

## First Responder Training

### Overview

First responders such as policemen, firemen and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) work in difficult, demanding environments on a daily basis. Their jobs require extensive training, a decisive, unhesitating mentality, and the ability to quickly evaluate and respond to complex situations.

Many of those first responders working in military-heavy communities are unfamiliar with military culture. Behavioral health issues, which affect a significant number of veterans and returning service members who have seen combat, are poorly understood not just by first responders, but by American society as a whole. While we must work to eliminate misunderstanding and stigma from every facet of our society, we must take particular care to ensure that first responders – who must evaluate and act in high-stress, high-leverage situations in very brief amounts of time – have a complete understanding of the most common behavioral health conditions affecting veterans, service members and their families. Their ability to understand, communicate with and respond to those they serve is of paramount importance to the formation of a safer, more peaceful community.

The following steps are designed to provide a simple, effective means of communicating the importance of behavioral health concerns to first responders in your community. They are 1) Prepare a Presentation; 2) Reach Out to First Responders; and 3) Additional Ways to Engage First Responders.

**Is it being done already?** Many behavioral health providers conduct their own outreach within the military community. Contact local providers, hospitals, state and national chapters of mental health associations, behavioral health support organizations, etc. and inquire as to their outreach methods. Even if they already have extensive outreach strategies, you may be able to provide support and build capacity as a partner. Many communities also host behavioral health awareness events. Contact local community managers at the government and nonprofit level, as well as community mental health centers, to determine whether or not you are able to assist with such events in any capacity.

## STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION

### Step 1: Prepare a Presentation

There is no single method for creating a powerful, effective presentation. Each community – and perhaps each type of first responder – will require a different touch. With that said, here are some of the main topics you may wish to discuss over the course of your presentation:

- **Common conditions:** What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? How might PTSD manifest in veterans and service members during those situations in which first responders are most likely to be interacting with them? What about major depressive disorder (MDD), traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and other common behavioral health concerns? First responders do not necessarily need to understand the nuances of behavioral health, but it is important that they be familiar with the basic characteristics of those conditions they are most likely to see. Avoid highly technical language, and focus on the pragmatic side of the equation; this information will make their job easier and safer, and it will improve the community as a whole.
- **Relevance:** Be sure to emphasize the particular characteristics of your community during your presentation. Discuss the military community as it relates to the first responders to whom you are speaking. This will encourage thought about behavioral health as it pertains not just to their work, but also to their families and friends; moreover, it will encourage the first responders to confront the span of behavioral health issues, and may encourage them to proactively pursue ways to resolve the behavioral health problems they come across.
- **Prevalence:** It is not unusual for the general public to take an uncharitable view of those struggling with behavioral health conditions. Stigma presents a serious issue, and it is important that communities take steps towards its elimination (for more information, see *Behavioral Health Promising Practice #1: Anti-Stigma Public Awareness Campaign*). Emphasize the prevalence of behavioral health concerns, especially among those who have experienced combat. It is also important to emphasize that these behavioral health issues are natural and normal responses to extreme trauma; they are not mental illnesses, nor do they indicate weakness or lack of character.
- **Audience:** It is important that you know your audience. The most common types of first responders are policemen, firemen and EMTs. Each has a distinct role, and each is likely to deal with different issues. While you do not need to create entirely different presentations for each, it is nevertheless important that you keep the particular duties of the first responders to whom you are speaking in mind. You may also wish to add a section to your presentation which deals with the territory of each type of first responder; this can be brief, but simply including it will make your presentation more effective, more persuasive and more personal.
  - Remember that many military personnel become first responders after separating from their service. During your presentation, inquire as to the military experience among your audience. By highlighting the personal connection between first responders and the military, you increase the likelihood that your message will be taken to heart.

