

## **San Diego Police Wellness Unit Overview**

### **Day Zero to Retirement and Beyond**

#### **By Assistant Chief Sandy Albreksten**

The SDPD Wellness Unit was established as a result of high-profile officer misconduct. Numerous employees were making poor decisions leading to arrests, policy violations, extremely poor behavior on duty, and alcohol abuse issues. Although the San Diego Police Department has long offered peer support, access to police psychologists, and police chaplains, these services were being underutilized.

A strategy was created to organize all of the SDPD wellness-related resources under one umbrella. Thus, the San Diego Police Department established the Wellness Unit in 2011. This newly formed unit was designated an office area with easy access for all employees and four full-time officers and sergeants were assigned to the unit. The Wellness Unit was established with the goal of coordinating the delivery of the various decentralized services to assist employees in managing their emotional and physical well-being. The mission of the San Diego Police Department Wellness Unit is “reducing or removing interferences to employee wellness, whether personally or professionally induced, by providing help, resources, training and intervention.”

For the Wellness Unit to be successful, it was critical that it receive support from the top down, starting with the Chief of Police down through the command staff. The officers needed leadership by example, and support for this program to grow and thrive.

The San Diego Police Department Wellness Unit’s responsibilities include identifying resources for employees, assisting employees in crisis, providing training, educational seminars, and workshops. The unit also manages all department “help services,” including the Peer Support Program, Police Chaplain Program, Alcohol/Substance Abuse Program, and psychological services. These programs and services are available to all sworn and civilian employees, as well as their family members.

While senior officers receive yearly in-service training on wellness and resource availability, the Wellness Unit recognized in order to carry out a culture of wellness, emphasis needed to be placed on reaching the newest generation of officers. To achieve this goal, the Wellness Unit is included as part of the pre-orientation process for our new officers. Prior to beginning the academy, Wellness Unit members give a formal presentation to our new officers, that provides an overview of the unit itself and the array of services and support that it provides. In addition, during the academy, the Wellness Unit conducts Emotional Survival training based on the work of Dr. Kevin Gilmartin. Immediately after graduation from the academy, our officers, along with their families, participate in the Psychological Preparedness Training for New Officers presented during a Family Wellness Day. During field training, our officers meet as a group with the Wellness Unit and a police psychologist to discuss the stressors of field training and how to manage their own identified stress triggers. Our new officers meet with the Wellness Unit one last time after completing field training for two days of training on effective interactions.

Mindfulness based training has recently been introduced to employees of the police department, both civilian and sworn. During these sessions, employees are led by a trained clinician through techniques and best practices of self-meditation. The goal is to teach employees how to self-guide through meditation during stressful and tense situations. Research has proven that mindfulness enhances the health and well-being of individuals, as well as organizational culture. It also improves an officer's ability to step into peak performance at a moment's notice.

The San Diego Police Department Wellness Unit is committed to providing all employees resources to achieve and maintain emotional and physical well-being. This is an ongoing endeavor, and the unit continues to develop new and effective ways to provide meaningful help and support. The San Diego Police Department Wellness Unit strives to keep each of their employees mentally healthy from Day Zero to retirement and beyond.

For details, please review the PERF report at <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/SanDiegoOSW.pdf> and see below:

<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>INDIVIDUAL</b>	<b>FAMILY</b>	<b>DEPARTMENT WIDE</b>	<b>FUTURE IDEAS</b>
Family Wellness Day	X	X		
ASAP Counselor	X	X	X	
FOCUS Psychological Services	X	X	X	
Peer Support	X			
Canine Therapy				X
Physical Wellness				X
Stress Management for trainees	X			
Emotional Survival Training	X	X		
Civilian Resiliency Training	X		X	

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