program (proactive services) includes the following services for both the employee (police officers, firefighters, dispatchers, and detention officers) as well as their immediate families.

- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) protocols after a critical incident as part of our CISM debriefings:

EMDR therapy facilitates the accessing and processing of traumatic memories and other adverse life experience to bring these to an adaptive resolution.

(<https://www.emdr.com/what-is-emdr/>). When an individual undergoes EMDR, memories of a traumatic event is accessed in a very specific way. It combines eye movements (there are other forms of bilateral stimulation such as left and right tapping) and guided instructions to help the person reprocess what they remember from the negative experience. In the reprocessing phase, the brain can “repair” the mental injury from that memory. The person will be able to remember the event and no longer feel like they are reliving it (e.g., PTSD), hence the related feelings become much more manageable.

EMDR therapy has been extensively researched and practiced with high rates of success. It has been endorsed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA); the US Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense; The World Health Organization; and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Dept. of HHS.

EMDR is a psychotherapy treatment that was originally designed to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories (i.e., PTSD, depression, anxiety).

- Yoga for First Responders (YFFR):

In recent years, great interest has emerged from different fields regarding first responders' mental health. These other fields have a holistic approach and have developed specific interventions and/or programs tailored specifically for first responders. Yoga for first responders is an example of these innovative programs focused on improving not just their mental health, but also their physical health, as well as enhancing optimal levels of job performance from decision making to tactical skills. This program provides first responders traditional yoga training that is culturally informed and job specific for the purposes of effectively processing stress, building resilience, and enhancing performance.

- Biofeedback/Neurofeedback:

Biofeedback is a technique used to learn to control some bodily functions, such as heart rate. During biofeedback, the individual is connected to electrical sensors that help them receive information about their body. Neurofeedback is a training method that helps the brain to self-regulate. Additionally, neurofeedback addresses the trauma resiliency directly at its source, the brain.

Military, Veterans, Law Enforcement, First Responders and Homeland Security are ideal candidates for neurofeedback training because:

- Neurofeedback is a strength-based, skill-training approach that is complimentary to the law enforcement and first responders' cultures.
  - Just like a personal trainer offers physical fitness, we offer brain fitness.
  - Unlike therapy, the individual does not have to talk about the trauma to resolve it. Neurofeedback addresses issues at the root: the brain.
  - Neurofeedback peak performance training helps reduce impulsive mistakes, providing better focus and attention, and enhancing accuracy in performance.
- Ongoing trainings for the employees and for their families in emotional survival, self-care, suicide prevention, financial management, alcohol, and drug addiction, among others. These trainings have been part of our quarterly trainings since 2017. Additional trainings on self-care and burnout have been provided to other departments such as Animal Services and all fire department stations. Last year the PSWU began Wellness Check Ins with dispatchers where the clinicians provided psychoeducational trainings on site and during the different shifts to cover all dispatchers. In 2022 the PSWU also began to offer training to the spouses related to trauma and vicarious trauma within the first responder family.
  - Incorporation of Peer Support Wellness Day for peer support members and their families by providing "team building" activities throughout the year.
  - Wellness check-ins for special units and periodic meetings with other departments such as dispatchers, detention officers, and peer support team members.



To succeed in our vision, we structured our wellness program utilizing a prevention framework. Our wellness program is comprised of three main prevention strategies: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.

### **Primary Prevention**

Primary prevention encompasses strategies to intervene before the issues or effects occur. The main goal is to target individuals who may be at risk of developing mental health conditions and intervene to prevent or decrease the onset of that condition (i.e., depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, etc.), and increase protective factors. Key components of primary prevention include raising awareness and education. The wellness unit provides continuous education and training which begin at the academy level for both fire and police.

This training facet includes the following trainings and activities:

