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Incorporating a Peer Support Program in A Criminal Justice Department

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Incorporating a Peer Support Program in A Criminal Justice Department

by

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Dedications

This research project is dedicated to the men and women who serve as first responders. It is also dedicated to my wife Cortney, who has supported me in every aspect of my military and policing career. To my children, Georgia, Josephine, and Grace. Who have sacrificed just as much of their time so I could complete this program.

Abstract

This research aims to provide police agencies with a step-by-step guide for developing a Peer Support Program. It will address how to design the program, overcome complex changes in an agency, create a crisis communication strategy, and budget for the new specialty department. This research will address ethical and moral dilemmas a peer support member may face as they perform their duties. Furthermore, the author will present a code of conduct that will serve as the foundation of the program. The researcher will also explain how training, ethical accountability, and stewardship are crucial in making an ethical program for first responders. Additional concerns were also identified statutorily in MN 181.9731, Public Safety Peer Counseling, regarding the protection and privacy of police officers. In part, the author has made several specific recommendations to amend state statute and identified key stakeholders to aid in the passage of new legislation to further protect first responders.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Mental health affects many people working in the field of criminal justice. First responders are seeing an increased need for mental health resources to improve their overall wellness. The question is, how can departments help address the needs of their employee's mental health? In this research, the author will address this question by discussing the implementation of a peer-support team. While incorporating a new specialty department can be difficult, it is well worth the time, money, and resources. This research will help guide a department in developing a peer support team from the team design to personal selection, as well as overcoming cultural challenges and budgetary needs.

The topic of mental health among first responders has grown throughout the years. Many agencies have adopted targeted programs to help combat mental health issues in the criminal justice profession. Even with these available resources, first responders still leave the field due to mental health-related issues. The topic of mental health in law enforcement does carry a stigma. For some people, asking for help is not an option because the stigma still carries so much weight. A law enforcement officer's average years of service is 16.57%, and 188 first responders committed suicide in 2022 (bluehelp.org, 2023). The author's motivation for examining this topic is important to him professionally as a front-line supervisor to help improve the quality of life for the people in his agency. First responders are asked daily to help others; it is time first responders get the assistance they deserve.

Historically, first responders have not talked about mental health, let alone their own. The topic of mental health has recently been brought to the forefront. In 2021, an Iowa Senator created and helped pass a bill for peer support teams. This bill allows first responders to seek help and confidently know what they share will be kept private (Grassley, 2022). The strengths

of current approaches in creating a peer support team are shifting. There were many areas for improvement to this topic, including funding, resources, time, and knowledge. Many departments are now seeing the need to address the topic of mental health for their employees. They understand that providing resources through trained peer support members is beneficial. It is not only beneficial to the employee but also to the department. Peer support members can provide well-needed services to extend a first responder's career and keep experienced professionals in the field.

The practice of creating peer support teams and providing access to clinicians for mental health counseling is growing. Departments have seen the need for mental health services for their employees, and agencies across the United States and other countries are doing so. One controversy surrounding peer support teams is that some first responders believe it will be used against them if they share information. This research will help first responders understand their rights and how the information they share will be kept confidential.

Peer support members are entrusted with confidential information from their peers. Peer support members will encounter daily moral dilemmas, immediate issues, and ethical considerations. It is the responsibility of peer support members to know and understand the laws governing information presented to them. Peer support members will be tasked with numerous situations where ethical decisions and stewardship will come into play. Peer support members must keep all information confidential that is shared with them so that trust is built among department members.

The author has seen a need to build a well-constructed peer support team for agencies across the United States. These peer support teams will be there in times of need to ensure first responders have the resources to keep them mentally healthy. This topic is vital to the author

professionally, as he has seen officers across the state of Minnesota leave the profession of policing due to mental health. Programs like peer support that partner with clinicians allow first responders to express themselves and speak about what may be bothering them.

As stated, in 2021, an Iowa Senator created and helped pass a bill for peer support teams in the United States Senate. Since then, many departments have seen the need to address mental health among first responders. In doing so, the outcome changes how their employers care for first responders. It has allowed first responders a much well-needed balance to address their mental health needs and keep them in their career fields. It also benefits the agencies as they see more well-balanced first responders working daily.

There are current strengths and weaknesses to the approach of peer support teams. Peer support teams are a relatively new concept. However, the strengths of peer support teams outweigh the weaknesses. Many new officers are getting into the criminal justice field. With these new working professionals, there is a much more welcome approach to addressing mental health. With these new hires comes a culture change—a change of support for such programs and the willingness to be open to others. The weaknesses are still present. Because peer support teams are a new idea, some veteran first responders have pushed back. This pushback comes as the veteran first responders believe sharing information with others will not be kept private. However, this research will address this issue and explain why this should not be a concern.

Due to the lack of knowledge of peer-support programs, many agencies do not understand the differences between peer-support members and clinicians. If these are explained to first responders, the program will succeed. First responders must also be presented with the laws surrounding their privacy. Privacy is one of the most significant questions, and this research will address it. Peer support members must have ethics, morals, and values. The individual(s)

selective for their peer support team must come from within their agencies. First responders must be able to trust the individuals with whom they share information. Furthermore, the individual(s) forming the teams must get feedback from the first responders in their agency. Agencies should not only ask who wants to be on the team but ask their employees whom they would prefer to have on the team, which will help build foundational trust.

Incorporating a peer support program can face some initial pushback from first responders. Most of the pushback comes from the need for officers to have trust that the information they share will remain private. When providing information to a peer-support team member, many first responders do not know or understand the law surrounding their privacy. It is vital for a department when they are creating a peer support program to clearly explain the privacy rights to their employees.

At the end of this research, the author will explain Minnesota state law and federal law that protects first responders' rights when sharing information with a peer support member or a clinician. This topic is one of the most important covered in this research. First responders know and understand the law well. However, some need to learn that there are laws that cover such privacy rights about peer support. The author hopes this research will guide departments to start a peer support team and a resource for first responders seeking information on such a program.

Professionally, this portion of the research is important to the researcher as they have seen departments attempt to create peer support programs and fail. The failures resulted from a combination of department missteps and lack of commitment by city governments. This failure was partly due to the lack of information and communication about program requirements. Peer support programs are relatively new, with limited information on designing, implementing, and

maintaining quality programs. This research will serve as valuable information to anyone working to incorporate a peer support program.

Historically, there have not been any laws that pertain to the privacy of those sharing information with peer support members. In 2020, Minnesota passed Minnesota State Statute 181.9731. Moreover, in 2021, the United States Senate passed a law providing privacy to first responders seeking help through peer support groups. Even though this information is public, many still need to learn how these laws affect them.

