



Defense Suicide Prevention Office Video Transcript

Spotlight on Suicide Prevention: 175th Air Wing – Maryland Air National Guard

MAJ Lakiyah Frederick:

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. My name is Major Lakiyah Frederick, and I am the joint suicide prevention program manager for the National Guard Bureau. Today we're joined by our friends from the 175th Air Wing with the Maryland Air National Guard. 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 inspiring and innovative. Let's learn about our guests and their work to keep our Service members safe from suicide. Maryland's 175th Air Wing promoted a local theme, "Being Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable", to normalize difficult feelings and highlight the importance of supporting each other through hard times. They created resource folders and a training video starring unit members. A facilitator's guide was also created to ensure accurate and consistent information was given during presentations. As a result, 99% of the Wing's airmen completed suicide prevention training. One member said, "It was the most effective training in my twenty-plus years of Service." Thank you for joining us today. Can you please take a moment to introduce yourself and your title?

Susan Starnes:

My name's Susan Starnes. I'm the integrated primary prevention program manager for the Maryland National Guard.

MAJ Lakiyah Frederick:

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.

Susan Starnes:

Sure. So our program focused on the trends being seen across the Wing. Many people were coming to the helping agencies, so the director of Psychological Health or the Chaplain Corps, Military and Family Readiness, and they were talking about stress and frequently diagnosing themselves with mental health issues. So, instead of identifying that what they were really dealing with was uncomfortable feelings that were also just part of their daily lives, especially when dealing with stressful events. So, having coping skills to work through those uncomfortable feelings so they would not become distressed was the key to what our program was about. So people would say things like, "I'm anxious.;" or "I'm depressed.;" or, "I have anxiety.;" or, "I have depression." Instead of saying that they were feeling anxious, or they were feeling depressed. So, we provided every member with a self-assessment to help them determine what their stress level was, and the assessment also offered them a potential skill that



they could implement on their own, and then that would help to improve the strategies that they already had in place in their lives.

So, the assessment went along with other things. So we had a flyer on how to help someone in distress, a question card that encouraged them to think about positive solutions, as well as all the mobile crisis numbers in our state. They were all handed out to the members in a folder at the start of the training. So that coincided with a video that was produced by our Public Affairs Office and that reviewed the risk factors, warning signs, and the GO SLO method. The people in the video were people from the 175th Wing, so they were familiar faces, and they ranged from young airmen to our command chief and our Wing commander. So, a facilitator's guide was also provided to help encourage communication and interaction.

At the times that the video would stop, there would be a member interaction portion, and so having the video that included people that they knew and making the video personal was, I feel pretty highly effective. Also, having the folder was something that they could take away from the training and use later if needed, really was I think an extra added piece and that came from feedback that we had received in prior years and prior trainings. But having the video available to our members means that they didn't necessarily have to be with their group when they got the training. If they were TDY or they were deployed, they were still able to be trained, and that helped us get to 99% of our Wing being trained.

MAJ Lakiyah Frederick:

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

Susan Starnes:

Sure. So our Wing has gone through several changes over the years, but our members, and as most of the Nation has, they have been inundated with the idea that life should look a certain way through social media and all of those things. So, they don't seem to realize that sometimes it's just unrealistic. So when negative things happen in our lives, it's normal to have a negative feeling, and that's totally okay. So, what they aren't seeing or learning is what to do with those uncomfortable feelings when they have them. So, social media is not the place to diagnose your mental health issues. It's certainly not the place to hold the standard of what reality is. So, it's better to develop a network of social support, develop grounding exercises, physical exercise, practice, breathing techniques, or just work through your troubles with a third party, ideally a therapist or a counselor.

MAJ Lakiyah Frederick:

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

Susan Starnes:

Yes, I do. So when we normalize feelings that most people are comfortable with, and when we give people options to manage those feelings, we're decreasing the likelihood of somebody would feel like those feelings are permanent or unresolved. So, the idea that life is hopeless typically comes from feeling alone or isolated and that there's no way to get a solution. In the National Guard, our members



are dealing with the stressors of Military Service but also managing a balancing act that comes with all the civilian community stressors. So, our Service members in the past year have felt confident enough in their skills to intervene that when seeing not only military members but civilians who are in distress, they've been willing and able to interact with them and de-escalate situations and ultimately save lives. So, I feel like it absolutely has made a difference.

MAJ Lakiyah Frederick:

Thank you for sharing with us all the ways you are working to make our military safe from suicide. I am 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. To access more videos and the resources in the Defense Suicide Prevention Office 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.