- Inoculation training – this training focuses on the new recruits and their spouses/partners, which includes emotional survival, self-care, and suicide prevention. By providing our new recruits with the appropriate information early on in their career, we will begin to build up their “emotional immune system.”
- New Supervisor’s Training – this training is part of the new supervisor’s training curriculum. The goal is to provide new supervisors with information to increase their awareness about signs and symptoms of distress, depression, posttraumatic stress, suicidal thoughts and/or behaviors among their subordinates and to equip them with the understanding and resources to help their first responders.
- Suicide Prevention Campaign - “Let’s Talk About It” is an internal suicide awareness and prevention campaign to inform and educate the public safety departments, administrators, spouses/family on prevention, signs and symptoms, resources, and what they can do to help someone expressing or at risk of suicide. For this campaign the wellness unit developed an introductory video featuring two of our first responders (i.e., a police officer and a firefighter) which have been identified as our workplace champions whose personal statements have had tremendous impact. By sharing their personal experience, in suicide, others have been able to come forth to talk about their personal struggles with mental health issues. (Link to 5:50 minute video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wWvIBnib-c> ).
- Biofeedback and Neurofeedback Training – in the primary prevention facet we use biofeedback and neurofeedback training to educate our first responders early on to learn how to regulate their physiological response to stress.
- Yoga for First Responders (YFFR) – this is also a prevention tool used a primary intervention to promote, develop, and maintain physical wellbeing and resilience.
- Monthly Newsletter (see attached) – the wellness unit disseminates a newsletter to continually provide information and education on a variety of topics. This newsletter is also shared with spouses/family.

### **Secondary Prevention**

The second tier of our program focuses on the early detection and prompts early intervention of mental health disorders. At this level of prevention, we aim at detecting the mental health issue early to intervene as soon as possible.

The secondary level of prevention is comprised of the following trainings and/or activities:

- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) interventions. Through this secondary prevention strategy our first responders will receive immediate intervention (defusing, debriefing, and/or individual crisis intervention) after experiencing a critical event on the job or in their personal lives. These interventions enable the peer members and clinicians to identify those individuals experiencing significant distress who may benefit for more in-depth treatment.
- One-on-One Peer Support - This intervention promotes safety and anonymity to enable other first responders to reach out for help to one of their peers.
- Biofeedback and neurofeedback – in the secondary prevention facet it is used to help alleviate or eliminate the signs and symptoms of trauma and stress.
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) – this intervention is also used after each debriefing to alleviate or eliminate the onset of trauma and stress after a critical incident. The wellness unit clinicians also utilize specific first responders’ protocols to address other chronic and pre-existing traumas.
- YFFR – it is also used as a secondary prevention strategy to target individuals experiencing chronic physical and mental health conditions because of cumulative trauma.
- Wellness Check-Ins – the wellness unit clinicians provide wellness checkups targeting specifically individuals in special units (i.e., child abuse unit, domestic violence unit, narcotics, cybercrime unit, crime scene units) to screen for depression, suicide risk, posttraumatic stress, anxiety, substance abuse issues, etc., to promptly intervene by providing in-house services or referring them out to private clinicians and/or inpatient or outpatient programs.

This second aspect of the program is intended to provide the initial “psychological first aid” by addressing the basic needs and reducing the psychological distress by providing effective, best practice, research-based interventions. It also includes normalizing and educating on common stress reactions and equipping the first responders with healthy coping strategies. In summary, the main goal of this secondary intervention is to help minimize the impact of a traumatic event and or chronic trauma.

