

The author(s) shown below used Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and prepared the following final report:

Document Title: Executive Summary of the Law Enforcement Assistance & Development (LEAD) Program: Reduction of Familial and Organizational Stress in Law Enforcement

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Document No.: 192276

Date Received: January 30, 2002

Award Number: 96-FS-VX-0006-(S1)

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**AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE
LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE & DEVELOPMENT (LEAD) PROGRAM:
REDUCTION OF FAMILIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS
IN LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Funded Through the National Institute of Justice

Grant Number: 96-FS-VX-0006-(S1)

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Project Overview

The Law Enforcement Assistance & Development (LEAD) Program provided for a consortium of three rural law enforcement agencies and mental health professionals to prevent and reduce stress, and to enhance the overall health of law enforcement officers and their families.

The *Law Enforcement Assistance & Development (LEAD) Program* served the Iowa State University Department of Public Safety, the Ames Police Department, and the Story County Sheriff's Office. The purpose of the program was to develop, implement, and assess multi-dimensional stress-reduction programs designed to benefit all participating law enforcement personnel (peace officers, dispatchers, parking enforcement officers, support staff, etc.) and their families.

The LEAD Program developed and implemented a multi-dimensional approach to stress reduction. Program staff provided a range of services that were designed to enhance the well being of individual law enforcement personnel, their family members, and the law enforcement organizations. Services were designed to prevent stress-related concerns, reduce stress related symptoms, enhance family health, and improve organizational functioning.

Services Provided

The LEAD Program's multi-dimensional approach included the provision of the following services:

- **24-hour Crisis Assistance**. Program staff implemented a 24-hour pager system, providing on-call/crisis intervention services to department staff and their families. All clinical staff members carried statewide pagers, and their pager numbers were widely disseminated. This service greatly enhanced the accessibility and utilization of psychological support services by officers and their families, who found LEAD Program staff to be highly responsive to their needs.
- **Critical incident debriefing**, primarily using Mitchell's model of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (Mitchell and Everly, 1993), was provided for officers involved in traumatic or critical incidents. Two of the three departments served in this project implemented recommended mandatory debriefing policies, while the third maintained a voluntary policy regarding involvement in debriefings.
- **Counseling services** for law enforcement officers and their families. LEAD Program staff provided individual, couples, and family services to support officers and their families in addressing issues of concern.
- **Stress/health education for law enforcement personnel** (e.g., stress awareness and management, prevention of alcohol and other drug abuse, exercise, relaxation, and communication skills). Training in communication skills (for administrators, officers and family members) was identified as an important element in stress reduction in the departments involved in this project (Ballantine, Jaeger and Fitzgerald, 1996). LEAD Program staff provided annual stress awareness and management training to all of the sworn officers of one of the departments.

- **Organizational consultation** to departments to identify and reduce factors (within the law enforcement agency) that contributed to staff stress. Initial consultation involved a review of policies and procedures and resulted in recommendations for the following policies which were adopted:
 - a) **Implementation of a “cradle to grave” philosophy** of service for the LEAD Program, whereby departmental staff were eligible for services from their date of hiring until 6 months following their separation from the department through resignation or termination. Retirees (and their spouses) were eligible for services throughout their life span. Families of staff who died while employed by the department were eligible for service for one year following the death of the employee. This philosophy emphasized the LEAD Program’s (and law enforcement agency’s) commitment to the well being of staff (and families) throughout their careers.
 - b) **Mandatory consultation for departmental employees**. All employees were required by their departmental policy to have an annual consultation with LEAD Program staff. New hires were required to have three consultations with LEAD Program staff in the first year of employment. The purpose of the consultations was to increase awareness of services and familiarity with the LEAD Program, to minimize barriers to service, to normalize use of support services, and to provide early intervention for employees that may have been experiencing stress related problems. Employee feedback was highly positive, with approximately 20% of employees requesting services beyond the mandatory consultation.
 - c) **Mandatory individual or group debriefing** for officers involved in critical incidents. As mentioned above, two of the three departments implemented this policy and the third utilized LEAD Program staff to make debriefing services available to its employees.
 - d) **Involvement in staff development training**. LEAD Program staff members have developed and provided workshops designed to improve interpersonal relations and organizational effectiveness. A unit within one of the departments received a series of interventions to address concerns about individual well-being and organizational functioning.
 - e) **Mandatory field-observations for LEAD Program staff**. LEAD Program staff were required to engage in regular field observations with departmental staff in the course of their duties. These ride-alongs provided excellent opportunities to personalize services, decrease misperceptions and mistrust, and learn more about the agencies served. Feedback from departmental staff indicated that ride-alongs increased respect, trust, and confidence in LEAD Program staff, and gave LEAD Program staff a better understanding of the issues and challenges faced by personnel.

