



La Mesa Police Department Wellness Program

BeSTOW-Beyond Survival Toward Officer Wellness

Traditional law enforcement training has focused almost exclusively on the mind and body, but neglects the most critical aspects of us all that make us human—our emotions and spirit. If an officer’s spirit is suffering, then they will not only tend to become emotionally, mentally, and physically ill or despondent; but the quality of service they provide to those who need the police the most, will also suffer. The La Mesa Police Department recognizes that it is no longer sufficient to only train their officers to physically survive each day. The soul and character of officers—how they learn to process emotional pain, trauma, and acute stress—all determine their quality of service to the community, as well as the quality of their lives and careers.

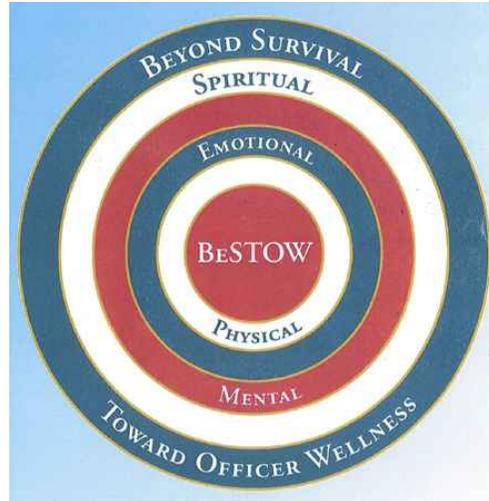
The La Mesa Police Department’s Wellness Program, one of the first in the nation and the first in San Diego County, was developed from the F.B.I.’s BeSTOW philosophy and training (BeYond Survival Toward Officer Wellness). After several La Mesa Police management staff attended the 10-week F.B.I. Nation Academy in Quantico, Virginia, they returned with a determination to develop training and a Department Wellness Program that would ultimately improve the quality of service to the community by enhancing the emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness of its employees.

The negative aspects and emotional trauma of a police career are toxic and cumulative, and they have a tendency to drain the spirit and life from officers. This can often leave officers

and dispatchers emotionally despondent and susceptible to burn out, depression, bitterness, ineffective service, suicidal thoughts, and a sense of hopelessness. Every year across the nation, approximately three times as many officers take their own lives than die in the line of duty. Officers are much more prone to suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, a sense of hopelessness, stress-related physical and emotional illness, and suicidal thoughts.

The La Mesa Police Department believes it is imperative to proactively train officers how to most effectively maintain their emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness in order to thrive throughout their careers. Emotional survival techniques are critical for officers to be able to consistently provide the highest quality of service to the community. Spiritual survival, issues concerning one's spirit, are also critical to the emotional survival of an officer; it is a compelling inner sense of purpose and meaning toward selfless, compassionate service to others, along with a deep connection to individuals and the community served. It involves the ethical practice of a nurturing and compassionate spirit, selfless service, integrity, and human dignity. The health and vitality of a community depends upon the emotional wellness of each officer.

The mission of the La Mesa Police Department Wellness Program is to provide support, assistance, training, and resources to assist police department employees in managing professional and personal crisis as well as enhancing their mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness so that employees will be better prepared to more effectively process the stress and emotional trauma prevalent within their chosen profession. An officer with a damaged spirit cannot serve the public and is in danger of self-destructing. It is in everyone's best interest—the police department, the officer, and the community—for officers to receive training and resources to learn how to most effectively practice emotional survival techniques to keep them emotionally well.



Officer's Uniform Pin

The La Mesa Police Department's Wellness Program consists of a Peer support team and the BeSTOW team. The Peer Support team provides support and assistance to police department employees and their families, in times of stress and crisis. The Peer Support Team may be utilized to support the community in situations of critical incidents, such as school shootings, natural disasters, and other traumatic situations. The Peer Support team has been active for the past 16 years and is very active in the California Peer Support Association.

The BeSTOW team has been active for the past year and provides proactive training for police department employees in hopes that they will develop emotional survival practices that may keep them from ever needing the assistance of Peer Support. The Peer Support team and the BeSTOW team work together to provide wellness practices and assistance to all police department employees, so that they can offer the highest quality of service to the community.

Part of the Peer Support and BeSTOW teams work is to reach out to the community to connect and interact with those who they are devoted to serve--the various members of our community in order to enhance the quality of life of La Mesa residents. This involves things like hosting community forums, adopting needy La Mesa families for Christmas, donating food to a local food bank for Thanksgiving meals, developing a youth leadership camp, speaking to community service organizations and faith groups, and other activities.

The La Mesa Police Department is very appreciative of the support and good will of our community and we invite the continued support of those whom we serve and protect.