

Police Well Fit Together Program

Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello. I'm your host, Jennifer Donelan, and today we will hear from Police Performance Auditor 4 John Doucet of the Risk Management Division of the Los Angeles Police Department. Our topic today is the officer wellness program that the LAPD is in partnership with Pepperdine University. Welcome to the show, John.

John Doucet

00:35

Thank you for having me.

Donelan

00:36

I find this subject so interesting and needed, the officer wellness program. Give us a brief description on what you're doing at the Los Angeles Police Department.

Doucet

00:46

This partnership with Pepperdine University has resulted in a conceptual program called Police Well Fit Together. The goal of the program is to provide our officers with skills and abilities to affect long-term lifestyle changes so they can enhance their physical and emotional wellness. The outline of the program as it stands now is that officers will engage in a 12-week wellness program that includes targeted exercises to improve tactical fitness. We'll develop a phone app that's going to help them assist in tracking healthy behavior. And over that 12-week period, there's going to be 12 team building activities. Just a side note, this program is still in the development stages and it's contingent on funding for full implementation.

Donelan

01:30

Why do you have an interest in this topic, especially this program?

Doucet

01:34

Risk management division where I work was formed in early 2015 and our goal is reducing physical, financial, and organizational harms in four different areas. These include employee involved traffic collisions, workplace conflict, uses of force, and workplace injuries. Of the four areas, workplace injuries is the most interesting to me and the organization is because it has a direct impact on our officers, and our officers are our most valuable asset. As we explored the causes of injury over time, we found that sprains and strains were a leading cause. Since our philosophy and approach to risk management at the LAPD is reduction of harms, our goal is to find ways to reduce the sprains and strains that our employees are experiencing. The best approach in our view would be to prevent these injuries before they happen. By partnering with an academic institution such as Pepperdine, they can provide the expertise in exercise physiology and psychology that will enable us to enact a program such as this. It should be noted that our partnership with Pepperdine University is a vital part of our wellness strategy overall but it's one of many approaches that we're developing or using to try and impact our employee wellness.

Donelan

02:59

How did your partnership with Pepperdine come about?

Doucet

03:03

We have an officer in risk management division who was a graduate student at Pepperdine University in their conflict resolution course. She was instrumental in helping us develop a conflict resolution course for supervisors in partnership with Pepperdine University. We've held a number of courses and trained hundreds of our supervisors in conflict resolution and the feedback has been excellent. Our employees love it.

Donelan

03:30

How does your role within the risk management division relate to this topic as well as this program, Police Well Fit Together?

Doucet

03:37

I'm currently the officer in charge of the analysis and evaluation section of risk management division. Among other things, my unit analyzes workplace injury data to identify trends, find out how our employees are getting hurt, what body parts are being injured, et cetera.

Donelan

03:52

You mentioned earlier as you talked about the causes of injury over time and one of them was sprains and strains. Can you expand a little bit on it? Is it like from workplace or just like the constant use or just plain, old silly activities that everybody does during the day?

Doucet

04:06

A good question. It's actually a combination of all those. Some officers are hurt of course in conducting police activity, trying to apprehend a subject, chasing after someone, et cetera. We also found a lot of our injuries are occurring during normal, everyday work activities. For example, lifting a war bag into a car or walking up and down stairs.

Donelan

04:27

Yep, sometimes it's that mindless activity that gets us. What is your goal on discussing the topic today with *The Beat*?

Doucet

04:34

Well, I think that officer wellness is incredibly important from several points of view. First, taking care of your employees, making sure they're emotionally and physically fit before they deploy to the field, it's just the right thing to do from an organizational standpoint. Secondly, a fit officer, one who's emotionally and physically well can provide the best level of service to the community. And the mission of the LAPD is, dependent on our ability to field deploy officers, providing for employee wellness ensures that we can fulfill our mandate to protect and to serve.

Donelan

05:11

From what you've been saying today, it seems like you have a vested interest in the program and it seems like you have the full support of LAPD. Is that the case?

Doucet

05:19

That's correct. Everyone from the chief and all the command staff down understand the value and importance of wellness when it comes to our employees, both sworn and civilian, and we have the backing of the chief on this proposal, definitely.

Donelan

05:36

Do you have any personal experience with officers that makes this program for Police Well Fit Together more vital for you to see success?

Doucet

05:45

As a data analyst, my job tends to look at the higher level statistics, so I don't see individual officers necessarily in the data sets that I look at. But from a personal point of view, I have many friends and many coworkers who are sworn officers and some of them are very tenured and I've seen the toll that the job can take after doing it for years. So, I really want to see a program such as this come into existence in the LAPD and hopefully we can see better outcomes for these officers.

Donelan

06:21

And I assume just because it makes logical sense that a healthier officer means less injury, less time off work, more savings or at least paying for itself over time.

Doucet

06:32

That's what we're hoping. Cost is a secondary concern. The wellness of the employees are our first concern. But, yes, you're correct. We do hope that there will be some cost savings in the end on this.

Donelan

06:48

I know this program just started within your division in 2015 and we're in the initial pilot stage. You mentioned earlier something about the LAPD approach to risk management is the reduction of harms.

Doucet

07:00

Correct.

Donelan

07:01

That's interesting, reduction of harms. When did you first become aware of this concept, of reduction of harms, and what's your source or background with that?

Doucet

07:10

My director, Arif Alikhan, was actually the person who discovered the author—well, discovered is the wrong word but he became aware of the author, Malcolm Sparrow, who is a risk management expert and he wrote a book called *The Character of Harms*. The point of the book is that traditional risk management programs have looked at risk from point of view, "What can we do to prevent X from happening?" We've kind of changed that paradigm a bit. The goal is not to look at what might happen, that is important, but what we want to do is look at what is causing physical, organizational, and financial harm to the LAPD right now. In other words, what's hurting our employees, what's costing us money right now? And that's the tack we take when we do our data analysis and develop our strategies for risk management.

Donelan

08:06

How is the Police Well Fit Together program unique from anything else that might be at other police departments across the country?

Doucet

08:13

There were many programs out there that looked at officer wellness but they tend to be a single-subject focus. They might focus on physical fitness or emotional resilience. But from what we found, there were no single programs that combined all aspects of officer wellness, and we wanted to look at it from a more holistic point of view, combine the physical fitness aspect with the emotional wellness aspect.

Donelan

08:45

Well said. So earlier you mentioned the book, *The Character of Harms* by Malcolm K. Sparrow, so we'll certainly be listing that with our podcast as a resource for any organization or officers out there that want to find out more about officer wellness through the reduction of harms as well as Police Well Fit Together. Can they contact you or your department if they have further questions about what's happening with the Police Well Fit Together program?

Doucet

09:12

Certainly. The best contact would be by e-mail and my e-mail address is N, as in Nora, 3852@LAPD.online.

Donelan

09:21

Any closing thoughts or words for our listeners today about Police Well Fit Together?

Doucet

09:26

I just want to say overall that I implore people to remember that officers are the protectors of our society, they're the frontline, and we owe it to them to give the best opportunity to obtain and maintain maximum wellness.

Donelan

09:39

Fantastic. Thank you so much for coming on our podcast, John. We certainly do want the Police Well Fit Together program to continue and we look forward to finding out more about your process as you move from concept to implementation.

Doucet

09:55

Thank you for having me.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

09:57

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

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