

The mission statement for the Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety Wellness Program is; “Create opportunities for our family to grow, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually and allow us to heal without reservation or judgement.” *(Refurbished/upgraded gym)*

The wellbeing of our officers is of the utmost importance. Due to the fact all sworn personnel are both police officers and firefighters, the Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety has been in the forefront of providing wellness services and training to its cherished members.

Traditionally, agencies have placed focus on Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD) as a means of stress management. In itself, CISD is a valuable step in stress management for acute stress as a result

of a recent event; however, may not play a major role in reducing chronic stress. What are we doing for our employees for the long term? This is what led the department to develop its robust wellness program.



The Department’s Wellness Program Includes:

### **Peer Support Services**

Peer Support Services are available to all public safety personnel. Upon joining the Department of Public Safety, an orientation outlining this service is provided to new employees and their significant others. The purpose of peer support is to aid and/or assist with the stressors that come with the police and fire professions.

### **Peer Support Team**

The Peer Support Team is comprised of a group of public safety employees that have received specialized training in addressing the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all public safety employees. Team members must be good listeners, in good standing within the agency, and be compassionate to the needs of others. Peer Support Team Members, as well as command staff, strive to make regular contact with all public safety employees as they’ve embraced the department’s “Family First” motto.

### **Critical Incident Stress Management**

Following a critical or significant incident, a debrief will occur. Critical incident debriefs are facilitated by a trained professional. Staff encourages mandatory participation in debriefings. Sonoma County Law Enforcement Chaplains are used as a resource to assist with grieving

officers and/or family members as well as provide outreach to members of the community after a critical incident.

## **Counseling**

Counseling services specific to public safety professionals are provided to public safety personnel. Two and a half years ago the department set up a specific budget for anonymous counseling services. The counselors are vetted and have extensive experience working with public safety personnel.

## **Mental Health/ Wellness Training Days**

Due to schedule overlap, the Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety is fortunate to have Thursdays as a consistent training day which affords personnel the opportunity to participate in various department trainings at least twenty times a year. Department Training days dedicated to the mental health of public safety personnel are provided to each member four times a year.

Topics discussed include, but are not limited to: resiliency, preparing your mind prior to critical



*(Teambuilding exercise)*

incidents, stress management (on duty and off duty), how to destress, counseling services available to public safety personnel, identifying odd behavior in co-workers and how to address them, suicide prevention, having a positive mindset, avoiding substance abuse, relationship building, physical fitness (diet/nutrition, exercise, non-mandatory fitness testing), PTSD awareness, Below 100 concepts; with emphasis on reducing vehicle speed, wearing your seatbelt and vest, teambuilding exercises, entertainment activities (escape room), outdoor activities (walks and hikes) and sporting activities (dodgeball, kickball, basketball, etc.). Specified mental health training days are designed to be inclusive of significant others.

A monthly wellness newsletter is distributed to all employees with fitness tips, exercises, mental health awareness, hotline numbers, and healthy recipes.

## **Retirement Planning**

Department members provide retirement planning, deferred compensation education materials to assist new employees with retirement planning. Additionally, we mentally prepare

our members with the tools necessary for the transition from law enforcement to civilian life. How to prepare for retirement sessions include, but are not limited to, discussions on what to expect when you are within 5 years of retirement age, what changes may happen to you, how to face the fear of retirement, how to address an identity crisis and the feeling of “I’m not a Cop anymore,” ways to set up your future to be successful in retirement, and if I were medically retired; what would happen to me and what’s the process?

City staff has been extremely supportive of the department’s venture by fully embracing the importance of employee wellness. As a joint venture, The Rohnert Park Public Safety Officer’s Association and City of Rohnert Park split the cost of a \$25,000 headquarters’ gym refurbishment/equipment upgrade. Additionally, the city manager authorized a \$4,000 purchase of customized meal prep bags for every department employee to encourage healthy eating in lieu of fast food indulging.

*(Meal prep bag)*



As a commanding officer for the department, I am grateful for the City’s investment into the wellbeing of our officers. My sincere gratitude to Lt. Jeff Nicks, Officers Justin Thompson and Lee Cooper, Dispatcher Emily Mugurussa and all of our Peer Support Team Members, for their unwavering commitment to the program and the wellbeing of our officers. This shift in mindset will pay dividends going forward.

Article written by Deputy Chief Mike Bates *(23 year veteran in law enforcement)*.