



Defense Suicide Prevention Office Video Transcript

Spotlight on Suicide Prevention: U.S. Coast Guard District 17

CDR LaMar Henderson:

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 achievement of our local programs. I'm Commander LaMar Henderson, and today I'm joined by my colleagues in the Coast Guard from Base Kodiak in Kodiak, Alaska. They are an example of what suicide prevention looks like at the local level of our military community. Their efforts to raise awareness and prevent suicide are inspiring and innovative. Let's learn about their work to keep our Service members safe from suicide. U.S. Coast Guard District 17 Health, Safety, and Work-Life Programs sponsored a year-round "Campaign to Connect," a program that offered monthly opportunities for Service members to connect through activities outside of the workplace, to include hiking, board games, book clubs, and many other events and trainings hosted throughout the year.

For example, they brought in speaker and author David Bartley to talk about his book, "The Power of Connection", hosted a cumulative trauma panel to discuss how cumulative trauma can lead to suicide, and distributed a return-to-ready toolkit for unit commanders to address crisis and care for Active Duty personnel and family members in need of services. Thank you all for joining us today. Can you take a moment to introduce yourselves and your titles?

Jody Carman:

Hi, everybody. My name is Jody Carman. I am the employee assistance program coordinator for Base Kodiak here in Kodiak, Alaska.

LT Erin Bohner:

Hello, my name is Lieutenant Erin Bohner. I am the deputy health safety work-life regional practice manager, and I am based out of Juneau, Alaska, responsible for all Health, Safety, and Work-Life Programs across D-17.

CDR LaMar Henderson:

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

Jody Carman:

So, thank you for the question, and you really spoke to a lot of the innovative aspects in the introduction about our "Campaign to Connect," which that was initiated by our former admiral who was very concerned about suicide in District 17 and in Alaska in general. And by allowing people time off every month to engage in activities that can be fun outside of work seems to be very popular, and so that is one approach that we have taken to bring people together. Of course, having that time off encourages engagement. So, that has really been pretty popular with our district. The other cornerstone of our program to encourage connection is, really, in the year '22, we did 15 applied suicide intervention skills



and SafeTALK classes, which might not sound like a lot compared to DOD, but for our small Coast Guard, it's quite an accomplishment in that we only have so many people trained and we have to travel great distances to provide these courses throughout the state.

And we know that suicide's very personalized and complicated, and the more people that we can get trained to intervene and to identify people that might be having thoughts of suicide, the more people that we can connect with and we can help possibly change their mind and to make another choice and to take their life and keep them safe for now.

LT Erin Bohner:

One of the things that I wanted to highlight that we did is we meet commands where they're at. Here in Alaska, we are spread across thousands of seashores and many of our customers and units are in areas that are not attached to the road system. So, one of the things that our program did is we send our specialists and our team members out to meet commands and units where they're at to provide these different trainings and things. And we work with the operators to get their schedules. So, we maintain flexibility in order to get to these units that are in these remote locations and bend our schedules to meet the customer's needs. So we go out, we meet commands where they're at, we apply trainings that they want. So, if a unit is experiencing a particular type of issue or challenge, we will send out the specialist who will give that training that the command is requesting.

So, we have this on-demand area where commands are our eyes and ears of what is going on. They'll bring that to the team and then the team will send specialists out there to provide the training that is needed for that unit. One of the other things that we have is a toolkit for commands to bring members that they have who are struggling to the team's attention. And so we have this care coordination team program, the D-SEM Team Return to Ready where commands will identify members who are struggling, and they will bring it to our attention where we can huddle subject matter experts and collaborate with commands to have the most positive outcome for the members.

So, we'll have behavioral health providers on there. We'll have family advocacy specialists on there. We'll have the employee assistance program coordinators. We'll have medical officers, commands, chaplains, whatever we feel is most beneficial for these people. The goal is to identify people, get them to the resources, and return them to ready. So that tool has been very successful, and we've been using it over the past year and continue to do so to this day.

Jody Carman:

It feeds into our operational stress control program, which is an upstream program to provide people with training on well-being from all aspects to flexible thinking, from mindfulness to nutrition, physical fitness, all the things. And it's based on that operational stress control continuum. So, that program overlaps with that. We assign them a color basically after the meeting from green, yellow, amber, orange to red so we can get a picture as to where they are. We want to get them back to the ready, to the green.