### **Tertiary Prevention**

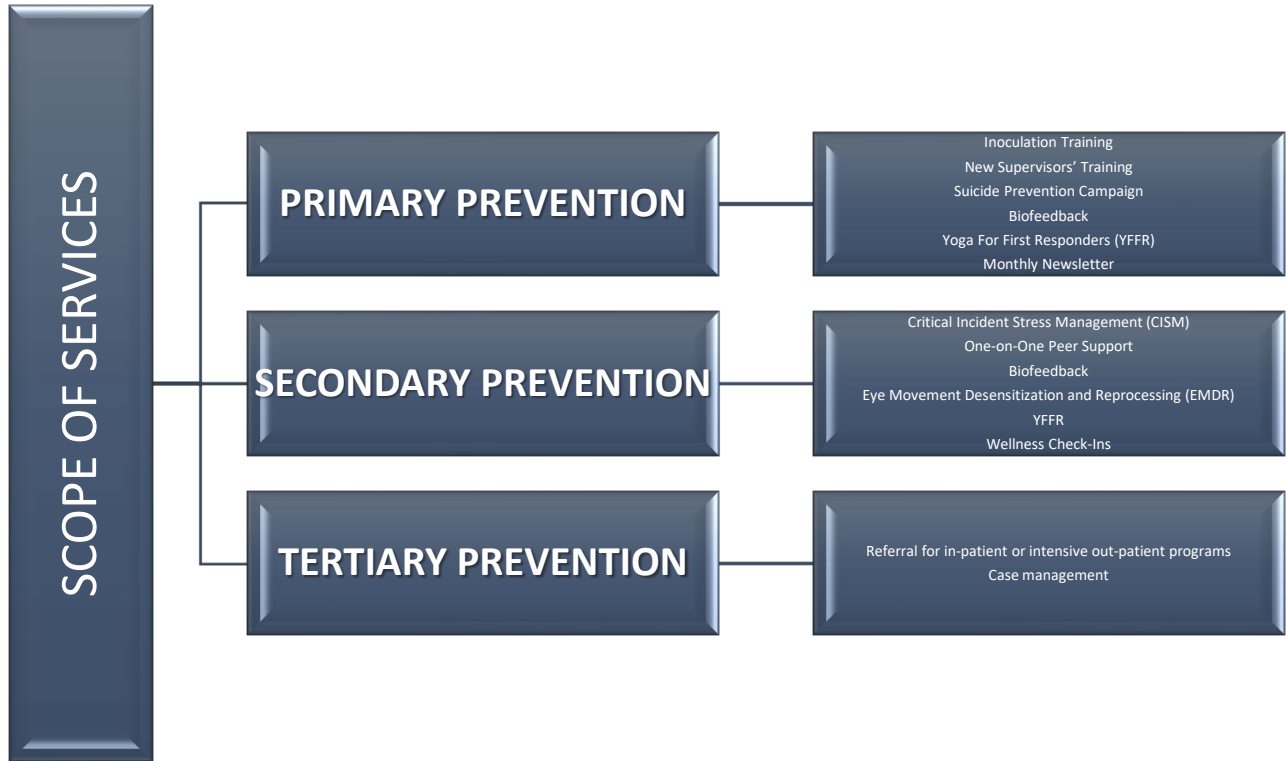
The tertiary level of prevention for individuals who have already developed mental health disorders and prevention is no longer an option. For these first responders the goal is to reduce the residual effects of a traumatic critical incident or cumulative trauma by maximizing the outcome and avoiding further complications. To ensure the individual is supported throughout the process, our program will provide the proper referrals for peer support and psychotherapeutic services as needed.

The tertiary level of prevention includes the following interventions:

- Referral for in-patient and/or intensive out-patient programs for mental health issues, substance abuse, or both.
- Case management – provides the support to the first responders and spouse or partner following in-patient, or out-patient treatment related to mental health, substance abuse or

crisis. This includes following up with medication and treatment compliance. Support to spouses or partners by providing referrals, education, and assigning a peer member to help support the first responder and their family through the process.

**Fig. 1 PSWU Scope of Services Chart**



**Peer Support Services**

In addition to the clinical services provided, the wellness unit clinicians oversee both fire and police peer support teams. Currently the police peer support team is comprised of 34 members (there’s representation from every department, retirees, and spouses). The fire peer support team is comprised of 19 members. The clinicians also coordinate all critical incident interventions and are responsible for developing ongoing quarterly trainings to equip the peer support members on several topics. In the past six years our peer support teams have participated from in-house trainings as well as trainings from other agencies.

The training topics provided are listed below:

- Substance abuse
- Marital Conflict
- Suicide Prevention
- The Grateful Brain
- Financial Planning
- Self-Care
- Tabletop exercises on major critical incidents and suicide prevention

- Officer Involved Shooting
- Getting Started
- Emotional Survival
- Ethics, Role Conflict, and Confidentiality
- Grief and Loss Training
- Spirituality Training

The policy for both teams (see attachment 5) delineate the function of the peer support services. In the City of Irving, all CISM interventions after a critical incident are mandatory. This decision was made to minimize singling out individuals participating in a debriefing process and being characterized as “weak.” Consequently, everyone directly involved in a critical incident is expected to attend a debriefing, defusing, or an individual intervention. Although attendance is mandatory, participation is not. However, everyone is a recipient of the information shared.

Peer support members are constantly engaging one-on-one and providing support to their fellow workers regarding other issues such as, marital conflict, depression, work related, etc. They submit monthly stats anonymously through a Google document to capture the number of contacts made and the related issues discussed (see statistical form template – attachment 6). This data is updated and presented to the Advisory Committee, the City Manager, and City Council in the End of the Year Report.

### Peer Support Program Supporting Data

Since the outset of our **peer support** program in 2016 we have gathered the following data.

