

Denver Police Department Peer Support Program

Purpose

To modify a program that provides every employee within the Denver Police Department the opportunity to receive emotional and tangible peer support through times of personal or professional crisis and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties.

Discussion

As one of the first peer support programs in the United States, Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in 1935 on the belief that a person's peers could offer meaningful assistance in the struggle of alcoholism. Since that time, peer support-based interventions (such as support groups) have helped people cope with a wide range of illnesses and circumstances. The rationale for such groups is that individuals who share a common illness or condition can cope more effectively by discussing their experiences, sharing practical information, and offering moral support to one another.

History

Based on concerns of alcohol abuse and officer suicide, the Denver Police Department Peer Support Project was established in June of 1982. The Program was among the first law enforcement peer support programs in the United States and continues today as a proactive, efficient, cost-effective extension of traditional behavioral health assets such as the department psychologist and employee assistance program. By providing employees with an informal, readily accessible personal assistance network, the Denver Police Department Peer Support Project continues to serve as a first line of defense against personal concerns that might otherwise not be addressed. The Denver Police Department has benefited from, and is grateful for, the efforts and sacrifices of the officers who came together in 1982 as the original group of Peer Advisors.

Policy

Peer Support Programs shall maximize existing departmental resources by providing employees with additional options and tools for dealing with personal problems.

Peer Support Programs shall be staffed by Peer Advisors operating under the supervision of the Department Psychologist. Peer Advisors are permanent paid department employees who have been specially trained to assist fellow employees by providing services such as information, guidance, advice, referrals, consultation, and liaison with healthcare professionals. Peer Advisors render these services voluntarily in addition to their regular work assignments. At the discretion of their supervisor(s), they may conduct Peer Support activities while on duty provided that this does not interfere with their regular work assignments, violate department policies or procedures, or otherwise disrupt department operations. Peer Advisors do not provide professional services such as diagnosis or treatment of mental disorders, psychological assessment, testing, counseling, or any other activity that might constitute the practice of psychotherapy under the Colorado Revised Statutes or other applicable laws.

Definitions

Client

In this policy, the term “Client” shall refer to any Denver Police Department employee that makes a self-initiated contact, is referred to, or is contacted by a Peer Advisor. Any Client, whether of the classified service or career service, may maintain a mutually consensual peer support relationship with any Peer Advisor of the classified service or career service.

Peer Advisor

A Peer Advisor is a Denver Police Department employee specially selected and trained to provide a first line of assistance and basic crisis intervention to fellow employees. Peer Advisors work in a voluntary capacity to assist employees during times of personal and professional crisis. Peer Advisors are trained to recognize situations and events requiring referral of clients to the Police Psychological Service Unit. Peer Advisors may be peace officers (member of the classified service) and civilians (members of career service). As Peer Advisors interact amongst themselves within the program, rank or position within the department is not a significant consideration.

Police Psychologist / Police Psychological Service Unit

The Police Psychologist will supervise the Peer Support Project of the Denver Police Department and provide voluntary and confidential services to all Denver Police Officers and their families (26.00 of the Operations Manual) and civilian (career service) employees. The Police Psychologist will assist in the selection, training, and retention of Peer Advisors and provide consultation regarding client and other Program matters as needed (116.18 of the Operations Manual).

Family Liaison Officer

Peer Advisors of the classified service (peace officers) selected for additional training and responsibilities in line of duty injuries and death. The Family Liaison Officer’s role is as facilitator between the Department and the officer’s family (116.19 of the Operations Manual).

Project Director

The Project Director oversees the operational aspects of the Peer Support Programs providing services to Denver Police Officers (established in 1982), career service employees at the Communications Bureau (established in 2002?), and career service employees of the Denver Police Department (established in 2005). The Project Director provides assistance and consultation to the Program Coordinators.

Program Coordinator

The Program Coordinator oversees the operational aspects of his or her specific Program and acts as the liaison between their Program and the Project Director / Police Psychological Services Unit.

Organizational Structure

Chief of Police

Deputy Chief - Administration

Police Psychologist

Project Director

*Program Coordinator
Denver Police Officers*

*Program Coordinator
Communications Bureau*

*Program Coordinator
Career Service Employees*

Each Program may maintain its individual policy, client statistics, agendas, meetings, continuing education, and client review with the Police Psychological Services Unit provided no conflict exists with this policy.

Project Director Responsibilities

The Project Director is appointed by the Chief of Police (or his designee) to oversee the Peer Support Programs within the Denver Police Department.

