

## Carlsbad Police Department

Historically, the policing profession has been mostly reactive. We respond to calls for service, address problems reported to us by citizens, and we investigate crimes after-the-fact for prosecutorial purposes.

While there are examples of proactive policing from early on, they are few and far between when a broad view of the profession is taken. To this day, much of our work remains reactive, but a shift has occurred.

As our profession has evolved over the years, so has our response to crime. Problem-oriented policing programs emerged and study after study showed this “new” model can be very effective at combating crime. Broken Windows, Compstat, hot-spotting, and CPTED became commonplace across the nation. Various task forces have been formed, and “high-speed/low drag” Crime Suppression Teams are now a highly coveted tool for the job. Proactive policing is now a preferred method and for good reason: it works.

As a former “high-speed/low drag,” hard charging cop, with a background as an Infantry Marine intent on taking the fight to my adversaries, I had an epiphany one day. If the old adage *the best defense is a good offense* can be applied to how we serve our community, why is our approach to how we serve our cops stuck in reactive mode, just like policing was for so many years? What can we do to take the fight to stress, burnout, depression, and police suicide? How can our profession benefit from a proactive model in this regard? With these questions in mind, my department’s Peer Support team took on the task of formulating a proactive approach to addressing the negative effects the policing profession has on the policing professionals.

The process was long and, to be honest, was more organic than it was designed. We started by focusing on resiliency and shifting gears to a more proactive Peer Support/Wellness Team model. We placed an emphasis on making small changes to improve the quality of our cops’ work lives while they were on the job. Investing time and money in our gym, drafting policy to allow (and encourage) physical training on duty, funding water stations, and contracting with a local college to participate in a health and wellness program.

We invested in the families of our department members and organized spouse/family meetings to get the resources to everyone directly affected by the stressors of this job. The spouse/family nights are designed to be fun and educational, bolstering camaraderie amongst our greater family, while also building awareness in hopes of addressing fallout before it manifests itself into something insurmountable.

Recognizing that most of our public interactions are negative (i.e. writing citations, arresting subjects, taking a report for someone who had just been victimized, physically or otherwise), we wanted to counter that with positive interactions. We proactively sought out opportunities to partner with other organizations in our community that participate in community enrichment programs. These interactions provide an opportunity not just to give back to the community, but to give our officers a chance to have overwhelming positive interactions with the public. Partnering with a charitable group is a proactive way to gain some perspective and serves as a great reminder that the vast majority of people are good and supportive of their police.

As an example, my department has participated in the *Life Rolls On – They Will Surf Again* program for the last five years. Members of the team volunteer in varying capacities to help persons living with paralysis experience the thrill of surfing. The event is refreshing - physically, mentally, emotionally, and even spiritually. It is restorative and rewarding all at the same time. The positive interactions with the adaptive athletes and other volunteers sends our cops back out into the field with a positive shade that helps temper the rigors of the job. This is as preemptive and proactive as it gets.

Our Peer Support/Wellness Team will have to continue to evolve, just as we would with police work in general. Our proactive approach is here to stay but that is not to say that reactive tools don't remain in our bag. We stay open to other approaches and will continue to seek improvement. It is also important to recognize that partnerships are important to achieving that improvement. Having a mental health professional imbedded in your team as an advisor/coordinator is a resource that must not be overlooked. Our department contracts with two different counseling companies to offer a variety of services at no charge to the officer or their family.

The partnerships must also exist within the department. Having buy-in from the command staff is critical to the success of a Peer Support/Wellness program. Our department is fortunate to have a command staff that is fully committed the health of our officers, and willing to invest in building the best cops possible to do the job. When the opportunity arises to implement something new, like an innovative mobile application to deliver resources directly to the troops (check out Cordico Inc., seriously good stuff!), it's nice to have your chief initiate and endorse the project.

Building, repairing, and strengthening the most important part of the department – the personnel – is critical. There is no one way to accomplish this noble task. Each of the above improvements to our program are not groundbreaking, difficult, or even expensive. Any department can implement them, so long as someone takes that first proactive step to set the program in motion. Being that former hard-charging detective- turned-Peer Support/Wellness Team Leader, I can tell you that my experience shows that proactivity works for policing - and it works for the mental health and wellness in police officers, as well.