							Start of PSWU	
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021	2022	
<b>One-on-One</b>	60	154	151	153	208	115	197	
<b>Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)</b>	13 Groups/88 individuals	8 Groups/188 individuals	6 Groups/59 individuals	11 Groups/113 individuals	16 Groups/65 individuals	6 Groups/14 individuals	16 Groups/35 individuals	
<b>Suicide Intervention</b>	0	3	5	4	8	3	3	
<b>Trainings</b>	10	13	7	8	14	17	26	

*\*Fire department data included.*

Prior to the establishment of peer support, in a period of 10 years the IPD lost four officers to suicide. Since the start of our peer support program in 2016 we have successfully intervened with 26 individuals (i.e., first responders and family members) that expressed active suicidal ideations. Individuals have been more open to seeking the help our peer support program is able to provide. Each of the 26 individuals received the help they needed and were able to return to work.

In addition to the peer support one-on-one services, since the development of the Public Safety Wellness Unit in October 2021, the clinicians have provided the following services.

2021-YTD	
Services	Number
Number of appointments:	330
Number of individuals:	92
YFFR sessions:	58
Trainings:	26
Crisis Interventions:	10
Wellness Check-ins:	35
Case Management	69
Triage	35
EMDR	36

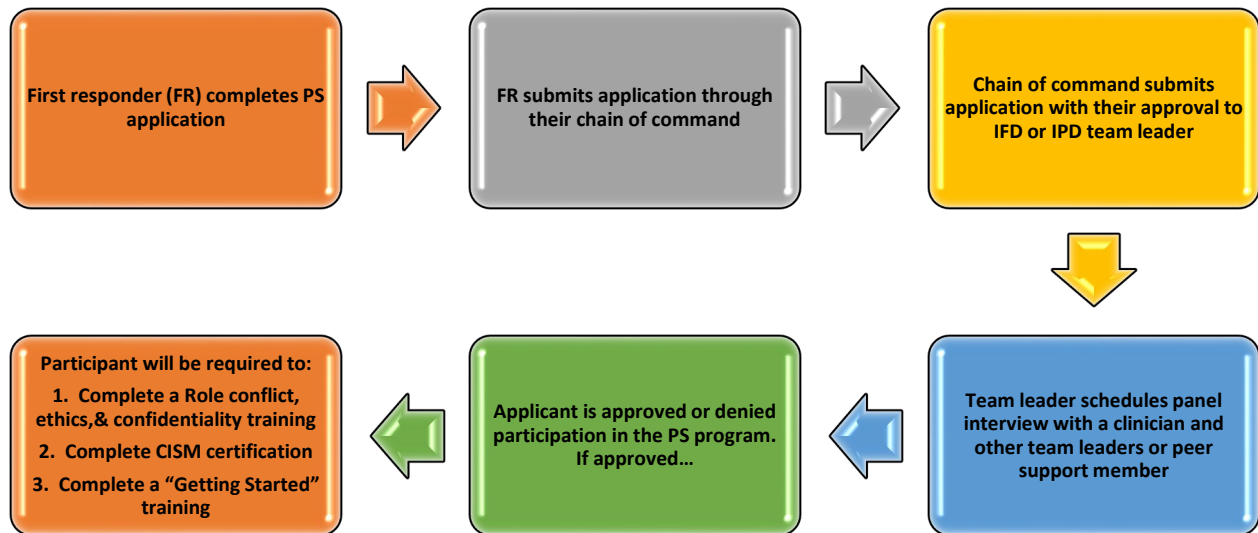
### **Additional Benefits and Services**

Throughout the years the Internal Affairs or Professional Standard Department and peer support have develop a collaborative relationship to provide support to officers undergoing an administrative investigation.

Our peer support teams also aid other departments around the DFW area after a critical incident.

### **Peer Support Program Recruitment and Onboarding Process**

Our peer support program’s recruitment and onboarding process is best explained in the following flow chart:



As part of our recruitment process, prospective peer members must fulfill a list of criteria (see attachment 7). Some of these criteria describe the individual’s personality traits (i.e., empathetic, excellent communication skills) along with a good standing within their respective departments.

