

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an effort to identify effective tools to combat stress, Police Chief Charles H. Ramsey decided to pilot the International Association for Human Values (IAHV)/ Art of Living Foundation (AOLF) Stress Management workshop with a cross section of MPD staff. This workshop has been presented in a wide variety of public and corporate settings around the world, and to police departments in Europe and Asia as a stress management/stress prevention tool. The current Washington, D.C. program was the first formal pilot program presented to police officers in the U.S.A..

The class was held at the department's training facility from June 2, 2003 — June 5, 2003. Individuals selected for participation in the program were generally referred by supervisors based upon a perceived difficulty in dealing with personal or professional stress. Several participants were on restricted duty and/or anti-depressant medication, and a number of participants also appeared to demonstrate symptoms of grief and/or Post-traumatic stress (due to a recent/pending divorce or the death of a loved one). The remaining participants believed they were sent to the program because their supervisor was either unable or unwilling to attend. Attendees included patrol officers (8), sergeants (6), lieutenants (6), civilian employees (7) and eight (8) individuals who did not identify rank..

The program was designed to teach concepts and practical techniques for reducing perceived stress levels and enhancing individual coping skills. Course content included a series of educational presentations designed to help individuals recognize and re-frame potentially stressful events, to make healthy lifestyle choices, and to increase commitment and focus in daily activity. It also included simple stretching (yoga) and meditation exercises, and the use of specific breathing techniques (Sudarshan Kriya and accompanying breathing practices) to reduce and prevent stress, increase lung capacity and deepen breathing, boost energy levels, increase concentration and mental clarity, and promote relaxation.

Paradigm Consulting Group of Tulsa, OK was contacted by the Art of Living Foundation to provide outside process and qualitative evaluation services, technical assistance in selecting

and implementing pre-post measures of effectiveness, and to prepare a written report (Executive Summary).

Data analyses indicates the program was well received and successful in reducing the levels of stress and depression among this population. Results demonstrated statistically significant improvements on all selected measures. These included:

- * Significant reductions in perceived stress levels (as measured by the Index of Clinical Stress).
- * Significant reductions in depression (as measured by the State-Trait Depression Inventory).
- * Significant improvement in the ability to fall and remain asleep, and to feel refreshed upon awakening (as measured by self-report surveys).
- * Significant improvement in digestion (as measured by self-report surveys).

(Individuals were surveyed on quality and quantity of sleep as well as digestive disturbances, as these are common physical indicators of stress in police personnel.) Participants also reported (via satisfaction survey results and participant comments) enhanced feelings of well-being, improved focus, and an expectation that they would be better able to deal with daily stress once returning to their regular duties.

Stress has been shown to contribute to higher rates of illness and absenteeism among police personnel, which in turn increases both the work load of other employees and labor costs. It also contributes to depression, anxiety, and diminished concentration and reaction time. Results from this Stress/Self Management pilot program suggest that it has the potential to become a valuable tool for addressing such stress related problems (including stress related illness and stress leave time) within MPD.