

I am extremely grateful that I got the chance to go to this class on PTSD! When I went I told myself I had nothing to worry about because I didn't see anyone shot or a horrible accident scene. While listening to signs of PTSD I realized I had a bunch of symptoms. Still while listening I tried to shove my feelings back down! I realized I avoided dates because of events I didn't want to remember. I would be physically sick for days, I would be short tempered. I was so thankful Chris took the time to listen and pointed me in the right direction. I am glad I didn't miss this opportunity! I was afraid of what people would say at my department and I know other people who are afraid of the same thing.

Respectfully

Karen

I watched my sister bleed out in front of me, on me. We were ten minutes from our ranch. The ranch was a place of peace, solace, family, and escape. We came upon her destroyed vehicle, She had collided with a F350 pulling a livestock trailer. When I came upon the carnage, that was her car when I found her, all my training and experience wasn't enough. My Brother in law lay on the asphalt not 20 feet away bleeding out, my sister in the driver's seat looking at me, asking me for help with her eyes. I watched her die in front of me.

Words can't explain where I was. She was everything to me, I had always wanted to be just a little more like her. I was lost she was my beacon. I spoke at her memorial, I spread her ashes. After that I just did what I thought I was supposed to. I was in a dark place, I wouldn't say I was suicidal but if a car swerved in my path I don't think I would have tried to move.

My wife began letting me know I wasn't doing the right stuff, I wasn't towing the line. She empathized with me, but we had a family. Unknown to me she made called Chris Orton, and asked for help. I had your typical Type A personality and didn't want any help. I met with Chris to placate my wife.

Shortly after meeting hearing Chris, I realized how much I needed him and peer support. Not just for me but for my family so I could be who they needed me to be. I had to be better, I had to get help. By our very nature Cops don't ask for help or get help, that is something that has to change and I believe Chris Orton and Peer Support saved my life.

Tom

Chris you got it started, you made staff and rank aware of the occupational stresses and trigger's that those before you were too afraid or too ignorant to understand. You brought awareness, resources, counseling and have help so many. Thank You.

Clarence

At a dark time in my life, to the point of looking down the barrel of my weapon, I was facing the pending death of my father, an unproductive family life and troubles at work and wondering if living was worth it. Without the help of Chris, I would have remained undiagnosed, untreated,

unhelped and un-alive. Only through education, training and ability to let our guard down and talk about what haunts us, can we achieve a healthy mental status that helps us to be a better husband, father, friend, deputy and human. I'm eternally grateful to Chris for his unselfish and unjudgmental friendship that helped me salvage a life and career.

Leonard

I am a Detective with eighteen (18) years of experience and prior to that I was an infantryman in the US army.

A series of negative events occurred simultaneously in my work, personal and social life, causing me to reach the limits of my coping mechanisms. Many of these negative experiences began years prior and all seemed to have converged at the same time. I called Chris and he re-assured me this was a normal reaction to an abnormal situation and was able to assist me. I returned to work a changed person with a completely different outlook on my life and this came only with suffering through this experience. Based upon my experiences, and knowing Chris, I navigated this part of my life emerging as a better husband, father, friend and employee.

Andres

I completely credit peer to peer for saving my life, and helping me become so much stronger that I can observe my fellow brothers and sisters struggling and help them before they reach that point I was at. Here is my story:

I began my law enforcement career in 2003 and nothing had prepared me for what I was about to be exposed to physically and mentally, not including its effects on personal life. During my years as a cop I had lost family, a child, a marriage, and my home. The stress was starting to build but I was always told I have to be tough to do this job and not show any type of weakness. I began to internalize the pain and treat the pain in any ways. I then began experiencing the trauma that came with this career.

I worked my first murder and was exposed to the evil man was really capable of. Then another murder, and another murder, suicides, and then one incident of holding a small child in my arms as he took his last breath and I watched him die.

