Heroes Helping Heroes

Non-profit, 501(c)(3)

**Mission:**

Heroes Helping Heroes is a non-medical support program designed to assist law enforcement officers, fire personnel and EMS personnel (collectively, “First Responders”) cope with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) by offering them an opportunity to participate in programs with fellow first responders who also suffer from PTSD.

**Objective:**

First, to improve the psychological wellbeing of current and retired first responders who have experienced traumatic events as part of their duties or service to the community in which they serve.

Second, provide first responders with an opportunity to cope with PTSD by being around fellow first responders who have experienced similar traumatic events and have experienced the psychological changes associated with these events such as stress, anger, anxiety, fear, isolation, etc.

Third, to help reduce the stigma of having PTSD and the isolation feelings associated with the psychological changes as a result of experiencing traumatic events.

Finally, and most important of all, is to help reduce the number of suicides by first responders as a result of PTSD by providing them with peer support and referrals to medical professionals who specialize in the treatment/coping of PTSD.

**What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

PTSD is a disorder in which a person has difficulty recovering after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event.

According to the Mayo Clinic, symptoms commonly associated with PTSD include agitation, irritability, hostility, hypervigilance, self-distractive behavior, and social isolation. Psychological symptoms include flashbacks, fear, severe anxiety, and mistrust. Mood symptoms are expressed by loss of interest or pleasure in activities, guilt or loneliness. Sleep disturbances in the form of insomnia or nightmares are also common. Other symptoms may include emotional detachment or unwanted, intrusive thoughts.

**Why a PTSD program for First Responders is needed:**

Only superseded by our military, Law Enforcement, Firefighter and EMS are the jobs most associated with PTSD in the United States.

According to the Department of Justice, “an estimated 15 percent of Law Enforcement officers suffer from PTSD” and those are just the percent of Law Enforcement professionals who are willing to come forward or seek help. This number is expected to skyrocket as both society and Law Enforcement becomes more willing to accept PTSD and disregard the stigma associated with being diagnosed with the disorder.

It is estimated that the average police officer in his or her career will be involved or witness over 850 critical incidents compared to that of the general public who will have an average of less than 5. According to the DSM-V, a critical incident is defined as “[e]xposure to actual or threatened death, serious, or sexual violence.” First Responders may directly experience the traumatic event, witness (in person) the event as it occurred to others, or experience repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event.

For decades, First Responders have attempted to deal with the effects of PTSD by turning to drugs and alcohol to help suppress nightmares, unwanted thoughts and other emotional problems. This, in turn, has caused many First Responders to develop substance use disorders. The American Addiction Center reports an alarming 23% of police officers struggle with alcoholism. Again, these figures are limited to those who are willing to acknowledge a substance abuse disorder exists and seek help.

According to Blue H.E.L.P. (an organization committed to helping families who lost an officer to suicide), 919 police officers lost their lives to suicide between 2016-2020. As of January 16, 2021, Blue H.E.L.P. has already reported two officer suicides for the 2021 calendar year. 133 fire personnel lost their lives to suicide in 2019 alone.

In 2019, the Minnesota Public Employee Retirement Association (PERA) noted police and fire applications for Duty Disability benefits on the basis of a PTSD injury accounted for approximately 71% of all applications submitted. This number was up significantly from 2018, where approximately 42% of the disability applications were submitted alleging PTSD as a disabling condition. These numbers are expected to rise in 2020, when an unprecedented number of applications were filed for duty disability benefits for PTSD injuries. Most employers have failed to provide or seek adequate mental health treatment for its employees. Continued failure to address the fact PTSD is plaguing First Responders will result in continued mental health problems, a decline in First Responder personnel, and rampant First Responder suicide. These are costs that we can no longer continue to bear.

**How will Heroes Helping Heroes help?**

As a non-medical support group, Heroes Helping Heroes will provide programs and opportunities for both active and retired First Responders such as:

• Day fishing trips

• Golf outings

• 4-wheeler excursions

• Snowmobile excursions

• Social gatherings and happy hour

• Wine tasting/painting night

• Book club

• Camping trips

• Any other activates that are reasonably requested

But the biggest thing that Heroes Helping Heroes will be providing to these wounded responders is that sense of family. The bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood remain intact to help and support one another though these difficult times and to remind each one of use that we are not forgotten and that we matter. Together, with all of us, we can make a difference and help our First Responders cope with and deal with PTSD so we can continue to live a productive life for both our families and communities.