### Volunteer Opportunities

**Title:** First responder presentation content specialist

**Task:** Identify topics which are particularly important to behavioral health as it relates to first responders; compile a list of talking points to serve as the basis of the first responder presentation; research and organize supporting information, graphs, figures, etc.; work with other presentation specialists to create a powerful, effective presentation

**Attributes:** Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

**Who:** Volunteers should be well-organized; experience with presentation tools such as PowerPoint or Keynote is highly recommended; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

**Hours:** Flexible

Before directly engaging first responders, it is important to have a firm idea of what you want to say. Why should first responders learn about the military community? What's the benefit to first responders, and what's the benefit to the community as a whole? You must be able to answer these questions, and others like them, in a clear, concise manner. A solid presentation provides the best way to make your point in an engaging and effective way, but a sloppy, disjointed or rambling one will hurt your cause. Below are some guidelines to follow when creating your presentation:

- **Brevity:** Try to keep your presentation between 30 and 45 minutes in length. It is possible to convey a great deal of information in that time. Should you run over, you run the risk of losing focus, boring your audience or repeating yourself. A relatively brief presentation also ensures you will have time to take questions, rectify any difficulties that arise and account for an occasional stumble during your recitation.
- **Structure:** Establish a handful of points that you feel are important, and build your presentation around them. Structure is extremely important to any presentation; there should be a logical progression from point one to point two to point three, and so on. An unstructured presentation will result in rambling, and will diminish its effectiveness.
- **Visuals:** A properly constructed visual component will engage your audience and keep their attention over the course of your speech. PowerPoint or Keynote make excellent visual aids *when used properly*. Avoid slides full of text, off-topic pictures, flashy color schemes and distracting slide transitions. Instead, follow these simple rules: make one point per slide; use a few simple, matching colors; stick to one font whenever possible; and avoid clip art, which generally looks unprofessional. It can also be beneficial to provide the audience with informative handouts; they will help the audience follow along with your presentation.
- **Rehearse:** It is extremely important that you rehearse your presentation prior to meeting with first responders. Stumbling over your words, forgetting your talking points, fumbling with your slides, constantly referring to your notes: these are the easiest ways to undermine your credibility, and they will effectively erase all the hard work required to create your presentation.

### Volunteer Opportunities

**Title:** Provider training presentation specialist

**Task:** Use a provided list of points to create an engaging, persuasive PowerPoint or Keynote presentation; provide notes and commentary for each slide; attend to any technical issues relating to the presentation

**Attributes:** Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

**Who:** Volunteers should be well-organized; experience with presentation tools such as PowerPoint or Keynote is highly recommended; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

**Hours:** Flexible

### Step 2: Reach Out to First Responders

Once you have created your presentation, it is time to reach out to local first responders. Below are some simple guidelines to follow during your initial outreach:

- **Contact:** During your initial outreach, try to speak to someone as high up in the organizational hierarchy as possible. A departmental or regional director would have the power to accommodate your request, for example, while a simple station manager might not. While it is possible your subsequent communications will be passed off to someone in a less-senior position, it is important that your initial contact have some sway within the organization. This will ensure your request is granted as expeditiously as possible.
- **Time:** It is always best to have a specific time frame in mind when requesting to speak in front of an audience. When discussing time with the first responders, be sure to request more than you will actually need; this will provide you some leeway to resolve any issues that arise and to answer questions.
- **Setting:** Where will your meeting take place? There are two major options you should consider. The first involves selecting a venue and having multiple first responder organizations come to you. This allows you to discuss behavioral health issues with a large audience simultaneously, but it may also result in some scheduling issues, since it can be difficult to find a date and time accommodating of a large number of busy parties. It also negatively impacts your ability to tailor your speech to specific first responders, which may weaken your message overall. Your second option is to meet with first responders individually. While this method is far more time consuming on your part, it will sidestep most scheduling issues, and will allow you to frame your speech in whatever terms are best suited to the individual type of first responder: the police department, the fire department, EMTs, etc.
  - **Materials:** Regardless of your training's location, be sure you have full knowledge of the facilities; you may need to bring your own presentation equipment, projection screens, projectors, chairs, refreshments, etc. If the first responders or your facility are unable to furnish equipment or amenities, be sure to bring all required materials to the presentation with you. Again, it is extremely important that you appear professional, knowledgeable and reliable during your presentation; forgetting your materials is one of the quickest ways to undermine your credibility.