Responsibilities include:

- To maintain the integrity of each Program and to constitute a line of accountability with the Chief of Police and Police Psychologist
- To assist in the formulation and administration of Program policies, procedures, guidelines, directives, etc.
- To insure adequate administrative support for the Programs
- To insure adequate funding for the Programs (i.e. training)
- To assist in the solving of any major problems and to consider complaints and grievances related to Peer Advisors and Program functioning
- To maintain records, statistics, and other documentation of Program activities
- To assist Program Coordinators in the selection and training of new Peer Advisors
- To assist Program Coordinators in acquiring continuing education for Peer Advisors
- To promote and market the Peer Support Project throughout the Department
- To assist the Police Psychologist in his or her duties and liaison with the Police Psychological Services Unit

Program Coordinator Responsibilities

- To manage the day-to-day operations of the Program
- To assist in the formulation and administration of Program policies, procedures, guidelines, directives, etc.
- To facilitate Program meetings with Peer Advisors
- To maintain records of Peer Advisor and Program activities
- To assist in the recruitment and training of new Peer Advisors
- To assist in the continuing education of existing Peer Advisors
- To assist the Police Psychologist with his or her duties
- To promote the Peer Support Project within the Department

Eligibility

Any non-probationary police officer (classified service) or civilian (career service) employee with an appropriate disciplinary history is eligible for the position of a Peer Advisor.

Selection and De-Selection

Applications for the position of Peer Advisor will be solicited as individual Program needs dictate. Candidates will be drawn from a list of eligible individuals who have submitted an application (Appendix A) to a specific Program. Candidates will then be required to undergo an evaluation in the form of an interview with a board consisting of:

- The Police Psychologist (or his or her designee)
- The Project Director (or his or her designee)
- The Program Coordinator (or his or her designee)
- Peer Advisors selected by the Program Coordinator

The selection board may consider characteristics and traits such as the applicant's reputation within the department, social skills, ability to empathize, previous education and training, job experience, previous use of a Program, motivation, sincerity, ability to complete training, and adherence to program policy.

Final approval for selection of Peer Advisors rests with the Chief of Police.

The newly selected Peer Advisor will sign a Memo of Understanding / Confidentiality Statement (Appendix B).

The newly selected Peer Advisor will be required to successfully complete all the training requirements of the Program.

Due to the sensitive nature of peer support work, Peer Advisors can be dismissed (De-Selected) at any time at the discretion of the Chief of Police and or in violation of the Memo of Understanding / Confidentiality Statement.

Training

Initial training for the newly selected Peer Advisor currently consists of a 40-hour curriculum that includes instruction concerning mental health, suicide, grief, chemical dependency (and other compulsive behavior), counseling skills, listening skills, issues with families and children, critical incidents, trauma, vicarious trauma, anger management, stress management, and referral techniques.

Meetings and Documentation

Program Coordinators will facilitate regular meetings, with their Peer Advisors, at a frequency approved by the Chief of Police who may provide Special Assignment time. The Police Psychologist (or his or her designee) will attend a portion of the meeting to provide assistance and consultation reference past and on-going contacts with clients. These meetings will also provide opportunities for continuing education.

Program Coordinators will insure Client Contact Sheets (or other methods of capturing data) are completed and submitted on a timely basis. The sheets may indicate the number and type of client contacts, but no information that could identify individual clients will be recorded. The data will be forwarded to the Project Coordinator on a regular basis.

Ethical Issues

The behaviors and actions of a Peer Advisor reflect on the credibility of all three department Programs and the Peer Support Project as a whole. Inappropriate behavior can damage the trust fellow employees place in the Project.

Paramount is the personal integrity of each Peer Advisor and his or her respect for each client's dignity, self-development, and personal welfare.

Peer Advisors will not exercise power over clients or derive personal gain from helping them. It is unethical for a Peer Advisor to accept any gift or remuneration from a client, engage in activities to meet their personal needs at the expense of the client, or to ask for favors or help from clients. A Peer Advisor's sole reward is the satisfaction of helping a troubled employee.

In developing trust with a client, it is beneficial to explain the Peer Advisor's role and describe what services can and cannot be offered. Peer Advisors are primarily caring and attentive listeners, serving as a bridge to helping troubled employees find the professional help they require, and not tasked to solve the clients' problems for them.

Peer Advisors must be knowledgeable with state statutes and department policy involving confidentiality. Peer Advisors must advise clients when confidentiality can and must be breached (such as indications of illegal behavior or an indication a clear and imminent danger exists to the client or others), preferably at the outset of any contact.

Peer Advisors must not enter into a "dual relationship" with clients. These can include situations where the client is a subordinate or supervisor, the client is a subject officer or panel member of a Disciplinary Review Board or similar process involving the Peer Advisor, the client's need for peer support stems from an incident involving the Peer Advisor, and other situations diminishing the Peer Advisor's ability to remain objective. Peer Advisors must strive to be neutral, not partisan or aligned with management or employee organizations. The Peer Support Project relies on the trust and endorsement of both management and employees.