In the beginning of this cop life I could not handle it. I tried to become stronger but my health and work performance began to take a downward spiral. I pulled away from family and friends and refused to admit I needed help because I feared I could lose the last thing I had which was my Job. Years went on and I struggled hard trying to survive the streets and the thoughts I began to have that my life was no longer valid. I tried to seek help but the cookie cutter process that was set up for employees made me feel as if I'm just going through another process of speaking with people who have no idea what it's like to do what we do. The nightmares become more graphic and more frequent as well as the flash backs. I would go drive, whether on or off duty, and realize I was speeding as if I was responding to a call. I had a death grip on my steering wheel and began feeling

of hopeless. When I began to think about suicide as the only way out felt ashamed of myself. How could I feel this way when I try to talk other people out of it at work telling them how precious their life is, I was a hypocrite. Then at a training I met a person who was willing to tell his story to other cops about how this life affected him. I knew every word and emotion he spoke of because I was living it. Before this class I never knew anyone else had felt this way and though I was just too weak, but I still felt I could not be helped nor could I reach out to anyone.

One night I had let the medication, alcohol, and pain finally win. I grabbed my duty weapon loaded it and told my then girlfriend I was going to kill myself and through that met Chris and I survived and got help because I got involved with peer to peer. I knew I was not alone nor was there anything majorly wrong with me. I was diagnosed with Depression and PTSD which are very treatable, and you can still become the person you were before but smarter and stronger.

Peer to Peer is a vital program to this life and career! You can be fearless of the monster we go out and face daily and stand tall willing to fight. When the internal monster slowly grows inside of you and knows every single weakness you hide from the external world it terrifies you. Only those who walk the same path can show how to defeat that internal monster by developing courage to face the pain. The only thing we ever really need is someone who can give us a small flame of hope, so we can fan the flame ourselves to develop a raging fire of salvation.

Sincerely John

If it were not for Chris Orton and the Peer2Peer program, I would not be alive today to tell this story. I would have committed suicide. They saved my life.

I have suffered from depression since my late teens, but I didn't know that's what it was. It was mild and depression among teens was not discussed back then, it was more of an adult disease. I started 911 dispatching when I was 20, it was a fun job for me and I loved it. Little did I know, the years of hearing horrible things over the phone and radio were taking their toll on my mind. I started becoming more irritable, angry, and depressed. The job, added with personal things in my life such as being raped and shot, sent me into a downward spiral. I didn't know it yet, but I had PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

After my divorce, I moved to Texas and started a new job. I thought that a fresh new start would do me some good, but I was still dispatching and still hearing those horrible things over the phone and radio. I was good at hiding my depression from others for a long time, but I was miserable and had considered suicide. I thought about what that would do to my family, so I bottled it all up and tried to push on. I still had no idea what was wrong with me and why I couldn't just "suck it up" and be happy. In law enforcement, you are supposed to be strong and not let things get to you. If you said you were having problems, you were seen as weak and not able to handle the job. The more time went on, the more I thought about suicide. I was having a lot of financial problems on top of everything else. I started to rationalize that my family would be ok after my suicide.

We had a mandatory in-service training that I attended. At the training, a detective that I didn't know got up and spoke to our class. That detective was Chris Orton. He told us about his life in law enforcement and how it affected him. He told us about what he went through and how he had PTSD, depression, and anxiety. He told us about the signs and symptoms. He was describing everything I was feeling and experiencing. He invited anyone to stay after class to speak with him if they wanted, but I didn't. I knew I would have cried and I still thought there was no way that I could have PTSD. I was just a dispatcher. He had actually seen horrible things. I just heard them. I couldn't possibly have PTSD if I hadn't seen them, right?

I became friends with Chris Orton on Facebook, but never really talked to him. One day, he reached out to me and asked if I wanted to talk. A man that I didn't know, recognized from things I wrote on my Facebook that something was wrong. My own friends who spent time with me and knew me never really noticed these things. If he hadn't reached out to me I wouldn't be here today.