The overall intent and effect of these practices was to increase access to and comfort with LEAD Program services, to reduce the stigma of using counseling services, to reduce stress among departmental personnel, and to improve function and quality of life.

- **Outreach through program brochure, pamphlets and newsletter.** Program staff developed and distributed program brochures and business cards to all law enforcement personnel and their families. Educational pamphlets on Critical Incident Stress, Grief, Depression, and Eating Disorders were developed to provide accessible information on issues perceived to be relevant to both clients and departmental staff. The LEAD Program published regular newsletters that became a popular and powerful vehicle for disseminating health education information, informing the community of program services, and soliciting input regarding program development.
- **Family Support Services.** LEAD Program staff implemented a series of workshops and social events designed to increase networking and support systems among existing staff, and assist them with areas of concern including firearms safety and competency, relationship communication skills, and stress/life management. These issues were identified through the LEAD Program recruiting a group of spouses of peace officers and meeting with them over a several week period in a focus group format. The spouses identified and prioritized needs of law enforcement spouses as they perceived those needs, and assisted in the development of spouse workshops.
- **Organizational Development Services.** The main focus in the area of organizational development was in the improvement of organizational communication patterns and through correction of misperceptions regarding organizational problems. Interventions in this area were expected to decrease individual stress-related symptoms and increase positive perceptions of work environment and employee morale. LEAD Program staff implemented a process to provide more regular feedback (in newsletters, during training, in interactions) regarding employees behaviors and perceptions related to work satisfaction and morale. This was expected to support and enhance the belief (and investment) in a more positive work environment, and result in decreased stress-related concerns. The basis for this intervention stemmed from work done by Perkins and Berkowitz in the social psychology field, who found that correcting misperceptions of maladaptive behaviors (e.g., alcohol abuse) had a measurable and positive impact in both correcting the misperception and in being related to decreases in the maladaptive behaviors themselves.

Program Support

The LEAD Program received regular programmatic input from two groups. The *Steering Committee* provided general policy direction for the project and consisted of the Project Director and the Chief Law Enforcement Officer from each the departments involved. The *Advisory Committee* consisted of four representatives from each of the three departments. Two (of each department's representatives) were departmental employees (with at least one of these being a sworn officer). The remaining two representatives were adult family members of departmental personnel. The Advisory Committee served as a focus group to identify issues to be addressed by the *LEAD Program* and provided input on program development and implementation. These two groups were significant resources in facilitating administrative, employee and family investment in the program.

Program Evaluation

Departmental staff were surveyed annually during the spring months of 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000. Analyses of these data showed that departmental personnel experienced significant decreases in stress-related symptoms and concerns. Results were varied (by department) regarding satisfaction with work environment and supervisory interactions. Expected results were not found for normative influence interventions.

Approximately 250 clients utilized nearly 800 clinical (stress reduction) sessions through the program. These clients reported high satisfaction with services and demonstrated significant positive change on post-counseling measures.

