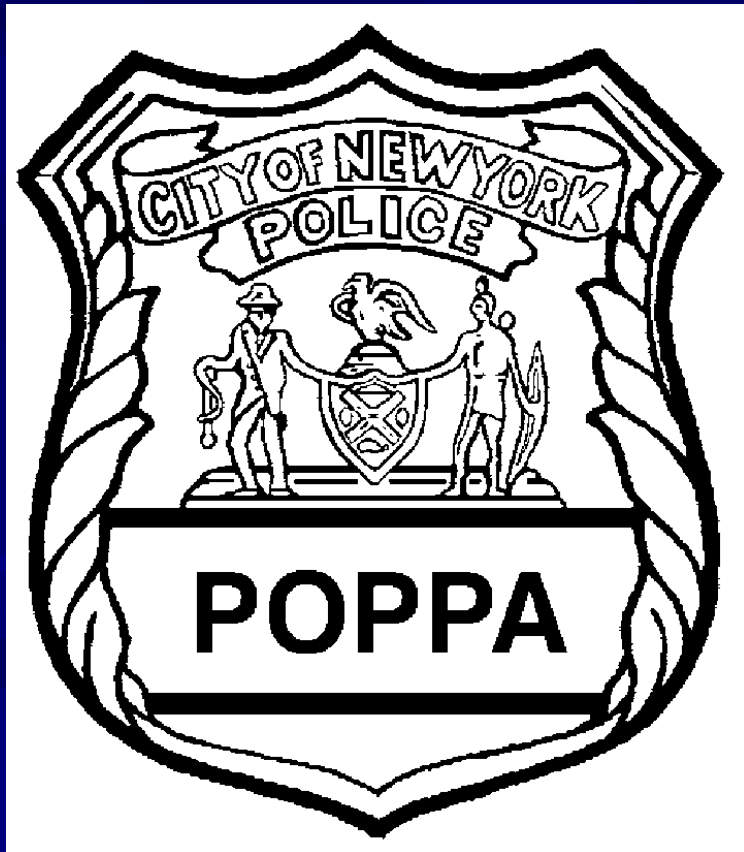


# POPPA: Using Volunteer Peer Officers for Building Resiliency and Preventing Suicides of Warriors



Annual VA/DOD Suicide  
Prevention Conference  
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# Time to Think Outside the Box

“I have also found that there are outside agencies or outside entities that deal with their own version of [post-traumatic stress and high rates of suicide]. I would hope that we would at least think through where...this [would] apply in other very high-stress professions...whether it's something like police or fire or SWAT teams or...someone...who is in a profession where it is life and death...”

*-Admiral Mike Mullen, November 2009*

# Suicide in Police and Military Population

- New York Police Department: Approximate Two-Year Period Mid1993-1995
  - 26 Suicides
  - 43/100,000 Per Year (assuming a 30,000 person force)
- US Army (January 1-November 30, 2009)
  - 147 Active Duty Suicides
  - 29/100,000 Per Year\*
- Activated US Army Reserves (Jan 1-Nov 30, 2009)
  - 71 Suicides
  - 38/100,000 Per Year\*\*

\*(147 suicides; 549,000 troops; rate projected for full year)

\*\* (71 suicides; 205,000 activated reserves; rate projected for full year)

# Suicide in Police and Military Population

- Every Year, More Police Officers Die from Suicide Than from Line of Duty Deaths
- During the Year 2009, for the First Time Since 2001, More Soldiers Died from Suicide Than from Combat Related Fatalities

# Similar Experiences



# Reasons Officers Don't Seek Assistance

- Fear of Job Related Consequences
  - Altered career path
  - Not Being Returned to Original Assignment
- Fears of Stigmatization by Peers
- Feelings of Personal Weakness or Failure
- Distrust of Agency Internal Psychological Services
- Distrust of the Mental Health System

# POPPA (Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance)

- Started in 1996, in Response to 26 NYPD Suicides in 1993-1995
- Confidential Outside Agency Voluntary Peer Assistance Program for NYCPD Officers
- Historic Tradition Piercing Partnership of Public Police Agency with Outside Not-For-Profit Agency
- Establishment of Political Will - Endorsement by the NYCPD, City Hall and All Police Unions
- Autonomous 501 ©(3) Charitable Corporation

# Peer Support Officers (PSO's)

- Volunteer for the 24/7 POPPA Help-line in addition to their regular NYPD assignment
- Screened by POPPA Administrators, other PSO's, and Mental Health Professionals
- PSO Training (8 Day Initial Training; 4 Days Continued Training Per Year)
  - Screening and Referral for Psychological Problems
  - High Risk Assessment and Intervention
  - Supportive Techniques, to Break Down the Barriers of Isolation, Stigmatization, Fear of Agency Related Consequences and of the Mental Health System