Jane

In 2012, I had a friend, Bryan, that was a retired Major from the United States Marine Corps. Not only being a man, but being a Marine, and a Marine Corps Officer he felt it was unacceptable to ask "anyone" for help. He knew he suffered from PTSD, but he didn't realize how bad and out of hand it was becoming. I connected Bryan with Chris Orton and his intervention helped Bryan see that no matter who you are, what position you held, even being a Marine, that asking for or seeking help is NOT a weakness, but it takes strength to be able to know when to ask for help, then following through. Bryan had been self-medicating and began to drink heavily prior to speaking with Chris.

John

My peer to peer experience:

September 18th of 2014 I experienced the worst thing a dispatcher can hear on the other end of the radio. The loss of one our own. I had never Chris but had heard about his wonderful training classes, his first-hand PTSD knowledge, and his ability to help and understand when others were struggling. It was amazing to feel so supported and be able to openly discuss my thoughts and feelings with everyone else and hear what they were thinking. I was able to move on from all of it and felt validated with everything I had felt and experienced. I will forever be thankful for him.

Krystal

Senior 911 Dispatcher

It is an honor for me to write a letter on behalf of my dear friend, Chris Orton. I've known Chris for over 25 years. My ex-husband started with the Travis County Sheriff's Department around the same time as Chris. In 2003, after 15 years with the Department my ex-husband was forced to fatally shoot a man during a crime. He was subsequently cleared by the Travis County Grand Jury. After the shooting my ex-husband immediately sank into a deep depression that would eventually be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder. My family was asked to come into the Travis County Sheriff's office where they debriefed my ex-husband and handed each of our three

young boys a teddy bear then we were sent home. The shooting and the lack of care by Travis County Sheriff's Department for my ex-husband eventually destroyed our family. We divorced and our three sons subsequently got into trouble after watching their father destroy himself and his life for years.

The shining and guiding light for my family through all these years is named Chris Orton. He has been with us since day one. He is our hero, our brother, our father, our friend and our HOPE. He has held each of us and been our rock through every part of this nightmare of PTSD. He has never given up on us. Chris has held talks, seminars, activities etc. trying to educate the public, my family and many others about PTSD. Chris has provided mentoring modeling and motivation to participants in both individual and group settings. Chris offers hope to people who are just beginning their journey on their recovery path. His excellent communication abilities and compassion help reinforce recovery efforts. Chris Orton's strength, compassion, knowledge and message of hope for victims of PTSD and their families has never wavered. He puts his own life on hold and his depth of caring and patience for his fellow officers and friends has no bottom.

I was angry for a long time with the Travis County Sheriff's Department for their ignorance of the issue of PTSD and not having resources available for their deputies and families when their lives are destroyed for just doing their jobs. The anger I had has now turned to hope because of Chris Orton. Hope that Chris will never give up the fight to take care of his brothers and sisters that suffer everyday of their lives from the trauma they experience while on the job.

My hope is that the Travis County Sheriff's Department will not just talk about starting programs but will actually put them into action. Please use this amazing man Chris Orton to help guide the Department into recognizing and helping his fellow officers by implementing peer support groups etc. How many more families will be destroyed because there is no available help?

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Robin

My name is Chris M. and on October 27, 2015 I started my day like everyone before for the last few years, with dread. I dreaded getting out of bed, I dreaded going to work, I dreaded seeing clients and most of all I dreaded seeing the victims. Today I started my day by going to the Austin Children's Shelter to attend a training that I signed up for (probably months earlier) and had forgotten about it until I had checked my calendar the night before. I wasn't even sure what the training was about but I knew why I had signed up, to get out of work even for a few hours.