### **Collaborative Partners**

The City of Irving has made significant strides in the support it has shown all first responders and their immediate families. One of those advances was a partnership with Responder Health to provide an additional venue for our first responders to seek help. Responder Health provides a variety of services such as vetted clinicians in and out of state, vetted inpatient facilities for mental health and substance abuse issues, as well as 24/7 confidential telephone access to other peers for consultation and/or crisis intervention. Additionally, the City of Irving granted first responders a 30 day leave for mental health or substance abuse issues, with no out of pocket expense, and without having to use their sick leave.

In addition to our collaborative relationship with Responder Health, our PSWU staff continues to expand on our referral resources in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area and neighboring cities and hospitals to provide our first responders more options for assistance.

Collaborative efforts have been made with hospitals in the area such as Parkland Hospital who was the first to implement a “first responder” intake protocol to increase safety and privacy for our first responders during a mental health crisis. Most recently, the PSWU has engaged in a collaborative effort with the Carrollton Springs Hospital – Springstone Help for Heroes Program, which also instituted a “first responder” intake protocol in a trauma informed care environment.

The City of Irving partnered with the new Law Enforcement Peer Support Program of NAMI North Texas. This organization developed an inter-department peer support network to cover the North Texas region.

## **Successes in 2022**

Dr. Betancourt, Senior Manager of the PSWU was invited to participate as a panelist in three important events to share the particularities of our wellness unit.

1. **International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio:** ICMA is the leading organization of local government professionals dedicated to creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world. Dr. Betancourt, along with the Irving Police Chief and the City of Irving City Manager, Chris Hillman, presented on the innovations that the Irving Police Department has made in the past six years to improve mental health services for both police and the community.



**From left to right: Chris Hillman, Chief Derick Miller, Dr. Mildred Betancourt**

2. **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas:** Dr. Betancourt was invited to discuss the importance of mental health among first responders. This panel was sponsored by Motorola Solutions Foundation with Michael



**From left to right: Michael Nila, Dr. Robert B. Sobo, Dr. Mildred Betancourt, and Motorola Executive Director for Motorola Solutions Foundation, Karem Perez.**



3. **Inaugural Symposium on Mental Health PTSD & Suicide Prevention at the Irving Convention Center, Irving, Texas:** This symposium was coordinated and sponsored by the Greater Dallas Veterans Foundation and City Council Member, the Honorable Albert Zapanta. The purpose of the event was to bring stakeholders and healthcare practitioners the latest information and research to better assist with mental health, PTSD, and suicide prevention to help first responders and veterans. (See attachment 8).
4. **Spouses/Family Program – “Meet & Greet”:** this was the initial event to introduce the PSWU to the first responders’ spouses to provide them information and to hear from the spouses what their needs are. The PSWU is developing training opportunities and activities to continue to solidify and extend the Spouses/Family Program.

*Spouses Meet and Greet*  
with Spouses Panel Discussion

Join us as we introduce the Public Safety Wellness Unit, discuss our roles as spouses and help us learn how our program can best support you and your family.

**WHO:**  
Only Spouses of Current Irving Fire and Police

**WHEN:**  
Saturday, October 22, 2022  
8:30am - Noon

**WHERE:**  
Irving Training Academy  
Breakfast and Lunch will be served

Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/spouses-meet-and-greet-tickets-432046481657>

5. **Dallas County First Responder Mental Health Program (FRMHP) Grant:** the county allocated the City of Irving \$186,306 for behavioral health care services. We are excited about the opportunity to further extend our behavioral health and peer support services to other public safety departments in Dallas County. Our unit will be able to expand our



services to offer trainings to first responders and their families/spouses throughout Dallas County, specifically smaller agencies with little or no resources. The PSWU will be hiring a part-time program coordinator to oversee this program.