CDR LaMar Henderson:

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



Jody Carman:

So, I'm a big believer in Suicideologist Thomas Joyner and his theories about suicide. If someone doesn't feel that they belong, if they have thwarted belongingness, they have this perceived burdensomeness, or they have the acquired capacity to act on suicide, I really feel like, if we can address those three, we can really do. That's what's inspired me to design the program the way it is, and looking at it from an aspect of individual relational and community aspects and trying to as an ecological approach to suicide awareness and prevention. That was the inspiration. Making sure that we promote the Crisis Line, we promote the firearm safety. We have policies in place that prohibit firearms in the barracks and to be unsecured in housing. We promote self-care, all of those things. We create education programs. Basically, like I said before, the assist training program, a SafeTALK training program, and our mindfulness training.

And my counterpart in D-17, Bob Atadero, does the ACE training and the QPR training. So, this is really a team approach across a great distance with a lot of individuals. It's not just my program. Suicide is everybody's business, and this is coming from the top down and bottom up, and our leadership and development council, the LDAC, and our chiefs mass all put together these awareness programs and events that are not just mine, but they all contribute to the cause of this program. And it's widespread. And again, I'm not the only one that owns it. It's really across our whole district. So, we want to connect people. We know that connection is what the most important thing is, and again, suicide is everyone's business.

LT Erin Bohner:

Yeah, thank you, Jody. And one of the things that inspired us to build the program in this particular way was the geographic disbursement of not only our team but our Coast Guard units across. So, it's very easy for people to feel isolated, alone, and forgotten about. And so we recognize that, that was going to be something we had to actively combat, and so we designed the program with the ability to travel out to the different units that are spread across the district and meet them where they are at, and also provide a mechanism for these units who aren't quite sure where the resources are or who to call to have this 911, so to speak, for health, safety, work-life services where people can call, get the right team members, and then collaborate and come up with the best way to take care of their shipmates in trouble.

So, that seems to definitely have a positive impact. We have multiple cases where we identify people prior to severe suicidal ideations or attempts. We'll just identify people who are struggling and be able to come alongside them before they make a decision that they can't take back.

CDR LaMar Henderson:

Do you think your program has implications outside your district, either across other Services or for suicide prevention efforts in the civilian community?

Jody Carman:

So here in Kodiak and across, I know in other areas of Alaska too, but most specifically here in Kodiak, we're an island, and so we are symbiotic. We have a symbiotic relationship with the community, and so our programs definitely have a local impact. We invite community members to our SafeTALK and assist classes. We always make sure that we have a certain percentage of people. We extend that invitation



out to the community. No charge, of course. We also have a critical incident stress management team that includes members from the community from the different services to help respond after these things happen because we know that we want to prevent all suicides, but sometimes they do happen. So we have community engagement in that. We have also done training with the Air National Guard and Army National Guard up in Anchorage. So, we do have some relation and spread out amongst the other Services and the community at large.

LT Erin Bohner:

Yep, exactly, Jody. And also, we will partner with Anchorage on these different care coordination teams. For example, we've had providers from JBER jump on and will be treating our members and be giving commands and our medical team advice on what they see, boots on the ground. So, in Alaska, we utilize whatever resources we have. And so there are community medical centers in remote communities like Cordova and Valdez where we'll partner with the hospitals there to stabilize our members or find people, and they'll work with the command, who then bring them to us. So, there is definitely a symbiotic relationship with firehouses, healthcare providers, and DOD entities all across the state.

CDR LaMar Henderson:

Thank you for sharing with us all the ways you're working to make our military safe from suicide. I am confident I can say this on behalf of the audience: we've all 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 campaign to prevent suicide, which took place in the Pentagon's 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 with your friends to discover. To access more videos and resources in DSPO's video library, visit us online at www.dspo.mil. If you are a Service member in crisis, remember, you are never alone. Dial 988 and press one for the Veterans and Military Crisis Line. You can also access the crisis line by texting 838255 or chat online at veteranscrisisline.net.