Upon entering the class I find a chair in the back right corner but I cannot sit still, it's probably from not sleeping or the anxiety that never feels like it will go away but I walked around and then decided I was going to leave. As I was getting close to the door I heard the man at the front of the class start talking. I heard that he was from law enforcement and he mentioned something about

anxiety or stress, something that caught my attention and made me stop in my tracks. I immediately went back to the chair that I had selected earlier to see the papers that had been passed out. I wanted to see what was the training I was in. I looked at the papers and started listening to the speaker and realized I was in a “PEER SUPPORT” training. I thought to myself that “this is crazy”, I wouldn’t sign up for one of these because no one knows how I feel. About that time the speaker started talking about how he had went through the anxiety, not sleeping, being on edge, depression and so on. I couldn’t believe this, there was one other person in the world who could relate to how I feel and what I was going through. I thought maybe he could relate to how there are days when the faces of the victims won’t leave your thoughts or how you feel like you can’t breathe. But even though it was fascinating to find someone else who can relate to me it was too much for me. I don’t know if it was the daily anxiety topped with the thoughts of the victims or maybe it was a feeling of fear of exposing myself and becoming vulnerable.

The emotions were too much, holding back tears I left but intentionally grabbed the speakers card. My thoughts I will not share with you but I did not know what to do. I was scared. I have faced persons with bats, knives and guns but had never felt scared like this before. I knew I shouldn’t drive, I couldn’t go to work, I couldn’t see anyone and I sure couldn’t let anyone see my like this. I finally called my Employee Assistance Program and quickly realized that where there might be an area that they service a need, it was definitely not in talking to someone like me at this particular time in my life, at the time when I needed it the most.

I looked at the card I had picked up and saw that the name on it was Chris Orton, so I called and left a message. I then continued my quest on trying to find someone I could speak with. This was harder than I expected, first to try to find someone who has experience talking to persons with the same type of background that I have, then someone who takes my insurance then someone who can see you within the next month.

While trying to find a doctor Chris Orton called me and things changed for me at that time. I had nothing to lose so I talked to him and told him how I was feeling and he listened. He listened and listened. He then told me that “he had been through this and that I was not alone”. These words seem tiny and maybe meaningless to someone until they are feeling alone and helpless and then these words represent “hope”. This is what Mr. Orton told me was that “there is always HOPE”, and he talked to me and for a minute there I felt like I could breathe normally again. He then told me about doctors that he knew that took my insurance and gave me a couple to choose from. From the information I received from him I was able to get into a doctor within the week (I know this isn’t normal but without the information from Mr. Orton this opportunity wouldn’t have presented itself to me).

My journey to recovery was not just based on seeing my doctor or medications, or different therapy methods but it was a lot based on Chris Orton. I have said that the reason I went to that training was because of divine intervention because that led me to talking to Mr. Orton, which led me on the path to recovery. But what else it did was provide me with someone to talk to who, more importantly, understood what I was saying. Mr. Orton, or Chris (as I call him today because I truly feel like I made a friend for life) would text me just to check on me. This started the same day he

called me and has not stopped yet. He even took the time out to meet with me for coffee and shared his story with me.

Too often we are overlooked because “it” is part of the job or we try to bury “it” because “it’s” a sign of weakness. I have had several friends who have taken their own lives, lost their lives, lost their careers, lost their families all because they do not have someone to turn to. I truly Thank God for Chris Orton and believe that the training he provided every persons in law enforcement including all first responders should be required to take it. Chris is different because he’s been through it, he takes the time to talk to you, to follow-up with you, provide you resources, and more. I can say with 100% certainty that Chris and his Peer Support training has saved lives.

If needed Chris can provide you with my contact information and I would be glad to speak with anyone about the important role Chris Orton has served in my life.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Holland Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist 101

