



Defense Suicide Prevention Office Video Transcript

Spotlight on Suicide Prevention: Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point

Lelia Brady:

Thank you for joining us for Spotlight on Suicide Prevention, a new series of videos by the Department of Defense to highlight the suicide prevention achievements of our local programs. Today we're joined by our friends from Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point. They are an example of what suicide prevention looks like at the local levels of our military communities. Their efforts to raise awareness and prevent suicide is both inspiring and innovative. Let's learn about our guests and their work to keep our Service members safe from suicide.

Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point focused their campaign on connecting Service members to their community by connecting military and civilian resources to form an integrated and holistic suicide prevention approach. Team Cherry Point held two leadership summits that reached over 80 senior leaders, which focused on talking to their units about suicide and best practices for reintegrating Marines into their units following a suicide attempt.

Additionally, Cherry Point held two Get Reel About Prevention fishing tournaments, and that's reel spelled with the two Es, along with wellness fairs and implemented a resilience and risk factor training program in partnership with the Provost Marshal's office for 108 first responders and distributed over 300 gun locks. Thank you all for joining us today. Can you please take a moment to introduce yourselves and your titles?

Cassandra Peck:

Hi. So, my name is Cassandra Peck and I'm the behavioral health branch head here at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point.

Jose Bernal:

Hello. My name is Jose Bernal, and I'm the primary prevention integrator aboard Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point.

Lelia Brady:

Let's learn more about your efforts and shine a light on your accomplishments. Please share details about your program, what your team accomplished, and what works best to encourage participation and engagement.

Jose Bernal:

Yes, ma'am. So, as you mentioned in our bio, we had a lot of events here at the installation from, for example, the gun locks. We provided those gun locks during our trunk-or-treat event that we have. So, the children received candy and the parents that had guns received gun locks, so that way they felt like they had something to take away with.



Another thing that we had was our Get Reel About Prevention, which, as you mentioned, started with two Es, but we meant it that way because we wanted to get a demographic also to attend because sometimes when we talk about prevention, some folks give us a Heisman. So, we wanted to do a Jedi mind trick for them to show up. Another thing, as you mentioned, we did Get with PMO, our first responders, because they are the first individuals that show up to any crisis aboard this installation. So, with that said, Ms. Cassandra, do you have anything else?

Cassandra Peck:

Yeah, I just want to add, you mentioned the Reel prevention tournament, and that is definitely a standout event in my mind. Just super creative that the team did. We live in a coastal area of North Carolina where sport fishing is really big here. So, I just think the way that they pooled in a fishing tournament, which really mimics what the community does, that gets people very excited throughout the year. There's several of them, spring, summer, fall.

So, doing that on the base really got a lot of people who otherwise might not have come to that event interested because fishing is such a big deal here. So, I think just the way that they were able to use the geographic area to encourage Marines and sailors to participate in a prevention event, and then also get to hopefully enjoy an activity that they can then take, that's a healthy alternative activity, and they can do that off base as well.

Lelia Brady:

Thank you. What inspired you to build your program this way, and why do you feel it has had a positive impact on preventing suicide?

Jose Bernal:

One thing, ma'am, is Connect to Protect. That's a theme that the DoD has pushed out, which we carry it very, very heavily. So, we wanted to connect everybody from first responders to people out in the community to stakeholders on the installation so everybody could be part of that solution to prevent suicide. So, it's not just one individual. So, we wanted to get the buy-in of everybody to make sure that our events are well attended. So, that's one thing, ma'am.

Cassandra Peck:

Yeah, we are just really fortunate. Cherry Point is such an amazing installation, and one of the things that really makes this a standout installation for me is just the level of connection and relationships that we have on the installation, off the installation. As Jose said, Connect to Protect is easy here because there is just so much connection and so much collaboration between departments and directorates. So, that is something that we do all the time, is come together, collaborate, have conversations, and I think it really just helps our program to be able to do so much more because there is so much buy-in from everyone else on the installation.

Lelia Brady:

Thank you both. Do you think your program has implications outside your installation, either across other services or for suicide prevention efforts in the civilian community?



Cassaundra Peck:

Again, going back to just the relationships that we have. We do a lot with the city of Havelock and the Craven County or county that we're in. And I think that Jose can probably speak to this. External stakeholders rely on us to show up to their events to support what they have going on off base. So, I definitely think the things that we do here and the work that we do here is noticed on the installation, but off the installation, and we often get invited to partner with the community, which I think then just really helps people see that we're all on the same page, that not only is the installation here to support them but so is the local community that they're living and working in.

Jose Bernal:

Yes, and I just want to piggyback a little bit also for different installations. As a primary prevention integrator, I do speak to other primary prevention integrators, and we share ideas. And one of the ideas that we shared is yesterday, we had a Sidewalk Chalk Talk, and a lot of folks showed up. I was very, very impressed of how many people showed up, and I sent some photos to some of my PPIs, and they also want to do something similar to that this month at their installation.

Cassaundra Peck:

Yeah, Jose sent out; I think there was a maximum of two emails that I received advertising that event and the number of people that showed up yesterday was really great and just speaks to how engaged people are with suicide prevention on this installation. It's really, really great to see.

Lelia Brady:

Thank you. It was definitely inspiring to see the words of hope written out and seen across social media. Jose, we can't thank you enough for your impact and influence across the primary prevention workforce and that engagement in the Wellness Symposium, and Cassaundra, all of your work in Behavioral Programs. Deeply grateful for both of you.

Thank you for sharing with us all the ways you're working to make our military safe from suicide. I'm confident I can say this on behalf of the audience, we've learned so much about ways we can lead the fight to help eliminate suicide across the military.

Our guests were honored at the 2024 Department of Defense Suicide Prevention Recognition Ceremony in September for their campaigns to prevent suicide, which took place at the Pentagon Hall of Heroes.

To those watching, we hope you enjoyed listening to what you've heard. Please help us spread the word by sharing the link to this video with others. If you found it on social media, share it on your timeline for your friends to discover.

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