

PEER SUPPORT FOR POLICE OFFICERS

1-833-219-2461



Alabama Law Enforcement Alliance
For Peer Support (ALLEAPS)
www.alleaps.org

We are a group of trained law enforcement officers of all types and from a variety of agencies.

The **Pain** of Policing: Officer survival is not just fighting; it includes surviving physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. If it's early in your career, you know this pain well. If you're a veteran, you have hidden this pain deep inside. In either case, it's killing you.

- **Life expectancy** of a male career cop is 57.
- We are number 1 in **suicides**.
- We have a **higher rate** of heart disease, divorce, alcoholism, and depression higher than other occupations.

We offer FREE **CONFIDENTIAL** and **PRIVILEGED** peer support. Alabama Statute 36-21-14 assures all communications with us are *confidential and privileged*. We are specifically trained and appointed to provide peer support services.

Because we are cops, **ALLEAPS** members are motivated by our compassion for our fellow officers and are here to help the realities of law enforcement. Many of the hazards we face are the unseen effects and inherent stresses of the life of law enforcement. We understand how the career and lifestyle of a cop affects us personally and professionally.

Even though we aren't counselors, many of us have suffered through this pain and can help you. We have been through shootings, being shot and having seen officers die. We have seen mangled children and abused adults. We have survived shootings, divorce, cancer, and bosses who have punished us for doing our job. Licensed counselors are available for consultation.

Don't hesitate if you are in need contact us, we care, and we can help!

CALL TOLL FREE
833-219-2461

PEER SUPPORT FOR FIREFIGHTERS AND EMS

1-844-525-3473



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Tuscaloosa Police Department

Peer Support After-Action Report

INITIAL RESPONSE

On September 16, 2019 at approximately 18:23, Officer Dornell Cousette was involved in an on-duty fatal shooting. Officer Cousette was transported to DCH Regional Medical Center where he succumbed to his wound. TPD Chaplain, Sgt. J.B. Hallman, was called at 19:00 and responded directly to DCH. While enroute to the hospital, Sgt. Hallman contacted the AL-L.E.A.P.S. (Alabama Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support) Region G Coordinator,



Adam Schniper. Within 20 minutes, an email was sent out to all Alabama Peer Support members and a response team was put together. In less than 2 hours from time of notification, Peer Support Team members were on the ground in Tuscaloosa. A Defusing was held with

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each of the officers who were first on scene and were most affected by the traumatic things witnessed/endured. Hallman and Schniper worked together to pair up TPD LEAPS team members with those responding from other agencies. These contact teams were then sent out to speak with all officers and dispatchers during Muster at HQ, East Precinct, West Precinct, & Dispatch. From this point forward, every muster held at all four locations had one of these contact teams in place. This saturation coverage continued through Sunday night, September 22nd.



CONTINUED SUPPORT

During the days to follow, TPD Officers, Dispatchers, Support Staff, and their families began to feel the full weight of the grief surrounding the loss of one of their own. This was an extremely high stress event for both those who were part of the department and those loved ones around them. The grief they experienced manifested itself in a variety of ways.

- Suicidal Ideations
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Withdrawal
- Inability to Sleep
- Constant Crying
- Questioning God
- Guilt
- Nightmares
- Intense Anger
- Worry for Safety
- Emotionally Overwhelmed
- Loss of Interest in Job

Peer Support team members helped countless individuals make their way through their grief. For the month of September, the Tuscaloosa Police Department Peer Support Team had **572** contacts. These contacts ranged from one-on-one defusings, to coaching sessions, to group defusing sessions, group presentations, and even welfare (buddy) checks.

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FAMILY MATTERS

Toward the end of the week, it became clear that the spouses of officers were also experiencing negative responses to the death of Officer Cousette. Many became overly concerned for their officer's safety, health, and wellbeing and began reaching out for guidance. Others wanted to know how best to help their spouse through this difficult time. It was then decided to create a "Spouse Night" event. AL-LEAPS approved licensed counselor Reggie Parker (Parker Counseling and Consulting, LLC) was brought in to speak to those in attendance. Once the event was publicized, numerous officers and dispatchers also requested to be able to attend. The TPD Support Group was instrumental in the logistics of preparing/organizing this event. Grace Church offered the use of their facilities and the event was held on Friday, September 20th. After a short time of being all-together and eating a provided meal, the spouses were separated from those directly related to the trauma: officers and dispatchers. The Spouse Night was well attended and believed to be helpful by those who took part in the event.



THE FUNERAL

On the morning of the funeral, AL-LEAPS members reported to each of our 4 main locations wearing class A uniforms. Several members took part in the funeral/precession/graveside service while others made themselves available to those returning to shift. This gave the TPD

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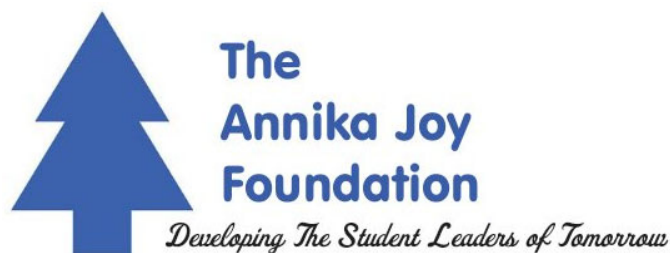
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Peer Support team members the opportunity to attend and take part in the services. It also allowed them the freedom to be able to minister to their fellow officers attending.