The strengths of this research and topic are expanding. Peer support is gaining momentum across the United States as the need to address mental health among first responders grows. The problems associated with peer support teams typically stem from poor design and insufficient funding. This research will be able to address such concerns.

Many city, county, and federal agencies recognize best practices and strategies surrounding peer support programs as beneficial. Keeping first responders physically and mentally healthy will benefit their departments. If a first responder is healthy, they can continue to serve their communities in a high capacity and have long and healthy careers. This research will address many concerns and topics surrounding peer support teams and clinicians. The researcher hopes this information will benefit many seeking to address mental health concerns among first responders.

Statement of the Problem

First responders have been taking their own lives due to the significance of the job they perform on a daily basis. This tragedy is happening due to the impact of the things they see and do, as well as a lack of resources for them when they need help addressing mental health issues.

Not only that, but the stigma attached to seeking mental health help has hindered first responders from pursuing the help they may need. This stigma and concerns about peer support programs needs to be addressed and first responders need to have resources put into place by the employer for assistance. In addressing both issues, first responders will be able to have long healthy careers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research will address not only the above statement, but it will dive into the incorporation of a new specialty department (peer support), look at how this change could impact a department, show how communication is important during the process, address how incorporating a peer support program along with a physical fitness program would be beneficial, and show how a department can budget for such a program. Furthermore, this research will discuss the importance of ethical principles peers support members must obtain as they work with first responders. This research will also have a policy departments can follow for peer support members. The author will then explain the legal aspects of information first responders share with peer support members as well as a suggested amendment to Minnesota state statute 181.9731.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Incorporating a New Specialty Department

Since the inception of law enforcement, police officers have risked their lives to care for people in their communities. On many occasions, officers do not know the people they are helping but choose to do so because of a calling to serve others. When police officers show up to work to help strangers navigate the worst moments of their lives, they leave their families behind who do not know if they will come home. As officers serve, they often forget about their well-being. If first responders fail to maintain their physical and mental health, how can they help others effectively?

Mental health has become a significant topic of concern within our society. At times, people do not think about how police officers can be affected by the job they do daily. Police officers do and see things in the line of duty that the everyday person will never do or never see. Our communities are safe because of the daily work that the men and women in law enforcement do. Because of this, we need to take care of our officers. The author will address how to incorporate a new specialty department through a peer support program in this research. The topic of mental health in law enforcement has grown throughout the years. Many agencies have adopted programs to help combat mental health in law enforcement and to give the officers an outlet. Despite these resources, officers have left the field due to mental health concerns. Mental health still carries a stigma in law enforcement, and asking for help is not an option for some.

To help law enforcement officers, an agency needs a good peer support group, a physical fitness program, and a successful training program for the officers involved. One of these ways is to vary the training methods for officers (Bureau of Justice Assistance, pg. 2). Agencies can offer

in-person, online, hybrid, and models to meet the needs of officers who work different jobs and schedules. These steps will ensure officers have a better overall sense of wellness, leading to happier and more productive employees.

Law enforcement is a demanding career. Most officers will encounter situations that are difficult for them. However, the same incident may not affect their partners similarly. In order to help an officer who may be struggling with mental health issues, it is important to know the signs and symptoms.

In researching this topic, the author will explore how to overcome a complex change agent, develop a crisis communication strategy, and provide instruction on how to design a wellness program that works alongside a mental health program, incorporate a new specialty program could help an agency who does not have a peer support program or needs to address issues they may be having with a current program. Officers are leaving the field at an alarming rate. This research will benefit officers and law enforcement as a whole.

Complex Change Agent

During a complex change, an agency must first examine if it is needed and will benefit the entire department. If the agency is not ready for the change, the why behind the change must be clearly explained to gain acceptance. A department's administration must determine if officers are open to the change and identify potential barriers preventing the change's success. In this case, the described change will be a Peer Support and Wellness Program for officers. A peer support team is a resource for officers to confidently approach their peers with personal or work-related concerns (Yard, 2023, personal communication). Each team member receives 30–40 hours of special training on how to guide their peers through critical incidents and related

stresses. The problem does not necessarily need to be related to mental health but could be related to fitness, finances, or family issues.

Wellness overall is essential for law enforcement. According to TacMobolity (2022), "60% of law enforcement officers experience hypervigilance, 76% experienced a shortened temper, 6 out of 10 officers have muscular tension, 70% experience depression, and most officers have poor sleep patterns"(pg. 10). All these issues combined can lead to unwanted stress. The factors that need to be looked at more closely are internal and external barriers to effective collaboration. Several internal barriers that the administrations need to evaluate will be the program's cost, how to structure the program, and whether officers view the program favorably. External barriers to a peer support program would be locating peer support training for officers involved and what outside clinicians would be available. Clinicians are licensed counselors who can assist an officer with mental health issues. The agency also needs to be considerate of the view of the public.

When incorporating a peer support program, leaders need to be flexible and willing to implement change within the agency when it benefits the agency and its members. Leaders need to have an open mind regarding ideas from their staff. They must be willing to work alongside their staff to collaborate on good ideas for the change. According to justicesystemspartners.org, "Collaboration is the first step to ensure that the local justice system is truly functioning as a system" (2015, p.2). Leaders who implement change must also be willing to educate themselves about the change they are trying to implement. When making a change that will impact an agency, leaders need to conduct research to gain the knowledge to implement the change effectively.

The structure of the peer support team is fundamental. Peer support groups need a structure but should not be micromanaged by senior ranking officers. One to two designated sergeants should supervise the group. Their sole role is to ensure they are checking in with the sergeant ranks and ensuring follow-up is being conducted on a case-to-case basis within the officer ranks. Sergeants should never be involved in a peer support role with subordinates. Minnesota. Minnesota state statute 181.9731 stipulates that officers should report to their peers, meaning officers to officers and sergeants to sergeants. This way of reporting keeps sergeants from having to report possible issues that could make them not eligible for duty.

Each peer support sergeant should be assigned six to seven peer support officers. These officers are responsible for assisting with officer-level issues. The agency should also provide its officers access to two to three licensed mental health clinicians for more significant problems outside the abilities of peer support officers. Some officers may prefer to speak with a licensed professional in a more private setting where information sharing feels more confidential. However, officers must know that the information they share with a peer support member, or a clinician will not be disclosed. When officers gain trust in the process, they will speak more freely about the issues they may face on or off the job.

The goal of a peer support team is to provide the best resources possible to their fellow officers. The peer support team should be meeting monthly, keeping information flowing through the agency, and making sure follow-up is being conducted with officers. Improvement is always the goal of a peer support program (justicesystemspartners.org, 2015).