# Importance of Volunteer Peer

- Credibility with Rank and File of NYPD
- Establishes Volunteer Peer as Role Model for Fellow Officers
- Volunteerism Ensures Highest Quality of Personnel and the Maximum Delivery of Services
- Reinforces the Cultural Imperative that Officers Take Care of Their Own-  
NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

# 24-Hour Peer Help Line

- Staffed By Volunteer Peer Support Officers 24/7
- Voluntary Clients, Self Referrals Only
- Face-to-Face Meetings at Offsite Location
- Written Confidentiality Agreement with Agency:
- All Conversations Strictly Confidential and Not Part of Employment Record, Not Subject of Any Official Enquiries

# Psychological Complications of Military and Law Enforcement Duty

- PTSD
- Institutional Stress
- Alcohol Abuse
- Marital and Family Problems
- Excessive Aggression
- Suicide

# Reasons for Calls to Help Line

Reason	Percent
⑩ Stress/Anxiety	30.1
⑩ Marital Problems	20.9
⑩ Traumatic Stress	15.9
⑩ Alcohol Problems	14.0
⑩ Depression	12.5
⑩ Bereavement	6.6

# POPPA Help Line Results: 12,161 Calls 1996-2009

- Approximately 70% of Calls Result in Peer Meeting
- Approximately 40% of Calls Result in Clinical Referral
- 90 % of Cases Continue to Work Full Duty Without Any Restrictions
- Confidential Sick Leave
- Approximately 10% of Cases
- Over 80 Suicides Prevented (High Risk Officers Who Stated Definitively That They Would Have Committed Suicide if POPPA Were Not Acceptable and Accessible to Them)

# Discussion of Confidential Sick Leave

- Confidential Sick Leave are 10% of Cases
- Department Liaison Monitors Status of Clients
  - Non-Departmental Office
  - Non-Departmental Records
  - Employment Record States Only That Officer is on Sick Leave
  - No Clinical Information in Employment Record
- Weapon Safeguarded by POPPA As Needed-No Official Removal, No Entry on Service Record
- Over 90% Return to Work Full Duty
- Disabled Officers (Unable to Return To Work) Are Approximately 1% of All Clinical Cases

# POPPA 9/11 RESPONSE

- POPPA Peer Officers and Mental Health Professionals
- Over 60 Teams from Around the Globe
- Outreach and Support at Ground Zero, Morgues, and Land Fill
  - Over 25,000 Emergency Workers Screened, Received Psycho-Educational Support or Crisis Intervention
  - Critical Incident Stress Information Provided
- Crisis Center Near Ground Zero
  - Over 5500 Officers Attended Group or Individual Crisis Intervention
  - Emergency Assessment, Support, and Referral
- 24 Hour Help Line Continued Daily Operation

# POPPA Programs

- 24 Hour Help Line Remains the Cornerstone of POPPA Interventions
- TRT (Trauma Response Teams)
- Retired Officers Program
- Peer Support Groups-Military Returnees
- RSP (Resiliency Support Program)



# Officers Perceptions of POPPA

- NYU Study Compared External POPPA Program and the Internal NYPD Mental Health Program (EIU)
- 184 Members of the NYPD Participated in the Study:
  - 89% of Respondents Were Satisfied or Very Satisfied with POPPA Services, Compared to 58% for EIU
  - 93% of Respondents Would Recommend POPPA Services to a Fellow Officer, While 58% Would Recommend the EIU Program
  - The Majority of Respondents Believe That POPPA Services are Confidential

# Officers Perceptions of POPPA

Anonymous Exit Surveys from TRT, RSP,  
Over 85% of Participants:

- Believe the Intervention Was Helpful
- Would Recommend the Intervention for Fellow Officers
- Believe that RSP Should Be a Part of Annual Training

# Benefits to NYPD/POPPA Partnership

- Lives Are Saved-Decreased NYPD Suicides

1994-1995    19 Suicides    32/100,000 Suicide Rate

2008-2009    11 Suicides    15/100,000 Suicide Rate

- Careers Are Saved

- 90% of Clients Remain on Full Duty Without Restriction While Receiving Clinical Services

- Among the 10% of Clients Who Need Temporary Sick Leave, 90% Return to Full Duty Within 6 Months

- Privacy is Protected and Public (Media) or Disciplinary Actions Are Averted

# Benefits to NYPD/POPPA Partnership

- Use of Volunteers and Independent Clinical Panel Reaches Officers Who Would not Normally Come for Help, Cuts Costs, and Ensures the Highest Quality of Service
- Sends a Clear Message to Personnel that Both Peers and Agency Leadership are Looking Out for Them
- POPPA's Programs Build Surge Capacity: a Cadre of Experienced Volunteer Peers and Clinicians Available to Respond to a Mass Casualty Event
- Cultural Transformation Over Time from Resistance to Seeking Assistance
- Peer Support Officers Themselves Seen as Role Models and Reminders That Seeking Help is a Sign of Strength

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