

## Apex, NC Submission

The idea for the "Veterans in Crisis" initiative began Memorial Day weekend 2014. Officers Guider and Pennington, both former Marines, received a call to assist a father whose son was "trashing" his house. The son, an Air Force combat veteran, had been diagnosed with PTSD and was breaking his father's personal belongings because he was not able to control his anger. The officers responded to the father's house and talked the veteran out of the attic where he had been hiding under the insulation to avoid the consequences of his actions. The officers were able to connect with the veteran based on their shared experiences of military service and combat especially. In the end, the officers determined the root causes of the veteran's stress and connected him with resources specific to veterans while diverting him from jail. Today, that veteran is still doing well and working on his continued recovery.

Weeks later, Officers Guider and Pennington told Cpt. Myhand (also a combat veteran) about the incident and how their shared experiences of military service played a critical role in helping resolve this incident peacefully. Cpt. Myhand immediately recognized the significance of such an idea and began work to capitalize on the officer's success that night. After a little research, Cpt. Myhand quickly realized that conflicts between military veterans, most suffering from PTSD and TBI, and police officers are often deadly; for the officer, the veteran, or both. Moreover, Cpt. Myhand could not find any other source offering the type of training and/or resources to help capitalize on the connections veterans share as a means in mitigating the dangers often present in these encounters. Even more amazing, while there are more than 46,000 veteran specific non-profits in this country alone, none are designed to help law enforcement deal with the crisis moment between police officers and a veteran in crisis. Realizing that more could and should be done, Cpt. Myhand set out on a mission with the personal goal of preventing just one more officer or veteran from being killed during one of these encounters. The idea to train CIT certified police officers, who are also military veterans, how to respond to a veteran during a crisis moment in hopes of avoiding a deadly outcome was born.

Cpt. Myhand spent the next 12-18 months speaking to groups such as: the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI), Alliance Behavioral Health, the International Associations of Chief of Police (IACP), the Civilian Law Enforcement and Military Cooperation Committee (CLEMCC), the Wake County Law Enforcement Executives, and the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police (NCACP) about his concept in an effort to gain support. After more than a year of research, speaking engagements, and one-on-one meetings, the concept finally became a reality in September 2015. Twenty-two (22) military veteran police officers and Emergency Medical personnel attended the first two-day class where they learned more about veteran related issues and the specific resources available. During this "hands-on" instruction, the students honed their skills when encountering a veteran during a crisis.

As of November 17, 2015, the first graduates have already amassed several successes. The first came from Officer Pennington within a week after completing the class. He responded to a veteran in a crisis and was able to make that connection based on service and his newfound training, connect the veteran with additional resources, and ultimately prevent a tragic outcome. In the second incident, Cpt. Myhand encountered a veteran who had been arrested for his second DWI in only one week: his third in six months. The veteran, suffering from PTSD and TBI was not able to sleep normally. Since he did not like the medication prescribed to him by the VA, he refused to take it. Seeing no other alternative, he turned to alcohol as a tool to help him finally get a night's sleep. This veteran's life was spiraling out of control, and compounded with other life events, he was becoming more and more suicidal. Cpt. Myhand shared his own experiences, not too dissimilar with the veteran's, and made that all-important connection. In

the end, he too was connected with resources, helped through the court system, and is currently seeing a veteran specific therapist.

The most recent success story came from Officer Wilson of the Garner Police Department. He responded to a call forwarded from a suicide hotline that involved a veteran actively contemplating suicide. In that case, three military veteran police officers responded to assist (only Ofc. Wilson had been trained) the veteran. They interrupted the veteran's suicidal moment, made that connection, and provided him with specific resources. They too ended the immediate crisis moment without further incident or injury to anyone involved.

The goal of this initiative is to expand this concept into a national law enforcement model. Agencies all over this country, potentially the world, can adopt it for their own communities. There are 750,000 veterans in North Carolina alone and the idea that this problem will fade is false. Law enforcement will continue to be asked to respond to veterans in crisis for many years to come. We must have a structured approach when responding in order to better ensure that officers stay safe. Moreover, that idea that a Police Officer might be forced to take the life of a person, who is only acting out because of the injuries sustained from military service, is unbearable. We have to do more to protect ourselves and those who have given so much in service to this great nation.

This training saves lives period! What we have found is that it not only works for the veteran in a crisis, but it gives the students the ability to rekindle that military comradery so many veterans seek. The time spent interacting with other veterans was as much a learning experience as it was a healing opportunity. Veterans around the world share a real "connection" with each other that often spans racial, gender, age, economic, and just about any other boundaries. In each of these cases, the veteran was either actively contemplating suicide or nearing that decision. Through this initiative, veterans help other veterans and law enforcement is able to do more in service of those who have so selflessly served our country. Makes one wonder, why have we not been doing this all along?