The risks involved in a peer support program are very low. An agency will not need to hire any new officers for this position as this position can be turned into a specialty duty at any

agency. This program will allow officers to have a way to communicate their issues with trained and licensed staff.

Crisis Communication Strategy

Communication is vital for any agency to operate. Communication needs to travel through the ranks and stay active. If there is good communication of what is taking place and why it is taking place, an agency will function at a higher level. For a peer support program to be successful, there must be effective communication. When a new change is implemented within an agency, employees push back if the why behind the change is not clearly explained.

All members of an agency need to understand the desired crisis communication plan. This plan should be proposed and demonstrated by the leadership team first, then passed down to the rest of the organization. This plan will be implemented by peer support member(s). Each crisis communication plan has three phases—pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis (Penn et al., 2022). The pre-crisis plan should identify the possible risks and needs. Peer support team members should be involved in the process to aid with potential solutions for handling the crisis.

The second phase is crisis response. In the response phase, the peer support team must have all the important information available. An individual or a team from peer support would then respond to the location requested. In this phase, the peer support member(s) must be able to provide the resources to the officer in crisis.

The third phase is post-crisis. Here, the peer support team will follow up with the officer to ensure that care and support are being given to the officer. The team will also be able to determine if the plan that was in place helped the officer. If modifications to the plan need to happen, this is where the team can meet to make the adjustments.

The hierarchy of the crisis communication strategy starts with the deputy chief. It then falls to the lieutenant to sergeant and sergeant to officer. In this plan, officers will still communicate directly with officers and sergeants with sergeants unless the peer support team member learns the officer/sergeant will cause harm to themselves or others. This communication strategy must be kept in line for the integrity and trust of the officers involved.

When possible, police leadership must always maintain open lines of communication within the agency. However, personal information cannot be shared regarding an officer's well-being. Not only is this out of respect for the officer(s) involved, but it is protected by law. If department leaders discover poor communication processes within the agency, they are responsible for fixing them (Stephens et al., 2011).

Ethics comes into play in any situation relating to an officer(s) involved in a critical incident or crisis. It must be determined during any situation whether the situation regarding an officer should be escalated up the chain of command. If it is deemed that an officer is not fit for duty, the administration must contact human resources. Once the officer is deemed fit for duty, they may return.

The agency should be open to the public they provide resources to officers regarding critical incidents and crisis circumstances. A collaborative effort should be sought out by Peer Support so that family, faith communities, and community resources can be utilized if a crisis response is needed.

Wellness Program

Leadership should be looking at wellness as a large part of leadership development. The development of leaders also requires coaching and mentoring. Establishing the physical aspects

of a wellness program should go hand in hand with the peer support program. The physical fitness side of the peer support program also requires a coaching structure.

The coaching should also stay within the ranks, sergeant to sergeant and officer to officer, to make officers feel comfortable. Follow-up is key to the success of the program. Once the program begins, following up with the officer bi-weekly will allow the mentor to help officers track their progress and determine what is working and what is not.

This process will give the mentor adequate time to help guide the officer in a better direction that works best for them. Policies will help guide the program and keep it on track. When looking at a physical fitness program, law enforcement must have a blend of cardiovascular training, weight training, and endurance training (Loux, 2018).

Incorporating these three aspects into a fitness program will allow officers to be better physically fit for their work environment. Officers usually find themselves in situations where short bursts of energy are utilized during short periods. These three training aspects will allow officers the muscular and cardiovascular ability to perform their duties. Incorporating both elements of physical fitness and peer support will make officers more well-rounded and able to serve the public in a higher capacity.

Physical fitness needs to be part of an agency's culture. A culture is made in an agency, beginning with the administration. Buy-in must occur throughout the agency, where the sergeants must assist the administration. To make this change, sergeants who work directly with the patrol officer must let officers know the benefits of physical fitness. Once buy-in is achieved and the program starts, officers will be able to see and feel the benefits. The physical fitness program will then carry over to the field training program (FTO), where recruits can benefit.

Physical fitness is a mindset. Incorporating the physical fitness program into the peer support program will allow the agency to use the same group of officers to coach others. The agency should also send the peer support team to training that revolves around physical fitness. Doing so will allow the agency to have a core group of well-rounded officers trained in both mental health and physical fitness.

The goal of the physical fitness program would be to incorporate short and long-term goals. When officers track their progress, they can see how far they have come in their physical fitness journey. When other officers witness their success, it will create more buy-in across the agency. A straightforward tracking model would be a sheet highlighting the officer's short-term goals, long-term goals, and a training log. The training log will also be a tool for the administration to use so that the officers can receive recognition and any pay incentives they have achieved through the program.

Budgeting/New Specialty Department

Staffing needs must be considered when developing a budget for the Peer Support Program. Staffing will come from within the agency, so hiring new employees is unnecessary. Once these officers are identified as Peer Support members, they will be sent to Peer Support training per Minnesota State Statute 181.9731 (Minnesota Revisor's Office, 2022). There is no need to seek grant-funded money. The program and long-term stability will come from the city budget overall. The administration will seek out other city departments to see what funding they have that could be reallocated to the police agency for funding. Securing a funding source will ensure the program's growth and funding each year. When asking for funding from other city departments, the administration will focus on what impacts their officers and why a peer support program is needed.

Presenting how positively the peer support team impacts the agency to the other city departments will aid with future funding. Doing so would take a lot of the ethical implications out of planning for the budget. When working on a budget, public perceptions and the impact on the community needs to be considered. At times, the public is asked to be taxed more to fund projects within the city.

Seeking money already in the city's budget will allow there to be no financial burden to the public. It is crucial to understand how the budget approval process works to identify partners and political allies to move the project forward. The city administrator must be involved if funds must be reallocated from other city departments.

The city administrator must consider if funds from other city departments should be given to the police agency. In doing so, political views could come into play, and it could be deemed that some, if not all, funding should come from other sources. A well-planned presentation by the administration to the city administrator and council will significantly affect the approval process.

When the peer support program is funded, deficiencies must be considered. Budgetary deficiencies could hurt the outcome a department is hoping to have. In this consideration, the administration needs a plan to keep the program moving forward. Having a plan will allow for the program to be successful. Sources such as grants and reallocating money from the agency's budgets must be considered.

Additional funds could come from the agency's asset forfeiture funds, other specialty units within the agency, and general funds accounts. Obtaining alternative funding sources will prevent a funding deficiency, and the program can maintain its current operating level with potential areas for growth. When it comes to the type of budget used to plan the program, a line-

item budget is the most common (Stuart, 2022). A line-item budget can be easily read and interpreted by people. An example of a line-item budget will be shown and explained in chapter three of this research.