- **Framing:** Decide how you will frame your request before reaching out to first responders. Most are extremely busy, and should your presentation seem a waste of time, they will not hesitate to turn you down. Emphasize the community's need for a greater understanding of behavioral health, and the positive publicity that will derive from taking steps to engage with the military community.
  - Here's an example: Hello, my name is [name] and I am [community role]. As part of our effort to support our local military community, we are reaching out to first responders with the hopes of presenting a brief primer on common behavioral health issues. We do not anticipate our presentation taking longer than [time frame], and we believe it would be a great benefit both to first responders and to the community if you would allow us to come in and speak with your employees.

### Volunteer Opportunities

**Title:** First responder training coordinator

**Task:** Identify first responder organizations within the community; perform preliminary outreach to first responders; maintain a list of participating first responders; schedule meetings, presentations and other interactions as necessary; provide any other required support for the presentation, the presenters or the first responders

**Attributes:** Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

**Who:** Volunteers should be well-organized; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

**Hours:** Flexible

### Step 3: Additional Ways to Engage First Responders

While a presentation is among the most effective ways to educate first responders about behavioral health, it is also important that they engage directly with the military community. This will help build overall community solidarity, while also establishing personal relationships between the first responders and veterans, service members and their families. Here are some ideas:

- **Encourage community engagement:** While ensuring that first responders have a basic knowledge of behavioral health affecting the community is essential, it can be just as helpful to provide a forum through which first responders can directly engage with the military community.
  - **Speakers:** One way to do so is by recruiting speakers from the military and behavioral health communities to assist during your presentation. These speakers can supplement your efforts, or may even be willing to conduct a presentation on their own. Personal narratives provide a powerful, emotional and persuasive way to package your message about behavioral health, and should be utilized liberally. Having speakers on hand will also permit a more fruitful Q&A session after your presentation, should you choose to engage in one.
  - **Volunteers:** If you are planning to engage in any other Community Blueprint activities, consider recruiting local first responders as participants or volunteers. Most first responder organizations regularly engage in community service initiatives, and you may be able to incorporate your local policemen, firemen, etc. into your efforts.

- **Fairs, conventions and other events:** Similarly, if you are planning any events, such as a job fair, a behavioral health services and support fair, or something similar, be sure to invite local first responders to attend in an appropriate capacity: as a possible career path, as community leaders, etc. This encourages personal interaction between the military community and first responders, and will help foster a positive relationship between the parties.
- **Educational materials:** Create simple handouts for attendees of your presentation. These handouts should emphasize the major topics covered during your presentation, e.g., major behavioral conditions, demographic and prevalence information, and the importance of understanding behavioral health conditions for first responders and the community.
- **Provide a mechanism for continuing engagement:** If your efforts secure the interest of the first responders, they may want to pursue, independently or as an organization, additional ways to engage with behavioral health issues and the military community. It is important to facilitate this engagement. Provide first responders with an up-to-date calendar of events within the community, and be sure that they are aware of both your efforts and those of other support organizations. They may wish to attend, volunteer or participate, all of which are valuable contributions. Also be sure to add the organization to any newsletter or email lists you maintain.

### Volunteer Opportunities

**Title:** Behavioral health community manager

**Task:** Identify events that may benefit from the participation of first responder organizations, or that may be of interest to first responders; compile and maintain an active calendar of these events; work with first responder organizations to ensure maximum participation and community engagement

**Attributes:** Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

**Who:** Volunteers should be well-organized; ability to conduct basic research is preferred; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

**Hours:** Flexible

### Measures of Success

It is important that you measure the impact of your First Responder Training; this allows you to identify the successful and unsuccessful components of your efforts. Future iterations of your First Responder Training will rely on these metrics in order to better communicate the importance of behavioral health to first responders and to the community as a whole. Below are some ideas to get you started:

- **Satisfaction:** Several weeks after your presentation, present attendees with a survey designed to evaluate their satisfaction with the program. Your survey should be designed to measure the impact first responders feel your training has had on their own behavior, thoughts and actions: Do you feel that the Community Blueprint Network First Responder Training you went through has impacted your understanding of behavioral health? Have you used any of the information or resources provided to you during First Responder Training in your interactions with service members, veterans or their families? Do you feel that you are better able to interact with the military community? Is there anything you would like to see added to future First Responder Training programs?