## **PSWU's Initiatives for FY 2022-23**

### **Suicide Prevention and Awareness Campaign**

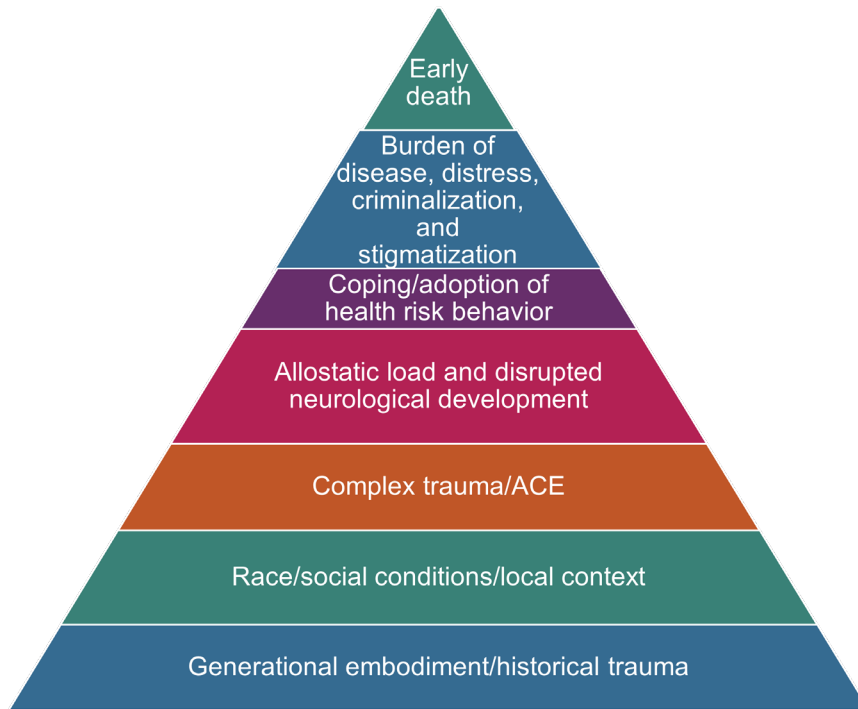
The PSWU delineated a five-year plan to fulfill the two main initiatives. The first initiative is a suicide prevention and awareness campaign to educate the main stakeholders about first responders' suicide. The campaign is called "*Let's Talk About It.*" It is estimated that 30 percent of first responders develop behavioral health conditions including, but not limited to, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as compared with 20 percent in the general population (Abbot et al., 2015). In a study about suicidality, firefighters were reported to have higher attempt and ideation rates than the general population (Stanley et al., 2016). In law enforcement, the estimates suggest between 125 and 300 police officers commit suicide every year (Badge of Life, 2016). Reference SAMHSA, 2018.

For this first campaign the PSWU staff coordinated the unit's open house in the new facilities, developed promotional literature, T-shirts, give-away items to roll out the campaign during the suicide prevention month in September 2022 (Link to 37 seconds video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uyr2MP0HdQ>). Throughout the year the PSWU staff will continue to engage in educating the public safety departments through the monthly newsletter, a series of 5 videos, and visits to stations and briefings.

The second initiative for our current fiscal year is a Trauma Informed Care for First Responders Campaign. This campaign will run parallel to the suicide prevention campaign starting in March 2023 to augment the importance of safety in the workplace.

Trauma informed care (TIC) is becoming a standard of practice in many hospital, social services agencies, and government agencies. TIC is an organizational framework that involves recognizing, understanding, and responding to the effects of trauma. It has become a widely recognized paradigm for creating safe spaces for trauma survivors, as well as addressing the effects of trauma on staff and the organization.

Studies show that when trauma is unaddressed, it can lead to or exacerbate mental illnesses and substance use disorders. It can also lead to poorer physical health outcomes, according to the ACEs Study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente in the mid-1990s. The initial study focused on how traumatic childhood experiences may negatively affect adult health. The ACE study found a direct link between childhood trauma and adult onset of chronic disease, incarceration, and employment challenges. The higher the number of ACEs, the greater the incident of negative outcomes as seen below:



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). Violence prevention: *The ACE pyramid* (adapted by RYSE Youth center).

In more recent studies like The Philadelphia ACE Project in 2017, shows that 83.2% of the participants reported at least one ACE, in contrast to first study conducted by Kaiser Permanente and the Centers of Disease Control where 69% of the participants had at least one ACE.

Due to the prevalence of trauma in the general population, many of our staff members could be dealing with their own history of trauma. Additionally, working with persons served who have their own trauma history can result in secondary or vicarious trauma.

This can lead to increased burnout in staff, compassion fatigue, and traumatic stress, which can result in negative organizational outcomes, such as absenteeism, higher turnover, and poor team morale.

The City of Irving recognizes the need for buy-in from all levels: organizational leaders, directors, supervisors, and persons served. The understanding of what trauma is, and how it affects the persons served, services providers (i.e., staff), and the organization, is pivotal for organizational change to occur.