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08-15-16 I write at the request of Officer Chris Orton, Travis County Sheriffs’ Department. I have had many opportunities to interact with Officer Orton in his role as a Peer Support Officer. On numerous occasions, he has appropriately referred fellow officers to my practice for individual psychotherapy. He has always demonstrated the highest level of professional courtesy and ethical behavior in those interactions. Most of the officers that have been referred indicate that they have participated in some Peer Support training organized and often lead by Officer Orton. These officers have been very grateful for the help of the Peer Support Team and Officer Orton in particular. Some of the testimonials regarding this support have been quite dramatic, including those who report that but for Officer Orton's availability and skill, they quite likely would have carried out an attempt on their life. Many of these officers have needed treatment for depression and or PTSD. It has been encouraging to note the more open attitude of these officers when they enter treatment. I believe that this more open attitude is a direct result of the peer support process which seeks to normalize officers receiving help when in emotional distress. It is my understanding that the presence the Peer Support Team within the Travis County Sheriffs Department has recently been diminishing. This comes at a time when it is quite apparent that law-enforcement personnel are experiencing even greater levels of stress and threat. I know that Officer Orton has exhibited a passion for playing this support role with his fellow officers. He has often given tirelessly of his time and energy, often without compensation, in the workplace. However, he is unlikely to be able to provide adequate resource availability for an entire department on his own. I believe that Counseling and Peer Support for law enforcement personnel is a critical and important public safety issue, as well as a humanitarian one. We all are served more effectively and safely when our law enforcement personnel function in an emotionally healthy manner. I believe that the Travis County Sheriff's Department would find great benefit in fully developing and supporting an integrated Peer Support program, as many other lawenforcement agencies have.

Respectfully,

Charles Holland, Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist

I was first contacted by Rick Cospers in 2010 wanting to meet with my wife and I and talk about what I have been experiencing since my return from deployment. Rick told me that they were trying to develop a peer support program for county employees that were struggling with some issues of stress and other things. In 2011 Chris Orton started teaching a peer to peer support class at the TCSO academy. I sat through the first class and recognized some things that I have been experiencing in my everyday life. After class Chris came up to me and asked if any of these topics hit home which they did. The next year I again attended this class which Chris asked me again if anything hit home. This time even more of the subjects hit what I was experiencing. Finally in 2014 while attending another version of this class I realized that I was having some serious issues. At the end of this class Chris came up to me and said "Do I need to call someone to get you the help you need". I told him it was probably a good idea. Chris got me in contact with a wonderful therapist named Craig Kern. I started seeing Craig and talking about my issues but that wasn't doing enough at the time. I talked to Chris some more and went to see a psychiatrist who put me on some medication. So between the psychiatrist and therapist my issues started getting better.

If it wasn't for the support and Chris reading the signs that I was displaying I truly believe I would not be here today. I thank god every day for Chris and the help he provided for me and my family.

Peer to Peer (P2P) works and I am here today because of this amazing program that Chris Orton put together. It was also a disappointment when I heard that it was closed down by someone who doesn't understand the issues that police officers are having with dealing with stressful incidents for years on end.

Again Thank you Chris Orton for saving my life.

Doug

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing this in response to my personal observations in regards to peer support and what it means to me. I'm a retired police officer who served 26 years before going out on a medical retirement. I had an officer involved shooting in 2013 and as a result was diagnosed with PDST and depression. I can attest to the fact that peer support is needed and should not be taken lightly. I have experienced both sides of peer support. The lack of support after my incident from fellow officers and positive support from people that I met through my hardships.

I cannot tell you how I met Chris since most of my early journey with PTSD is a blur. I'm thankful that I met Chris and without him I'm not sure I would be here today. Chris has been there when I needed him. He has never judged me and always offered positive support. These are trying times for law enforcement and now, more than ever this is the time when more support groups are needed. It takes more than counseling to help someone who is suffering and doesn't know who to turn to. In my experience I was unable to speak with people who didn't understand what I was going through. I kept hearing people tell me to just get over it. This is not acceptable. Officers and people working in public safety need people to turn to that they feel they can trust and who have been there and done that.

Chris has been a beacon in the dark to so many people and it would be a travesty and a disservice to take away a program that means so much too so many. There are very few people that I trust and can turn to but Chris is one of them. If you are thinking of taking away any program that Chris is involved in I beg you to reconsider.

Sincerely,

Bob