- **Scale:** It can be helpful simply to record the number of first responders you are able to reach. For example, if you speak to the local police department, record the number of attendees your session receives, and compare this number to the total number of policemen. Retain this data and use it to compare participation across first responder organizations, across counties, etc.
- **Effect:** It can also be beneficial to measure the impact of your efforts as they pertain to the military community itself. Record any behavioral health-related incidents involving the military community or first responders. This information should be public record, and can be requested from the proper services – typically either your local police station or municipal record service. Compare this data with incidents prior to your efforts. You may also wish to compare your data across several statistically similar counties, if you are able. Doing so will result in a more rigorous study.

#### Additional Resources

- **Center for Social Innovation:** <http://www.center4si.com/>
  - The Center for Social Innovation brings a fresh perspective to society's most difficult social problems. The Center believes the solutions to homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse and community violence are already known. To implement them, the Center works to close the gap between research and practice, providing real-world tools, training and technical assistance to providers throughout the country.
- **Citizen Soldier Support Program (CSSP):** <http://www.citizensoldiersupport.org/>
  - CSSP is a congressionally authorized, federally funded grant administered through the Odum Institute for Research and Social Science at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. To prepare civilian providers to address post-deployment issues facing current conflict veterans and their families, CSSP has partnered with Area Health Education Centers and medical providers from the Department of Veterans Affairs, United States Navy and United States Public Health Service to create on-site and online courses for PTSD and TBI, Women Returning from Combat and Family Issues.
- **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):** <http://www.va.gov/>
  - The VA was founded in order to fulfill President Abraham Lincoln's promise, "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan" by serving and honoring America's veterans. To this end, the VA operates an extensive array of facilities throughout the United States.
- **Give an Hour:** [www.giveanhour.org/](http://www.giveanhour.org/)
  - Give an Hour is a national nonprofit organization that provides free mental health care to our returning troops, as well as our veterans, their families and their communities. Mental health professionals from all major disciplines are included in the network, which includes psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, substance abuse counselors, licensed professional counselors, pastoral counselors, psychiatric nurses, marriage therapists and family therapists. Give an Hour has providers in every state and U.S. territory. There is no limit on services provided, and all services are free.

- **National Center for PTSD:** <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
  - A VA-run center of excellence for research and education on the prevention, understanding and treatment of PTSD. The National Center provides no direct clinical care, working instead to improve the well-being and understanding of American Veterans throughout the country. The site provides extensive information for both providers and veterans.
- **The Pathway Home:** <http://www.thepathwayhome.org/>
  - The Pathway Program is a residential recovery program specifically created for, and dedicated to serve, our Nation's "New Warriors" – those of any age who have served our nation's global war on terror in areas of the world such as Afghanistan and Iraq. These men and women have survived the stressors of war, but find themselves experiencing problems that are "getting in the way" of functioning at their top form.
- **Real Warriors Campaign:** <http://www.realwarriors.net/>
  - The Real Warriors Campaign is an initiative launched by the DCoE to promote the processes of building resilience, facilitating recovery and supporting reintegration of returning veterans, service members and their families. The site features a comprehensive section specifically for service members, veterans and families, and provides a wealth of valuable information and material.
- **RESPECT-Mil:** <http://www.pdhealth.mil/respect-mil/index1.asp>
  - A treatment model designed by the United States Department of Defense's Deployment Health Clinical Center (DDHC) to screen, assess and treat active duty soldiers with PTSD and depression. RESPECT-Mil provides information for primary care clinicians and behavioral health experts. The site also engages in web-based provider training and has a number of specialized care guides, tools for implementation, etc.
- **TRICARE:** <http://www.tricare.mil/>
  - **TRICARE** is the health care program serving uniformed service members, retirees and their families worldwide.