



## **The San Diego Police Department Wellness Unit**

### *Executive Summary*

Law enforcement agencies are all too familiar with responding to horrific incidents that are an everyday part of the communities we serve. Unfortunately, the San Diego Police Department (SDPD), like many other agencies throughout our nation, had long failed to adequately prepare its officers for their cumulative impact, until it was simultaneously struck by tragedies and misconduct involving department members in 2011.

It is true that chaos creates opportunities, as the founder of the SDPD Wellness Unit and Assistant Chief Sarah Creighton and her team quickly discovered. An overabundance of critical personnel matters awaited them when the Unit first opened its doors.

With a sense of urgency and purpose, the Wellness Unit looked critically at causes, factors, and anything to explain why its officers had engaged in conduct that violated the community's trust.

After looking comprehensively at all of the investigations, it became clear significant personal or professional interferences preceded the criminal acts and should have been noticed by coworkers and direct supervisors. Some officers were going through a divorce, battling substance abuse, having interpersonal issues, and most were having financial issues as a result of pay cuts.

SDPD decided to focus internally and create a culture of wellness, driven to utilize the full potential of all resources now placed under one command structure to fulfill its mission.

### **Wellness Unit Mission**

**The Wellness Unit is committed to removing and reducing interferences to employee wellness by:**

- Identifying and enhancing existing resources
- Developing and providing wellness education
- Collaborating with academic institutions on innovative LE studies, developing partnerships with health and wellness providers
- Staying abreast of wellness program best-practices through research
- Developing and administering a fitness and preventative health incentive program, serving as an advocate for employees enduring personal or professional difficulties





Yet, cultural change cannot be effectively implemented and institutionalized without successfully communicating it, encouraging others to embrace it and having strong coalitions to continuously provide guidance to achieve the short-term wins needed for long-term success.

A two-year evaluation of the Unit by all department members was conducted in 2013 and it produced very impressive results for the Unit's ability to communicate its vision of eliminating the stigma associated with employees asking for help, as well as implementing the Unit's mission and encouraging employees to utilize its services. A list of those services include:

### **Wellness Unit Services**

- Resource identification- we will help link you to a resource that best fits your needs whether in answer to a personal or professional issue. We will continually seek out new resources to offer our employees.
- Check on employees- we will call anyone you are concerned about but may not feel comfortable calling and let them know the services we have available. Your request will be kept completely confidential at your request.
- Provide answers when we can. We will check on the status of any personnel investigation you may be under and provide you with a status update or rough timeline of when you can expect to hear from the investigator. We will not, however, insert ourselves into the details of the investigation or make recommendations to the investigator about how to handle the investigation.
- Provide educational seminars and workshops. We will facilitate workshops around the issues that are important to your well-being and health.
- Share important Law Enforcement studies and collaborate with academic institutions willing to partner on studies important to our department.
- Rally immediate debriefing and intervention resources for all employees impacted by significant critical incidents, officer deaths, or other spontaneous events where employees would benefit from a variety of help resources being immediately available. We will continually recruit and train prospective peer support and MAP personnel, and provide coordination for the department's chaplain services.

With its participation and leadership in the San Diego County Wellness Forum and through its Wellness Advisory Committee, the SDPD Wellness Unit continually seeks to train and discover new ways to meet the needs of officers, who are entrusted to meet the needs of our communities.

After 5 years in existence, the San Diego Police Department Wellness Unit finds itself well suited to serve America's Finest.