Ethical Principles and an Action Plan for Peer Support

Peer Support

Peer support is a program implemented by first responder agencies to assist those in need as agencies have begun to recognize the need for mental health assistance for their employees. First responders work in a field where they are asked to respond to calls and see things every day that the average citizens may never see in their lifetime. Experiencing repeated traumatic events causes undue stress on first responders that can build over time. Without proper stress management, a first responder's emotions may spiral out of control and ultimately cause them to leave the profession. A peer support team can help assist in the beginning stages of mental health trauma to keep a first responder active and healthy. A peer support member's role is to actively assist first responders in getting the mental health assistance they may need. Peer support members do not provide counseling but engage first responders when sought out to assist them in finding the resources they need. Peer support members are there to listen and engage first responders to cope in healthy ways.

Facts

There are relevant facts surrounding a peer support program in Minnesota. The state of Minnesota covers and outlines Public Safety Peer Counseling under Minnesota state statute 181.9731. Under this state statute, if a member of an agency seeks help from a peer support member, what is shared is considered confidential. Meaning a peer support member would not have to, or be able to, disclose information to a third party (Minnesota Revisor 2020).

The most prominent myth of a peer support group is that some first responders believe that if they share any information with peer support, it will be used against them. Officers may feel this way due to the lack of understanding of what a peer support member does. This logic of thinking can be referred to as situational ethics. Pollock (2019) refers to situational ethics as an action that can be viewed as right or wrong depending on the situation. Officers must properly understand what peer support members can and cannot disclose. Sometimes, peer support members must share information regarding the officer's or others' safety. However, if an officer shares information with a peer support member not involving safety issues, and the peer support member shares this information with anyone, the peer support member will receive department discipline and removal from the team. This information will be discussed in the peer support code of conduct later in this document.

A second fact surrounding peer support is that first responders may not trust some peer support team members. Some people may think that if certain members learn about what they share, the whole agency will know what is happening to them. Improper personal selection can lead to mistrust of the entire program. Therefore, the right members must be selected for the peer support team. First responders need to have those they trust as peer support members for their agency.

Values and Concepts

When a first responder shares information with a peer support member, they expect privacy. What this means for a peer support member is a duty to keep information learned private. No one should know this information except the peer support member and the first responder. Loyalty and honesty are among the most significant issues when private information

is shared. Peer support members are ethically obligated to keep information from being shared, which is the program's foundation (Pollock, 2019).

Moral Dilemmas

At times, peer support members may face the moral dilemma of deciding to share information about an interaction they had with a first responder. As stated above, peer support members should not share any information they receive from a first responder except those in harm's way. In this case, the necessary steps must be taken to help the first responder at this time. They must receive the help they need. When peer support members are required to relay safety information that was privately shared, this can cause an internal conflict due to the loyalty to their coworkers. The duty to report needs to be outlined in a peer support member's ethics of care protocols. According to Pollock (2019), "The ethical system that defines good is meeting the needs of others and preserving and enriching relationships (p. 38).

The first responder who shared information with a peer support member in confidence may look at this from a deontological ethical view. This ethical view concerns the nature of the act being judged (Pollock, 2019). If a peer support member takes vital information to the administration, their act will be judged. Conversely, the peer support member does so to prevent harm to the first responder.

Immediate Issue

The most immediate issue that needs to be addressed so it can be resolved is trust among first responders. First responders need to have trust in their peer support team. Behaviors shown by peer support members will reflect how much trust there is. When working with first responders, peer support members must display moral and ethical behaviors. They need to build trust when the program starts and continue that trust throughout their time as a peer support

member. This trust will be noticed, and when it is, first responders will want to seek the help they need to resolve any issues they may be facing.

Resolve

To resolve the trust issue, first responders must know and understand the role of peer support. To accomplish this, peer support members must put together a presentation of what services they can offer as well as how privacy will be taken into account. First responders must know what is and what is not confidential. Once completed, meetings/briefings must occur to get a clear message out to the first responders. During these meetings, any loose ends can be tied up and addressed.

First responders must also understand when it is required to seek mental health services. After a critical incident, some departments offer mental health services to their employees. In contrast, others require them to attend mental health services. These requirements need to be covered by peer support members in meetings. The department's policy regarding these services needs to be reviewed so first responders are by staff before a critical incident so no one is caught off guard by department requirements. First responders must also understand the requirements regarding the agency's annual check-in. During the annual check-in, first responders are required to meet with a department-approved mental health provider. The information shared during mandated check-in is confidential and is not reported to peer support members or department administration. The first responder can discuss any information they are willing to share with the mental health provider at that time. A description of a mental health provider is given in the code of conduct in this document.

Leadership must let first responders know they will not be involved in the operation of the peer support program. They need to be clear that the only time they will be

involved and know what is taking place is if harm will be done to themselves or others. First responders also need to know that leadership supports the program and will be a positive resource if asked by first responders. According to cops.usdoj.gov (2022), "Leadership's increasing support of Performance and Recovery Optimization and other programs and policies that support officer wellness can be sensed by the rank and file and has increased officer morale" (p. 66). In doing so, first responders can develop the trust needed to make a successful program.

Impact on Peers, Community, and Criminal Justice

The impact of a properly structured peer support program can have a lasting effect on department members. Being supported through the difficult times in a first responder's career can keep the employee grounded and employed. It keeps the first responder not only mentally healthy but also physically healthy. A healthy officer can serve their community, giving that community the best service possible. With healthy officers, a healthy community will also be seen. Officers will be mentally and physically ready to serve the public. In turn, this will promote and foster a better relationship the communities will have with officers. Overall, this affects the criminal justice system significantly as we see recruitment and retention of officers dwindle. According to Orrick (n.d.), "Never before has the recruitment and retention of police personnel been as critical or as challenging for police organizations as it is today" (p. 13). With these challenges, peer support teams become more vital.

Ethical Considerations and Action Plan

Ethical considerations are at the forefront of a peer support program. There is no room for egoism among the peer support team. *Egoism* can be defined as whatever benefits oneself (Pollock, 2019). Peer support members must understand that being a team member requires being selfless. They are on the team to help others through difficult situations and will be called

upon in a time of need. Members must take responsibility for their role and work for the common good of first responders and the department. Members must be loyal and trustworthy and exercise sound judgment when working with first responders.

The action plan involving peer support requires an explanation of their responsibilities and a clear explanation of the entire program. First responders need to be able to see this plan as this will help to calm any fears they may have about the change. A written code of conduct needs to be in place and presented to first responders to accomplish this. The code of conduct will give the first responders a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a peer support member, a mental health provider, and the agency. Clear and concise language is beneficial to not only the first responders but also the department. How the document is created is essential as well. Creating change and implementing it needs support and buy-in from all formal leaders in the agency.