TEAM DEFUSING

While the members of the TPD Peer Support team were helping others deal with their feelings of grief, it became necessary for them to ignore their own emotions brought about during this tragedy. Following the LEAPS model, all team members were required to attend a team defusing, which was held on October 17, 2019. During this meeting, David Higgins LPC (the other AL-LEAPS approved counselor) conducted a joint defusing/coaching session. The team's response to this time of open communication was extremely positive. All involved enjoyed the time spent and considered it beneficial. One-on-one sessions were also offered to the team that would allow each member to work through any residual issues brought on by their shouldering of the burdens carried by so many employees (and spouses) of the department.

This event was sponsored by the Annika Joy Foundation, a local charitable organization with deep ties to Law Enforcement. They arranged for the use of the facility in which we met and provided dinner, desserts, drinks and snacks.



CONCLUSION

During the days following the tragic death of Inv. Cousette, the members of the TPD LEAPS team worked tirelessly to help their brothers and sisters in blue to work through their grief. This loss hit us all hard and many in our department are still dealing with the ripple effects of the permanent loss of such a dear friend. Each team member put aside their own feelings of loss and heartache to walk hand in hand with their fellow officers through their grief process. Over the course of several days/weeks after the death of Investigator Cousette, the members of our LEAPS team spoke one on one with countless individuals. They made death notifications, conducted defusings with the traumatized, held coaching sessions, spoke in muster/line ups,

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initiated interventions when needed, and enlisted the aid of other specially trained experts in the field of mental health for those needing additional assistance beyond their skill set.

Although we as a department are far from putting this devastation behind us, the exemplary work of our Peer Support Team has helped many within our ranks cope with this tremendous loss. To this day TPD Peer Support team members continue to call, talk to, go visit, and conduct follow-ups with officers, dispatchers, support staff, and their families. Time after time they responded to the needs of those around them...seeking out those who were hurting. They gave of themselves to help those they love.

The men and women of the TPD Peer Support Team exemplifies the care, concern and love this agency holds for its fellow man and the tenacious spirit of this great city of Tuscaloosa.

DEFINITIONS

- Defusing: A short, educational briefing by the LEAPS member within 3 hours of a High Stress Event for the purpose of normalizing an officer's internal response to the event.
- Coaching Session: Also known as a Debriefing: an in-depth briefing led by the LEAPS member in which the officer involved in the High Stress Event reveals internal responses to the LEAPS member under privileged protection of law.
- High Stress Event: formerly known as Traumatic Event or Critical Incident: an event that has the ability to create significant negative emotional, psychological, and social changes to an officer.
- General (Coaching) Session: a meeting between a LEAPS member and an officer for the purpose of discussing general stress issues not related to a specific High Stress Event. Topics may include financial matters, relationship issues, illnesses, and general job stress. Coaching sessions are typically conducted one on one.

TPD TEAM MEMBERS

Michael Azwell – Traffic

Brooks Barksdale – Juvenile (SRO)

Dwayne Bigham – Patrol (HQ)

Archie Cain – Patrol (E)

Clifford Gregg – CID

Jason Hallman – Patrol (W)

Emily Kerstetter – CID

Michael Melendez – CID



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Peer Support Team After-Action Report

INITIAL RESPONSE

On December 1, 2021 Wilcox County Chief Deputy Trent Gulley and Deputy Madison “Skip” Nicholson responded to a domestic call on Shamburger Road in Yellow Bluff, AL. When the deputies arrived, they were met with gunfire from the suspect. Chief Deputy Gulley was struck in the arm while Deputy Nicholson was struck multiple times in the chest and neck. Deputy Nicholson died at the scene.

Trooper Heath Heaton, AL-L.E.A.P.S. (Alabama Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support) Region C Coordinator, requested the TPD Peer Support Team be deployed to Wilcox County to assist their fellow brothers and sisters behind the badge at the conclusion of the funeral. Chief Rice cleared the peer support team to respond as requested.

On December 15, 2021 the TPD Peer Support Team was activated and responded to the Wilcox County Courthouse where we met Trooper Heaton. Peer Support was able to conduct a group defusing for numerous individuals (officers & dispatchers) at that time, following the standard of care guidelines taught by the AL-L.E.A.P.S. program. Those attending were each provided with the defusing handout, relaxation drills form, and the ALEA toll-free telephone number (833-219-2461) where any emergency responder (including dispatchers) and their families can reach out for peer support assistance. They were also given personal phone numbers to various team members that would be available 24-7 should they need to talk.

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Peer Support Team After-Action Report

FOLLOW-UP

Over the following days/weeks TPD Peer Support Team Members spoke by phone with numerous individuals from Wilcox County S.O. and surrounding agencies. (Due to geographical challenges, all follow-ups were/will be conducted via px.)

CONCLUSION

During the days following the Line of Duty death of Deputy Nicholson, numerous officers and deputies from various agencies sought out Peer Support Members to help with processing the thoughts and feelings experienced due to this event. The Tuscaloosa Police Department Peer Support Team has had multiple contacts from this event to-date. These contacts involved administration officials, officers, deputies, dispatchers, support staff, and family members. All contacts ranged from group/one-on-one defusings and coaching/debriefing sessions, to group presentations and welfare (buddy) checks.



TEAM MEMBERS

Michael Azwell – MHO

Brooks Barksdale – SRO

Archie Cain – SRO

Jason Hallman – Communication

Emily Kerstetter – CID

Michael Melendez – Patrol