

<b>Title:</b> PAT – 56 Peer Support Program		<b>Effective:</b> August 28, 2023
<b>C.O.P. Signature:</b>	<b>Revised:</b> TBD	<b>Next Review:</b> 1 yr

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this section is to provide guidance and direction for a Peer Support Program. The Peer Support Program is a program that offers assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively impact their work performance, family unit or self. This assistance is confidential, providing it does not violate any law or Douglas Police Department's policy and procedures.

This program is designed to:

- Be in compliance with *Wyoming State Statute 7-23-102 Peer Support Counseling Session Communications; confidentiality; applicability.*
- Provide emotional support during and after times of personal or professional crisis to other employees who express a need for assistance.
- Promote trust, allow appropriate anonymity, and preserve confidentiality for persons using peer support team members within the guidelines of the program.
- Develop peer support team members who can identify personal conflicts and provide guidance or referral to professional/alternate resources as required.
- Maintain an effective peer support team member training and response program.
- Support those who have had family tragedies.
- Maintain contact with employees who are away from the workplace due to long-term illnesses or injured on duty and provide support where desired and needed.

## **Philosophy Statement**

The Douglas Police Department has recognized the value of providing a way for their employees and their family members to deal with personal and/or professional problems. A successful approach to this problem has been to provide a program which offers a qualified peer support team members in addition to an existing Employee Assistance Program (EAP). One of the Douglas Police Department's most valuable resources are its employees. The peer support program's goal is to assist peers with stressors caused by professional and/or personal life events and help them continue to be a productive member of the department.

### **A. Confidentiality**

The acceptance and success of the Peer Support Program will be determined, in part, by observance of confidentiality. It is imperative that each peer support team member maintain strict

confidentiality of all information learned about an individual within the guidelines of this program. Communications between the peer supporter and a person is considered confidential except for matters which involved the following in accordance with Wyoming State Statute 7-23-102(e):

- Threat of suicide or criminal act made by a participant in a peer support counseling session, or any information conveyed in a peer support counseling session relating to a threat of suicide or criminal act.
- Information relating to abuse of spouses, children or the elderly, or other information that is required to be reported by law.
- Admission of criminal conduct
- Disclosure of testimony by a participant who received peer support counseling services and expressly consented to the disclosure.
- Disclosure of testimony by the surviving spouse or executor or administrator of the estate of a deceased participant who received peer support counseling services and the surviving spouse or executor, or administrator expressly consented to the disclosure.
- This section shall not prohibit any communications between peer support specialist who conduct peer support counseling sessions, or any communications between peer support specialists and the supervisors or staff of an employee assistance program.
- This section shall not prohibit communications regarding the fitness of an employee for duty between an employee assistance program and an employer.

A general guideline of confidentiality for peer support team members to follow is to inform the person what the limitations and exceptions are regarding the information shared during a peer support contact. The peer support team member is reminded to focus on the conversation on the person's thoughts, feelings, reactions and resources. Peer support team members will not keep any notes or recordings of peer support conversations.

Trust is vital to the person seeking help and assistance from the peer support program. In those cases, where a concern or a question regarding confidentiality arises, the peer support team member must immediately report to the program coordinator any of the above exceptions to the confidentiality guidelines. If that person is not available, the peer team member shall notify their immediate chain of command. The preservation of life and the safety of others is a mandated role of first responders.

## **B. Duties and Responsibilities**

The role of peer support team member is to provide support and assistance to employees in time of stress and crisis. Peer supporter team member's responsibilities are:

- Convey trust, anonymity and assure confidentiality within guidelines to employees who seek assistance from the Peer Support Program
- Attend regular peer support team update training to ensure the highest standard of employee support.
- Provide assistance and support on a voluntary basis.
- Assist the employee by referring him/her to the appropriate outside resource when necessary.
- Maintain contact with the Program Coordinator regarding peer support deployments.
- When necessary, contact the Peer Support Program Coordinator for assistance and guidance.
- Peer Support team will agree to be contacted and, if practical, respond at any hour. Be available to the individual for additional follow-up support.
- The peer support team member is not exempt from federal, state, local laws or the policies and procedures of the Department.

#### **C. Role of the Mental Health and Wellness Committee**

The Mental Health and Wellness Committee acts as the policy and training advisory board for the program's operation and future direction, subject to review and approval by the Chief. The committee also participates in the selection process of new peer support team members.

#### **D. The Peer Support Program Coordinator**

The coordinator serves as the link to ensure that the program is being managed in accordance with the goals and objectives established for the program. Duties of the coordinator include:

- Provide effective supervision to the peer support program.
- Serve as a member of the Mental Health and Wellness Committee.
- Recruit and coordinate the screening of the peer support team applicants.
- Coordinate training of peer support team members.
- Develop resources to assist individuals when problem areas are identified.
- Maintain only statistical data of reported contacts by peer supporter team members.

Confidentiality of department members, their family members, spouses/significant others seeking peer support program assistance shall be upheld.

#### **E. Peer Support Selection Process**

All interested employees who choose to volunteer as a peer support team member must submit their memorandum of interest through their chain of command to the Peer Support Program Coordinator. The Peer Support Advisory Committee will recommend candidates suited for appointment as a peer support team member to the Chief for final approval. Prospective peer supporters must be willing to meet the following criteria:

- Agree to maintain confidentiality within the guidelines provided with department policy.
- Must possess emotional intelligence and interpersonal communications skills.
- Be motivated and willing to manage time effectively. This will allow minimal impact on their normal duties.
- Must successfully complete the selection process.
- Must attend and successfully complete a basic peer support training course and any other department required training.

**F. Peer Support Team Member Service**

- Peer support team members may voluntarily withdraw from the program at any time. They are required to notify the peer support program coordinator as soon as possible.
- A peer support team member will be removed from the program for conduct inconsistent with program policy and objectives.

**G. Internal Investigations**

It may occur that a peer team member is assisting an individual who is or becomes the subject of a disciplinary investigation. The peer support team member should be guided by the confidentiality guidelines of this policy. They shall not share information received in confidence during a peer support contact unless it falls within the Peer Support Policy guidelines exceptions to confidentiality in accordance with Wyoming Statute 7-23-102(e).

Peer support team members may not hamper or impede the investigation, nor may they attempt to shelter the individual from the department's investigation. The peer support team member's role in disciplinary situations should be one of support and assisting individuals through the stress they face during the disciplinary investigation process. If peer supporter team members have any questions or concerns regarding these situations, they should consult with the Program Coordinator for guidance and assistance.