Implementation

The implementation of any new policy may be viewed positively or negatively. The administration's job is to explain the reasoning and benefits behind the policy. Those who need to follow the policy need an understanding of the change. If this change is presented and explained, it can change the outcome of how others view the policy. Implementing a new policy is essential. A new policy, or even adding or changing a policy, has implications. When addressing a new policy, it must be presented in an in-person training session. Sending out a blanket email is not a good idea as there can be too much gray area or room for others to interpret the policy. If presented in training, it can be explained, and questions can be answered (Zauhar, 2023, personal communication).

In drafting a code of conduct or new policy, assistance from others would be helpful. First, a working document must be generated. Using other agencies for guidance can be helpful. Some agencies may have already produced a document covering the desired need. Using this information can be helpful when a policy or code of conduct is created. It is crucial to create a document that fits an agency's needs. Once complete, having others look at the document is important to ensure the policy will fit the department and its officer's needs.

The administration needs support from their first-line leaders when implementing change. Policy and procedures are the same when it comes to change. According to Stewart and O'Donnell (2007), "Successful implementation of change requires a balance between "top-down" planning and distributed leadership" (p. 1). All members in an official leadership role must be on board when a change occurs so the transition goes smoothly. Therefore, all formal leaders need to be involved in implementing the new code of conduct for peer support. The researcher would present the new code of conduct in a meeting. Feedback would be asked to be given if changes need to be made. If changes need to be completed, they will take place. Once the code of conduct was complete, a discussion would take place between all leadership, explaining the need for the change so the same message is delivered to all employees. It will also show that leadership is taking an ethical approach to help every employee understand the new code of conduct.

Feedback and Ethical Expectations

Feedback is essential when it comes to applying any new change. Even when the code of conduct is finalized and put into circulation, it may need to be changed. Change does need to take place when it is warranted. Policies and rules need to be looked at occasionally to determine if changes need to happen. It would be considered if the peer support code of conduct was implemented and briefed to all employees and someone saw a need for a change. The author

would meet with those who felt changes needed to be made and ask them their reasoning. If the reasoning was valid, the parties suggesting change could be requested to conduct their research. According to Cerna (2013), "Policy implementation often takes place because a wide range of stakeholders interact between different levels – thus both central policy-makers and local actors on the ground are important for successful implementation" (p. 19). Positive feedback and utilizing all necessary resources are great ways to execute positive change.

Ethical expectations to consider revolving around the code of conduct for peer support would consist of avoiding harming the employees and the organization more. New changes in policy can add undue stress to an organization. If a peer support program and the code of conduct are not welcomed, it can divide an agency. Presenting the change and allowing others to express their feedback is essential. It gives the employee a sense of belonging and brings buy-in to the change.

Training

Peer support members are the only individuals required by Minnesota state law to be certified as peer support counselors (gov., 2023, Subd. 2 (d)). Training peer support members is critical. Minnesota state law requires peer support members to be certified by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Commissioner's Peer Support Standards. This training varies between 30-40 hours. All other employees who are not peer support trained would need to sit in on an in-service training provided by the police department. This training would consist of two parts. The first portion of training would explain the final copy of the peer support code of conduct. Employees would be introduced to the department's peer support team, and the peer support team would explain the resources they can offer employees. These resources include providing employees with contact information for a mental health professional, general support

before or after critical incidents, services to their families, and department-wide family events. Peer support members would be available to any employee on or off duty.

The second part would be informing the employees of the difference between a peer support member and a mental health professional. A peer support member cannot provide mental health counseling to employees. They are there for guidance as well as to be a resource. A mental health professional is a licensed therapist vetted by the department and Human Resources and can provide in-depth mental health services to the employee. Employees must understand the differences, which will be outlined in the peer support code of conduct.

Ethical Accountability

As mentioned before, peer support members should keep information they receive from first responders private. It is the peer support members' job to hold themselves ethically accountable. Peer support members need to be held to a high standard to gain the trust of first responders. According to Pollock (2019), "A code of ethics helps engender self-respect in individual officers; pride comes from knowing that one has conducted oneself properly and appropriately" (p. 129). To ensure that peer support members are held to a high standard, the author created a code of conduct. This code of conduct explains the role of peer support, what a mental health professional is, officer confidentiality, Minnesota law governing peer support, and accountability of peer support members. The code of conduct will be shown in chapter three and can be referenced in the appendices.

Stewardship Principles

Stewardship is an important aspect of one's life. It means a person is willing to care for others and put their self-interests aside. According to Okpala and Caldwell (2019), as cited in Block (2013), "Stewardship encompasses the ethical responsibility to act on behalf of others and

to honor the responsibilities of service, rather than to pursue one's self-interest" (p. 3). Peer support is all about stewardship. It encompasses first responders putting their needs aside and helping a brother or sister in need. Peer support members ask for nothing in return and hope they can assist others when needed. Not only is stewardship about putting others first, but it is also about trust. First responders are looking for those they can share information with, knowing that what they share is confidential.

Those called to be stewards help others in need using the gifts they were blessed with. According to the New Living Translation Bible (2015), as cited in 1 Peter, verse 10-11, "God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then, everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen" (p. 2187). We were put on this earth to help and encourage others. It is in our DNA to serve our fellow man. Peer support members are no different. They have a calling to be stewards and must establish the trust put in them.

Legal & Legislative Life-Long Learning & Application

Police officers have long served the public and have not asked for anything in return. Officers are sent to calls and put into situations that most people will never encounter in their lifetime. In 2022, the number of officers that took their own lives was 132 officers (<https://bluehelp.org>). That is 132 lives lost that could have been saved.

Law enforcement is a demanding job. Many people forget that officers are human, just like anyone else. Police officers have emotions and feelings like every other person. Since the beginning of law enforcement to the present time, officers have carried a stigma of being the

"tough guy." Police officers have been told and taught that nothing should bother them, and if it does, they need to suck it up and move on.

This adage leads officers to a place where they can hurt themselves, their loved ones, and their families. Mental health is a significant topic in the United States today. Until recently, police officers have been forgotten about regarding mental health. Some police officers have even felt they could not and should not discuss their mental health.

Because of this stigma, some police officers have suffered the impacts of the job. According to Bakker et al. (2021), "Recent studies have shown that the accumulation of critical incidents makes rescue workers susceptible to developing psychological and physical symptoms, such as PTSD, depression, health problems, state anger, anger out, emotional dissonance, and burnout" (pg. 819).

