Virginia Association of Counties

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2018.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact Gage Harter.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County, Virginia

Program Title: Wellness & Resiliency Program

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher E. Martino

Title: County Executive

Signature:

Virginia Association of Counties
Achievement Awards

County: Prince William County, Virginia
Program Title: Public Safety Resilience Program
Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Executive Summary / Brief Overview

Since 2007, Prince William County has experienced three line of duty deaths, two critically wounded by gunfire, and four deaths by suicide. While the County's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides employees and their family members with free confidential, short-term counseling services and assistance, it was determined additional health and wellness resources were needed specifically for public safety personnel. Staff from various agencies worked to determine any gaps in existing services and developed a plan to address those gaps. Based on an analysis of the existing EAP, it was determined that development of a system of behavioral health care resources specifically for public safety personnel was a critical need.

In the fall of 2016, the Police Department, Department of Fire and Rescue and Public Safety Communications jointly formed a Wellness and Resiliency Unit in an effort to provide agency personnel with easily accessible health and wellness resources. Staff developed and instituted a plan to address the gaps in existing resources by establishing a team of Behavioral Health Specialists to provide counseling services, review and update the existing programs for all public safety agencies, and establish a Health & Wellness Coordinator for the Police Department, with similar responsibilities as the existing Safety Officer within the Department of Fire and Rescue. A Work Hardening Program was also implemented through a partnership with George Mason University's Athletic Training Program. This program provides certified athletic trainers to address on and off-duty injuries to public safety personnel in an effort to mitigate injuries and aid employees in returning to full-duty as quickly and safely as possible.

Program Overview

The public safety profession requires not only the endurance of physical strength, but mental and emotional strength as well. It is a particularly rigorous career which requires that a high level of physical and mental performance be maintained for extended periods of time.

Individuals who work in public safety are susceptible to on-duty injuries and illnesses at a rate much higher than those in other professions. According to the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., the overall decline of health and fitness among police officers is indisputable and "the consequences of this phenomenon are also well known; greater vulnerability to on-duty injury and illness, increased exposure to liability and loss of respect by the public at large, among others."

Since December 2012, the Police Department has experienced two line of duty deaths, two critically wounded by gunfire, and three deaths by suicide within a one-year period. Since 2007, the Department Fire and Rescue has experienced one line of duty death and one death by suicide. In addition, although Public Safety Communications has not experienced a line of duty death within their unit, they recently suffered the loss of a retired employee to suicide. They are equally affected by these events as they work directly with both Police and Fire personnel. Psychological impacts can be similar to that of Law Enforcement and Fire-EMS due to exposure to traumatic events. Dispatchers routinely witness many traumatic events while talking to victims on the telephone or receiving radio communications, and receive little resolution because the call is disconnected once Police or Fire and Rescue personnel arrive on-scene.

While the County's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), managed by INOVA Employee Assistance, provides employees and their family members with free confidential, short-term counseling services and assistance, it was determined additional health and wellness resources were needed specifically for public safety personnel.

With the occurrence of the traumatic events in Public Safety, it became evident that there was a need to take immediate action to enhance the behavioral health services available for our public safety workforce.

Staff from various agencies worked to determine any gaps in service and to develop a plan to address those gaps. Staff conducted an analysis of the existing EAP and met with management of our EAP provider. Based on this analysis, it was determined to be a critical need to develop a system of behavioral health care resources specifically for public safety personnel. Staff recommended the following enhancements be made to develop a holistic program that meets the unique needs of our public safety agencies:

- Establish a Team of Behavioral Health Specialists to provide counseling services for public safety personnel in the Police Department, Department of Fire and Rescue, and Public Safety Communications.
- Update/review the existing Health & Wellness programs for all public safety agencies.
- Establish a Health & Wellness Coordinator for the Police Department, with similar responsibilities as the current Safety Officer within the Department of Fire and Rescue.
- Establish a Work Hardening Program through a partnership with George Mason University.
- Strengthen current services where needed.

Staff determined that an effective Public Safety Resilience Program would consist of four functional areas:

- Absolute Crisis: This Functional Area addresses the needs of a public safety employee who is in immediate need of services.
- Counseling Services: This Functional Area consists of a Division Manager and three Therapist IV employees within the Community Services Department that provide direct daily counseling services to public safety employees. They provide oversight of the Behavioral Health Panel and coordinate services between the Behavioral Health Panel and the public safety staff.

- Wellness Checks: This Functional Area ensures each agency has effective behavioral health promotion and wellness activities in place which include, but are not limited to, peer support teams, Chaplain services, and wellness information tailored to the needs of public safety personnel.
- Work Hardening Program: The Work Hardening Program addresses the post-injury rehabilitation component while working in concert with Employee Health, Peer Fitness Advisors and the employee to get the employee returned to full duty. Additionally, the employee is educated by certified athletic trainers on techniques not only to minimize re-injury, but also to prevent potential future injuries. The goal is to have the employee returned with the best chances of a long-term, fulfilling career without re-injury to previously injured areas in addition to future injury prevention.

In the fall of 2016, the Prince William County Police Department, Department of Fire and Rescue and Public Safety Communications jointly formed a Wellness and Resiliency Unit in an effort to provide agency personnel with easily accessible health and wellness resources.

In September 2017, the Board of County Supervisors approved the transfer of $425,699 and authorized two new positions to help support the Public Safety Resiliency Program. This program establishes a team of behavioral health specialists - three Public Safety Therapists and a Public Safety Resiliency Program Division Manager - to provide counseling services specifically to public-safety personnel in the Police Department, Fire and Rescue Department and Public Safety Communications. These four positions work together and share common office space as a part of this team.

The creation of the team of behavioral health specialists was the most vital part of the program. At the time, there was one behavioral health specialist who supported Fire and Rescue personnel. A second behavioral health specialist was included in the FY17 budget to support the Police Department with a future plan of adding

two additional positions to complete the team: a Division Manager to provide clinical supervision, program direction and licensing oversight as well as provide oversight of the Behavioral Health Panel and work with the public safety agencies to improve their overall wellness services. Currently, all four positions have been filled to serve the Police Department, Department of Fire and Rescue, and Communications. Staff are embedded with each Department and offer a variety of mental wellness resources.

It is our belief that our members best serve the public when their physical and mental well-being are maintained. These initiatives provide resources to first responders and public-safety staff who are seeking assistance. They work in a confidential setting, ensuring that trust and confidence in the program is built for public-safety employees.

Through this program, we are better able to provide behavioral health and wellness promotion and treatment services tailored to the needs of public safety personnel and designed to reduce the instances when an employee needs crisis intervention. Our theme is "Protecting Our Protectors" with a goal to:

- Mitigate the impact of exposure to potentially traumatic events,
- Enhance coping skills and abilities, and
- Assist with problems of daily living.