TIC care requires a paradigm shift away from habitual, routine procedures, and approaches. Thus, the importance of educating the main stakeholders to begin the initial training phase to develop basic awareness of TIC. This initial phase encompasses an introductory training about TIC principles and the prevalence of trauma. The campaign will kick-off in March 2023 with a video promoting safety in the workplace by the chief of fire and chief of police, accompanied by the City Manager showing his support. Next phases will include continuous training throughout the organization to address the organizational needs for wellness and self-care.

## City of Irving Public Safety Wellness and Safety Programs

### Police and Fire Training Academy



In 1988 the City of Irving opened a 22,772 square-foot training facility for fire and police personnel. The training academy provides both internal trainings and hosts other training opportunities on a wide range of topics for personnel from other departments.

The facility includes a full-size gymnasium with free-weights and a separate, enclosed area containing various types of workout equipment (**see picture 1**).

Additionally, it has a separate indoor seven-lane pistol range for training and qualification complemented by a separately operated state-of-the-art “Prism” shooting simulator (**see picture 2**).

The physical fitness program is part of the City of Irving’s iWin program offered to all employees. Officers and firefighters can work out while on duty but are required to have their radios on in the event of a callout. The IPD has two stations (North and South), and both have gyms available 24/7. Some of the fire stations have a designated exercise area.



**Picture 1: Full-size gymnasium**



**Picture 2: Shooting Range**

A large training room with capacity for 50 persons for trainings and/or meeting room, in addition to three other classrooms with theater style elevated seating for up to 32 persons each (see **picture 3**).

All the academy staff are Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) licensed instructors, as well as instructors in firearms. Most, if not all training, is available for TCOLE credit. The staff also includes certified weapons armorers for GLOCK, Beretta, and Smith & Wesson.



**Picture 3: Large Training Room**

## **Firefighter Cancer Awareness Campaigns**

### **“Grey Matters to Firefighters”**

The City of Irving Fire Department partakes in the “Grey Matters to Firefighters” Campaign. In the month of May, our firefighters wear grey t-shirts to help raise awareness of, and financial

funds for, the fight against brain cancer. Research shows that firefighters are 32% more likely to being diagnosed with brain cancer than the general population.

### **Nick Gonzales Foundation for Brain Tumor Research**

Our fire department also volunteers to collaborate with the Nick Gonzales Foundation for Brain Tumor Research to host the annual North Texas Firefighters Agility Challenge in the Spring and a Golf Tournament in the Fall.



Agility Challenge



Golf Tournament

### **“Turn Irving Pink” Campaign**

In conjunction with firefighters across the United States, Irving firefighters join the fight against cancer and designed their own pink Fire Department T-shirt to state that, “Irving Fire Cares Enough to Wear Pink.”



Irving firefighters wear these pink t-shirts during the Cancer Awareness Month in October, to help raise awareness and funds for the Baylor Irving Health Care Foundation.



## Irving Fire Department – “Blocker Program”

In 2019 fire department chief, Victor Conley, developed the Blocker Program. This program is part of the responder safety traffic management program, and it has become a national safety program. The goal of the program is to provide additional protection for first responders while responding to traffic accidents and reduce exposure of front-line apparatus. By re-purposing retired pumpers to block traffic while firefighters and other first responders on the scene of a major traffic accident it not only protects lives but also reduces liability claims and saves the City millions of dollars due to loss of equipment.

### The Blocker Program Success Story

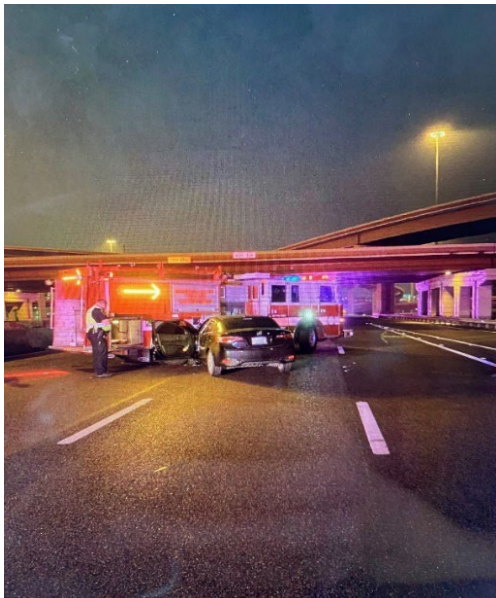
The project was needed because our first responders were exposed to life threatening situations daily and the cost and risk to life and equipment was beyond measure.