A police officer's overall well-being and wellness matters. Along with the critical incidents officers encounter, sleep, a well-balanced diet, exercise, and water intake all affect an officer's mental health. Of all of these listed above, critical incidents affect officers the most. Critical incidents account for 53% of officers' mental health issues (Bakker et al., 2012). This author has set out to not only study the impacts of mental health on police officers but will be proposing a policy change and identifying key stakeholders to help incorporate the change needed to help officers have a long, healthy career.

Policy Change

In September 2020, Minnesota recognized a need to help police officers and their mental health, which was finally a step toward getting officers the help they needed. Minnesota state statute 181.9731 was adopted in September 2020. This state statute allows police departments to set up peer support teams and involve clinicians to assist officers.

The state statute also affords officer privacy to assure that what they share with a peer support member or a clinician will not be used against them in court (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/181.973>). However, under Subdivision 3, prohibited disclosure must be expanded and more transparent. Under subdivision 3, the state statute needs clear and concise information addressing the primary concern of officers seeking mental health help. The concern among police officers is that the information they share will be disclosed and used against them. This addition to the state statute would assure officers that if they seek mental health help, the information they disclose would not be used against them. By doing so, an officer could share information with a peer support member or a clinician and not worry about potential consequences.

Under subdivision 3, Disclosure Prohibited, line (c) needs to be added. This line and policy change would read (c) If a first responder needs mental health services and seeks such service, whether through a peer support member or clinician, whatever information is shared cannot and will not be disclosed in a court of law against the officer(s) for any legal reason. It is the right of the officer(s) to seek mental health counseling and not have it used against them. No governing body shall seek this information as it is protected information by law.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders that would favor this policy change are the Minnesota Chiefs Association of Police, sheriff's departments, local law enforcement, and each person within law enforcement. The arguments made by each of these groups and agencies would be positive. It would be a positive addition to the Minnesota state statute to assure officers seeking mental health services would be protected.

More precise language may encourage officers to seek help who may not have under the current language of the statute. This update could prevent officers from falling into depression and taking their own lives. Overall, encouraging officers to get help would benefit them, the departments they work for, and society. The stakeholders who would not support this change would be anti-law enforcement groups as well as specific policymakers. These individuals could argue that the current statute is clear, needs no additions, and would only give officers another means to claim health-related medical needs.

Solutions to Criticisms

In November of 2021, Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Senator, helped write and pass a federal bill titled Confidentiality Opportunities for Peer Support Counseling Act. This bill, much like the Minnesota State statute, gives protections to law enforcement for them to seek counseling for mental health needs. Grassley stated, "This law ensures officers have an opportunity to participate in peer counseling with the confidence that their privacy will be protected" (para. 2).

This bill not only gives officers protections under Minnesota state law but also protections under federal law. Like the Minnesota state statute, Grassley's bill was voted on and passed in Congress, showing support for law enforcement. To address the negative impacts of views of this bill and address the criticisms, presenting data showing how peer support counseling will not only help officers but also show how healthy officers working in the field allow them to be better officers for their communities.

When an officer's well-being is looked after, it addresses the officer's longevity of their career and how they conduct their job. According to Sherri Martin, the National Wellness Director for the National Fraternal Order of Police (IACP), "The biggest choice of services for

police officers is peer support. 3 out of four would rather go to peer support than any other kind of services out there" (p. 1).

Legal Implications

Addressing the legal implications of the bill would take much work. Those who would not favor the policy change could argue that this gives police officers too much protection regarding critical incidents. Data would need to be presented showing how many officers seek care from peer support and if the support helped the officer. However, Minnesota state statute 181.9731 Subdivision 3. (b) states, "Government data on individuals receiving peer counseling are classified as private data on individuals, as defined by section 13.02, subdivision 12, but may be disclosed as provided in subdivision 4" (2020, p.1).

The only way an officer's information seeking peer support counseling can be released is if the counselor believes the person seeking care will harm themselves or others, information is disclosed that is required by law to report under mandated reporting laws, the officer provides written consent, the surviving spouse of the officer gives written consent, or the individual who received counseling testifies voluntarily (state statute 181.9731).

Minnesota state statute 181.9731 could be brought back up in Minnesota legislation and argued. If this did happen, and it passed, the bill could be changed for the better or worse. However, peer support is growing across the county, and officers who felt a stigma with seeking help are fading. According to Cnapich et al., "Similarly, research has found police officers view peer support training as beneficial" (para. 9). This makes officers more well-rounded and healthy.

Current Court Decisions, Public Policies, Legislation

To date, there have not been any court cases or decisions challenging the peer support law. There have also not been any court cases where an officer has been asked or made to testify regarding information regarding facts disclosed to a peer support member. As time continues, the author can see this being challenged in court. This challenge may come in the form of the prosecution team seeking information that an officer disclosed when he or she was involved in an officer-involved shooting.

It is essential to get Subdivision 3, line (c) added to Minnesota State statute 181.9731. As a reminder, it would read (c) If a first responder requires mental health services and seeks such service, whether through a peer support member or clinician, whatever information is shared cannot and will not be disclosed in a court of law against the officer(s) for any legal reason. It is the right of the officer(s) to seek mental health counseling and not have it used against them. No governing body shall seek this information as it is protected information by law. As of today, two laws govern peer support services for first responders. The first covers Minnesota state law, which is Minnesota state statute 181.9731, and the federal law titled the Confidentiality Opportunities for Peer Support Counseling Act (117-60). These two laws address and support first responders seeking peer support counseling.

Execute the Change

This change in Minnesota State statute would take work. It could be argued by Minnesota government officials and those who oppose the change that the current law is sufficient. Outside assistance would be needed to change the law. It would take more than one voice to address this change. Other local law enforcement agencies would need to be involved. Along with local law enforcement, the League of Minnesota Cities, the Minnesota Fraternal Order of Police,

Minnesota State Senate Representative Zach Duckworth, United States Representative Angie Craig, and Senator Amy Klobuchar would need to be involved. These individuals would be the local Minnesota companies and government representatives who could assist in changing the Minnesota State statute. Utilizing these key players would help ensure progress is made on the amendment of the statute and give officers a voice when it comes to addressing mental health.

Action Plan

As a leader in the workplace, this change would be welcomed. Changing the statute would need buy-in, however. This change would be proposed to the Chief, Deputy Chief, and Lieutenants of the Apple Valley Police Department. It would be presented with data from other agencies to show the success of a peer support program. The amendment would also show how one small change could and will give peace of mind to officers who want help but are concerned that the information they share could be used against them. Once buy-in is achieved and the amendment is passed, the state statute applies to all Minnesota first responders. During a department-wide meeting, this amendment to the statute would be presented, showing the officers they can seek help without repercussions.