The project maintained an active outreach program, providing over 40 outreach programs to approximately 1,300 persons. Participants reported high satisfaction with and excellent benefit from those training sessions.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Feedback from constituents and users of services provide strong support for the efficacy of the LEAD Program. Surveys, clinical data and training evaluations showed high satisfaction with services and generally positive outcomes related to services, supporting the value of a multi-dimensional approach to individual, family and organizational stress reduction. The multi-dimensional approach showed several advantages:

- Program staff members were able to reach a large (in effect, total) percentage of the department on a personal basis. Mandatory contacts, field observations and family service social events provided opportunities for less formal, non-clinical interactions with personnel who would otherwise have avoided the program. Such interactions provided opportunities to develop rapport with personnel and to discuss the full range of services provided by the program.
- Through the provision of such a wide range and variety of services, personnel become more familiar (and comfortable) with program staff members. This facilitated the clinical and debriefing processes (i.e., more confidence and trust in staff, less resistance). Non-clinical contacts (through outreach and social contacts) provided insight to the needs of individuals, and sub-groups of the organizations. This would have been much more difficult to achieve through the provision of clinical services only.
- Providing clinical services to the family members of personnel was an indirect, yet powerful and valuable way of serving personnel, and therefore, the law enforcement organizations. Employees were appreciative that services were available to their loved ones and would often, following counseling, report the positive outcomes they associated with their family member's experience with the LEAD Program. In addition to supporting an improved quality of life for the identified client, a flexible provision of services enabled improved rapport with departmental personnel, and indirectly benefited their lives and the organizations for which they worked

- The multi-dimensional approach fit well with the dynamic nature of the law enforcement organizations, work environments, and individuals. The flexible nature of a multi-dimensional program allowed LEAD Program staff to shift their focus to the unique needs and concerns of a given department at a given point in time. This enhanced the perceived value and, ultimately, the utilization of program services. The important advantage was that a flexible program could more easily become an integral part of the department and work environment, which was more regularly utilized than a static program with a more narrow focus.
- Finally, personal responsibility of constituents to provide program staff with direction facilitated the buy-in process, contributed to their sense of ownership, and boosted their commitment to the program / program objectives. We believe this “buy in” happened more quickly and easily as a result of the multi-dimensional, non-pathological approach taken by LEAD Program staff members.

Limitations

The significant limitation of the LEAD Program was the cost in sustaining an adequately staffed, multi-dimensional program that was focused on the needs of law enforcement personnel and families. The three departments ranged in size from 32-50 sworn personnel, with a combined sworn and civilian staff of less than 250 persons. Neither the collective consortium of departments, nor any of the individual departments, could absorb the cost of sustaining LEAD Program services without continued support from external sources. Several options were explored including adding other departments to the consortium, assessing fees for some services, corporate sponsorship, and additional grant support.

As the three constituents were the primary law enforcement agencies in the county, there were few viable options in adding agencies. All other agencies in the county consisted of fewer than 8 officers each; therefore there was not significant financial incentive for those departments to “buy in”. Neither the steering nor advisory committees were supportive of implementing fees for services; believing that the costs of recovering minimal fees would be prohibitive and those larger fees would decrease access to service. Corporate sponsorship was dismissed due to concerns about potential conflict of interest. Finally, additional grant support was strongly discouraged as it was seen as negatively affecting the perceived stability of the program. In fact, the program had already experienced such problems during a delay in the funding cycle between the original and supplemental grants. That experience resulted in some constituents expressing their reluctance to invest in (and utilize) a service that “might not be here tomorrow”. These criticisms should not be viewed as global statements about the appropriateness of a given option for a given program. Rather, they are presented as issues for consideration as programs look to the future for their funding and stability.

No cookbook approach

This program was designed and implemented to meet the unique needs of three, small, rural law enforcement agencies. All elements of the program, from its organizational structure, management, staffing, needs assessment, service provision and evaluation were designed to address the unique

constellation of needs presented by the constituent agencies. Through consultation and discussion with stress management staff (from across the country), it became clear that no one approach could, nor would, be effective for all law enforcement agencies. Therefore, those who seek to develop and implement stress reduction plans for their personnel and/or families, should conduct careful and thorough needs assessment. Based on that assessment, and a strong understanding of the people and organizations to be served, program managers can draw on the experiences of the LEAD Program (and other similar programs from across the country). There is a strong and understandable motivation to "not re-invent the wheel", when it comes providing support services. However, it is equally important to be sure that the wheel fits before attempting to use it. Otherwise, significant effort and resources may be expended to fix problems generated by the very services intended to decrease stress in the organization.

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