In 2015, a catastrophic accident occurred that triggered the need for change. A drunk truck driver plowed into a light pole at 3 a.m.

The Irving Fire Department responded and set up a safe zone using a ladder truck and a battalion command vehicle to provide a barrier between oncoming traffic and first responders. The driver ran and police chased him, while the three firefighters waited for a tow truck.

After setting the barrier for an hour and a half an 18-wheeler going 70 miles per hour smashed into the back of the ladder truck and sent the firefighters flying. One landed in the highway 50 feet away, and the other two landed on the shoulder of the highway. Meanwhile, the ladder truck spun and rolled. The 18-wheeler burst into flames, killing the driver, and sending diesel fuel across the highway. The firefighters survived but required hospitalization and months of rehab.

The cost to repurpose five retired apparatus into Blocker units was \$15,200 (\$3,040 each). This cost was already neutralized when Blocker 12 was struck in August 2018, saving a \$1.2 million aerial tiller-truck and when Blocker 8 was struck in March 2019 saving the lives of 10 Irving police officers who were investigating a prior accident and their vehicles (at an average police response vehicle price of \$35,000 each).



**Employee Annual Health and Safety Fair**



## **City's Health Incentive Program**

### **iWIN Program**

(See iWin booklet – Attachment 9)

Designed to motivate employees to live healthier lifestyles, the city offers an employee health incentive program. General government employees who earn 400 wellness points from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 8, 2023, will earn a monthly financial incentive of \$130 starting October 2023.

With this program, employees can earn a significant number of points simply by taking part in annual preventative healthcare. The remaining points can be earned by participating in activities that promote wellness, such as providing proof of regular gym visits, getting an annual flu shot, donating blood, or attending Wellness Speaker Forums.

For civil service employees, such as fire and police personnel, the path to earning a financial incentive will be solely based on fitness testing. Depending on the score, civil service employees can earn \$50, \$100 or \$150 monthly.

### **Employee Health Clinic**

In July 2018, the Irving City Council approved an agreement between the city and CareATC to open an employee health clinic. The clinic is available to employees and retirees, as well as their spouses and dependents, enrolled in one of the city's health insurance plans.

Those on the city insurance plan have a \$0 copay for each visit to the clinic. The city's high-deductible health plan, pay a \$40 copay for each visit, as mandated by IRS rules to have costs go towards the Out-of-Pocket Max and Deductible. With each visit, services covered at no additional cost include, but are not limited to:

- Allergies
- Cold and Flu
- Diabetes Management
- High Blood Pressure
- Lab Work/Tests
- Physicals
- Asthma
- Congestion
- Headaches
- High Cholesterol
- Sports Physicals
- Tobacco Cessation

### **Wellness Speaker Forum**

(See 2022-23 Schedule – attachment 10)

The Wellness Speaker Forum are classes that feature topics related to wellness and health issues. Different individuals, agencies, or services are promoted throughout the year which employees can attend in person or access these classes on demand. These classes are part of the iWIN incentive program.



## Closing

I have been an employee with the City of Irving since August 2010. In my 12 ½ years with the City I have witnessed and/or been a recipient of the efforts the City of Irving has made to ensure overall wellness and safety for all city employees. Nonetheless, in the public safety area, the City of Irving has shown an enormous amount of support, both in words and actions. The most recent example being the evolution of what was once our peer support program which has grown into the Public Safety Wellness Unit, completely funded by the City of Irving general budget to ensure continuity and accessibility of services.

Along with other wellness and safety benefits the PSWU offers our first responders culturally competent, cutting-edge services to meet their needs. The way the services are being accessed, the participation, and efficacy of the program speaks to the overall acceptance of the program among our first responders.

We know there is still a lot of work to be done to provide quality and timely mental health care for our first responders; to tackle the stigma and continue to make a paradigm shift. We believe that the creation of the Public Safety Wellness Unit will provide the conduits to facilitate access, improve experience and outcomes, and be more actively involved in prevention.

Therefore, it is our humble opinion that our Public Safety Wellness Unit is worthy of the Destination Zero Comprehensive Wellness Program Award.

Respectfully submitted for your consideration,

Mildred Betancourt, Ph.D.  
PSWU Senior Manager

Victor Conley  
Chief of Irving Fire Department

Derick Miller  
Chief of Irving Police Department

Chris Hillman  
City Manager