Concepts and Impacts

The impacts of the amendment to the state statute would have a significant effect on peers and the criminal justice system overall. This amendment would allow more first responders, especially police officers, to come forward who may be struggling. Currently, there is a stigma. It is not a stigma that officers cannot reach out for help, but a stigma that if officers share information with peer support or a clinician, the information they share will get out or be used against them. While this is a common worry among some officers, amending the state statute

with clear and precise language would take this worry away. The result would benefit the criminal justice system as a whole.

Administrative Considerations

Regarding the amendment of the state statute purpose, the administration would need to support their officers. There would be no legal concerns to have to address this amendment. It would solely be put into place to address a growing concern that police officers are taking their own lives. It does not affect any criminal or civil law. A police department would continue to operate like it did in the past. Use of force policies and procedures would not change, nor would mandated reporting procedures. This amendment would not affect any other portion of how law enforcement operates.

Expectations and Accountability

If and when the amendment passes, officers would have an obvious explanation for their personal information staying private. Regarding accountability, peer support members are required by law to take a certified training that is a 40-hour course. In this course, peer support members are given the training and tools to address situations they encounter.

They are also taught how to keep information private between them and an officer and when they need to disclose information. The peer support members must not disclose any information unless the officer is in danger of harming themselves or others or if mandated reporting laws are violated. The administration's job is to ensure they do not get involved in the peer support process unless the officer is endangering themselves or others. If the administration gets information that a peer support member is violating officers' privacy rights by seeking help, they must look into it. If true, the peer support member must be taken off the team and disciplined.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the author has presented a statewide problem in regard to Minnesota State statute 181.9731. A solution has been given to the problem and stakeholders have been identified. An action plan was given, and it showed how the criminal justice community would benefit from the solution proposed.

Chapter 3: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Implications

The Implementation of a peer support group in any agency will be beneficial to first responders, the departments they work for, and the citizens they serve. In chapter two, a line-item budget was discussed as the easiest way to budget for a peer support program. Options of where the funds could come from to support a peer support program were discussed in detail in chapter two. The budget is one of the most important things to establish as an agency to ensure the program's success. A well written budget showing where funds will need to be allocated will keep an agency on track. The line-item budget below is an example and does not necessarily represent the actual cost of a peer support program.

Figure 1

Peer Support Program Budget

Category	Budget Amount	Actual Amount	Overage	Total
Incentives	0.2%	\$76,000	0	\$76,000
Training Peer Support	\$600 Per Officer*7	\$4,200 (Once)	0	\$4,200
Travel	\$300	\$300	0	\$300
HR	\$2,000 (Once)	\$2,000	0	\$2,000

Physical Fitness Training	\$600 Per Officer*7	\$4,200 (Once)	0	\$4,200
Clinicians	\$5,000	\$5,000	0	\$5,000
Over Time (Meetings)	\$3,000 (Set)	\$3,000	0	\$3,000
Total First Year and Thereafter				\$94,700 (First Year) \$84,300 (After)

Note. Peer Support Budget. Own work.

Ethical principles were also discussed in detail in chapter two. Being ethical and keeping information confidential is highly important as a peer support member. Below is an example of a code of conduct/policy agencies could use to govern their peer support program:

Peer Support Code of Ethics

Peer Support Code of Conduct

Effective Date: 4/21/23

I. POLICY

The purpose of this policy outlines the department's expectations regarding every employees' conduct with the public, fellow officers, supervisors, and organization.

Employees who are involved in Peer Support are expected to follow the code of conduct. Employees will perform their assigned duties to the best of their ability. Those assigned to Peer Support will also be expected to carry out their official duties as an officer. Which includes protecting life, property, keeping the peace, prevent crime, make lawful arrests, and enforce the criminal laws of the city, the State of Minnesota, and the United States.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees who work for the Police Department. It encompasses the Police Departments Code of Conduct regarding those who are Peer Support members. This code of conduct is established to offer a safe and private way for department members in times of personal need. Peer Support members will provide assistance during and after a critical incident with guidance from the department's Mental Health providers. This code of conduct covers all employees whether they are on or off duty.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Performance of Duties
- B. Peer Support Team
- C. Approved Mental Health Professional
- D. Officer Confidentiality
- E. State Law Regarding Peer Support

IV. POLICY ELEMENTS AND APPLICATION

A. Performance of Duties

Officers will first and foremost perform their assigned duties. These assigned duties can be patrolling operations, Investigations, Community Impact Unit, or others that may have been assigned. Officers are expected to fulfill their obligations to the citizens of the city and the State of Minnesota. Officers will act in their official duties unless assigned otherwise by the Chief of Police or their designee.

If an officer is working in their official capacity and a Peer Support member is requested, the Peer Support member's supervisor must give them authorization to suspend their official duties. When acting in an official capacity as a Peer Support member, officers will execute these duties until their assignment is complete.

B. Peer Support Team

A Peer Support member is one who has been chosen to be a part of the team by the Peer Support Sergeant. Members will be sent to Peer Support training such as First Responders Support Team (frstmidwest.org). This training teaches Peer Support members vital information on how to assist their partners in time of need as well as instructs the member the importance of confidentiality. Below is a description of the team.

1. A team lead by a department sergeant and staffed with trained Peer Support members from the department.
2. May provide daily assistance or referrals to a Mental Health professional.

3. Team members will develop and employ wellness programs that support the well-being of officers.
4. Members will be selected to the team by the Peer Support Sergeant.
5. Mental Health providers contracted through the city.
6. Members will hold the rank of sergeant and below.

C. Approved Mental Health Professional

A Mental Health professional who has received their degree in career services or counseling as described at (mn.gov/boards). Has passed the Minnesota Licensed Professional Counselor examination and has been approved by the city and established a contract with the city. The Mental Health providers do not conduct fitness for duty evaluations. The sergeant in charge will keep a current list of the Mental Health providers contracted through the city.

D. Officer Confidentiality

Information that is discussed by officers to a Peer Support member or a Mental Health professional is private. There are some exceptions. They are as follows:

1. The Peer Support counselor receives information from the officer they are going to harm themselves or others.
2. The Peer counselors receives information that they must report under mandated reporting laws to include the maltreatment of minors.
3. The officer who receives counseling provides written consent to disclose the information they shared.
4. The officer who received counseling is deceased and the surviving spouse provides written consent.
5. The officer who received counseling voluntarily testifies.

E. State Law Regarding Peer Support

Information discussed is protected by Minnesota State law. Minnesota State statutes 181.9731, 181.9732, and 13.43 Subd. 9 and 9a protect the officer from disclosure of information shared with peer counselors and Mental Health providers. Department administration, supervisors, or other Peer Support members cannot request this information.

V. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Peer Support members must attend a Minnesota State approved course to be certified as a Peer Support member. Peer Support members may not act as a peer counselor if they do not have this certification. Approved trainers can be found on the Minnesota POST board website.

VI. ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Information shared by officers to Peer Support members is sensitive and confidential. Any Peer Support member who shares this information to others, except those listed in section D, will be dismissed from the team. They will also receive department discipline. This discipline, depending on the violation, could include a verbal reprimand, written reprimand, unpaid suspension, and termination. A violation of confidentiality, except those listed in section D, will be brought to the chief law enforcement officer.

Note. Peer Support Code of Ethics: Own work.

A good budget and a code of conduct will help any agency make a peer support program successful. A budget can be easily tracked and adjusted as time passes and can be a working document to serve the desires and needs to either expand or reduce the needs for the program. A code of conduct will also keep an agency and its peer support members informed as laws may change and any amendments that may need to take place can be put into place. It is also a document that will serve the purpose of discipline if the code of conduct is violated by peer support member(s). It also serves the purpose of keeping members of the department informed.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research has looked at how peer support teams are vital in the field of criminal justice to support first responders. Further research could be examined in the coming years to show the impact a peer support team is having on an agency. To do this, the author will continue to gather data on agencies to see if there have been positive impacts on recruitment, retention, and the longevity of first responders. The author will gather this information using voluntary

surveys for those who want to participate. These surveys will examine areas such as moral and the impacts of moral, whether positive or negative, that their peer support team(s) has brought to their agency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the author has shown how to overcome a complex change agent, how to incorporate a crisis communication strategy, how to establish a wellness program (physical fitness program) into the Peer Support Program, and how to navigate the new specialty department into an agency using a line-item budget. The author continued and discussed a peer support team's function and how they can assist first responders in a time of need. Values and morals surrounding peer support members were addressed to include the importance of moral dilemmas one might face while working with first responders. As a peer support team, explaining to first responders what role a peer support member holds and addressing any feedback from first responders is critical. Doing so can build the trust needed to make a successful program. The author implemented a code of conduct for peer support, addressed how keeping information shared with peer support members is private, and spoke on stewardship principles. Stewardship stands out in everything peer support members do. Being a good steward and serving others is what is asked of them. Working with those who need help is fundamentally the basis of peer support. This research has addressed how trust and being a good steward is important. Furthermore, the author has presented a statewide problem regarding Minnesota State Statute 181.9731. The problem has been solved, and stakeholders have been identified. An action plan was put in place, and it was shown how the criminal justice community would benefit from the solution proposed.

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Appendices

Peer Support Code of Ethics

Peer Support Code of Conduct

Effective Date: 4/21/23

VI. POLICY

The purpose of this policy outlines the department's expectations regarding every employees' conduct with the public, fellow officers, supervisors, and organization.

Employees who are involved in Peer Support are expected to follow the code of conduct. Employees will perform their assigned duties to the best of their ability. Those assigned to Peer Support will also be expected to carry out their official duties as an officer. Which includes protecting life, property, keeping the peace, prevent crime, make lawful arrests, and enforce the criminal laws of the city, the State of Minnesota, and the United States.

VII. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees who work for the Police Department. It encompasses the Police Departments Code of Conduct regarding those who are Peer Support members. This code of conduct is established to offer a safe and private way for department members in times of personal need. Peer Support members will provide assistance during and after a critical incidents with guidance from the department's Mental Health providers. This code of conduct covers all employees whether they are on or off duty.

VIII. DEFINITIONS

- A. Performance of Duties
- B. Peer Support Team
- C. Approved Mental Health Professional
- D. Officer Confidentiality
- E. State Law Regarding Peer Support

IX. POLICY ELEMENTS AND APPLICATION

A. Performance of Duties

Officers will first and foremost perform their assigned duties. These assigned duties can be patrolling operations, Investigations, Community Impact Unit, or others that may have been assigned. Officers are expected to fulfill their obligations to the citizens of the city and the State of Minnesota. Officers will act in their official duties unless assigned otherwise by the Chief of Police or their designee.

If an officer is working in their official capacity and a Peer Support member is requested, the Peer Support member's supervisor must give them authorization to suspend their official duties. When acting in an official capacity as a Peer Support member, officers will execute these duties until their assignment is complete.

B. Peer Support Team

A Peer Support member is one who has been chosen to be a part of the team by the Peer Support Sergeant. Members will be sent to Peer Support training such as First Responders Support Team (frstmidwest.org). This training teaches Peer Support members vital information on how to assist their partners in time of need as well as instructs the member the importance of confidentiality. Below is a description of the team.

1. A team lead by a department sergeant and staffed with trained Peer Support members from the department.
2. May provide daily assistance or referrals to a Mental Health professional.
3. Team members will develop and employ wellness programs that support the well-being of officers.
4. Members will be selected to the team by the Peer Support Sergeant.
5. Mental Health providers contracted through the city.
6. Members will hold the rank of sergeant and below.

C. Approved Mental Health Professional

A Mental Health professional who has received their degree in career services or counseling as described at (mn.gov/boards). Has passed the Minnesota Licensed Professional Counselor examination and has been approved by the city and established a contract with the city. The Mental Health providers do not conduct fitness for duty evaluations. The sergeant in charge will keep a current list of the Mental Health providers contracted through the city.

D. Officer Confidentiality

Information that is discussed by officers to a Peer Support member or a Mental Health professional is private. There are some exceptions. They are as follows:

1. The Peer Support counselor receives information from the officer they are going to harm themselves or others.
2. The Peer counselors receives information that they must report under mandated reporting laws to include the maltreatment of minors.
3. The officer who receives counseling provides written consent to disclose the information they shared.
4. The officer who received counseling is deceased and the surviving spouse provides written consent.
5. The officer who received counseling voluntarily testifies.

E. State Law Regarding Peer Support

Information discussed is protected by Minnesota State law. Minnesota State statutes 181.9731, 181.9732, and 13.43 Subd. 9 and 9a protect the officer from disclosure of information shared with peer counselors and Mental Health providers. Department administration, supervisors, or other Peer Support members cannot request this information.

X. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Peer Support members must attend a Minnesota State approved course to be certified as a Peer Support member. Peer Support members may not act as a peer counselor if they do not have this certification. Approved trainers can be found on the Minnesota POST board website.

VI. ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Information shared by officers to Peer Support members is sensitive and confidential. Any Peer Support member who shares this information to others, except those listed in section D, will be dismissed from the team. They will also receive department discipline. This discipline, depending on the violation, could include a verbal reprimand, written reprimand, unpaid suspension, and termination. A violation of confidentiality, except those listed in section D, will be brought to the chief law enforcement officer.

Note. Peer Support Code of Ethics: Own work.