

DEALING WITH LOSS: HANDLING THE DEATH OF A VOLUNTEER

All VIPS programs at one time or another will have to deal with the death of a current or former volunteer. Some VIPS programs have policies and procedures in place to handle a volunteer's death, most often written in response to an earlier experience with the death of a volunteer. This issue of *VIPS in Focus* offers examples of agencies that have dealt with the loss of a volunteer and have established policies and procedures to respond to the death of a volunteer.

Delray Beach, Florida, Police Department

Delray Beach is located on the southeastern coast of Florida between West Palm Beach to the north and Boca Raton to the south. It is a diverse community with multimillion-dollar houses and Section 8 and HUD housing developments. An estimated population of 60,000 includes many elderly residents, a large group of Haitian residents, a growing Hispanic community, and a large seasonal resident population. Delray Beach also accommodates many tourists and visitors, swelling by as much as 20,000 in peak season. The Delray Beach Police Department comprises 158 sworn officers, 78 civilian employees, and 452 volunteers who contributed 40,763 hours in 2006.

The department's volunteer program is divided into three groups, each headed by a

volunteer major; the groups are operations, support, and community patrol. These groups are further divided into 19 divisions, each led by a volunteer captain with the support of volunteer lieutenants and sergeants. The volunteer program uses 15 cars, three golf carts, one electronic car, one boat, and two mobile radar trailers. The volunteers handle, but are not limited to, administrative duties, patrol duties (on foot, in a car, or in a boat), and public education presentations. The volunteer program has also established a nonprofit corporation and a volunteer support services division, both with the goal of assisting volunteers in need of physical, emotional, or financial support.

Volunteers Supporting Volunteers

The slogan of the volunteer program at the Delray Beach Police Department is "Whatever a volunteer needs in life, or wants in death." The volunteer support services division was created in 2005 to fulfill this promise. Its members have visited every volunteer who has entered the hospital and offered whatever assistance the volunteer or his or her spouse needed during that time. The division has delivered food, provided transportation, sat with volunteers in hospice, and attended many viewings and funerals. The department has learned that the volunteer support services division can better assist the family during a time of need with advance preparation. That preparation involves

identifying volunteers who will be able to help handle requests and ensure that those volunteers communicate with each other. It also involves preparing to be flexible, as everyone handles the death of loved one in his or her own way.

The Death of a Volunteer

The Delray Beach Police Department averages eight to 10 volunteer deaths a year. Once the volunteer support services division has been notified of the death of a volunteer, the volunteer captain of the division contacts the family to offer condolences and assistance, relaying any requests to the volunteer coordinator. The volunteer captain serves as the point of contact for the family and the liaison between the volunteer coordinator and the family.

In the case of a death of volunteer, all volunteer group and division commanders are notified by e-mail and they personally notify their volunteers. In the case of a sudden death or a line-of-duty death, police chaplains make themselves available to volunteers. By arrangement, the volunteer captain has a set of volunteers who assist with the coordination of requests. All volunteers receive notice of the death of their colleague and information about arrangements for the funeral and burial.

Most members of the division in which the volunteer served, the three group commanders, the volunteer coordinator, and members of the ranking sworn staff are invited to attend the funeral, pending the family's wishes. The group commanders and volunteer coordinator make every effort to attend every funeral. The volunteer support services division may, at the request of the family, provide a new uniform for burial, a volunteer

honor guard, and pallbearers. The family's wishes are always sought and observed.

The Delray Beach Police Department has yet to suffer the loss of a volunteer while on duty, but the department has prepared for such an event. If a volunteer dies in the line of duty, the family can elect to have a department funeral to include all volunteers, civilian staff, and officers. A police chaplain can officiate at the service, the department honor guard can participate, and the volunteer fleet can lead the procession from the funeral to the cemetery.

Lodi, California, Police Department

Lodi is situated between San Francisco and Sacramento in northern California. The police department maintains a staff of 83 sworn officers, 25 civilians, and 100 volunteers to protect the city's 63,000 residents. They work side by side in every facet of the department. With more than 26,000 volunteer hours contributed annually by participants in the PARTNERS Senior Volunteer Program, the department has virtually doubled its staff with no impact on the city's budget.

PARTNERS volunteer in every area of the department, on projects large and small, including registering drug offenders, conducting tours and crime prevention programs, translating for officers, calibrating DUI devices, staffing the false alarm program, and conducting parking citation hearings. PARTNERS also work with officers directly during patrols, handling abandoned vehicles, issuing parking citations, addressing parking problems, serving subpoenas, booking found property, transporting evidence, providing traffic control at accidents, towing vehicles, and

assisting officers in transporting equipment and persons. The PARTNERS program works with community improvement officers to address nuisances and promote community-oriented policing for the department. PARTNERS participants respond to emergency calls 24 hours a day, working more than 600 hours on emergency calls in 2006.

Prepared to Handle the Loss of a Volunteer

The Lodi Police Department implemented procedures on handling the death of a volunteer after a volunteer suffered a heart attack and died while directing traffic on duty. The loss had a devastating effect on the entire department because it came just six months after an officer was killed in the line of duty in a motorcycle accident in 1999. The volunteer coordinator planned, organized, and oversaw the entire service to assist the family on behalf of the department. The department learned it needed to have procedures in place for the loss of a volunteer and to develop a support system for the volunteers and staff. The department has procedures in place to guide it in the event that an active volunteer dies off duty, a volunteer dies in the line of duty, or an inactive or retired member of the program dies.

When a volunteer enters the program, he or she completes a service request form, which details the level of participation the volunteer wants from the department at the time of their death. The form asks for the name of a spouse or partner and the name and number of another family member to be called in the event of an emergency. It also asks whether the volunteer wishes to be buried in uniform, have members of PARTNERS attend the service in uniform, have the PARTNERS honor guard present, have the PARTNERS honor guard stand at attention at the gravesite, have the

PARTNERS honor guard serve as honorary pallbearers, have a PARTNERS participant speak at the service, and, if so, which one. The form leaves room for the volunteer to list any additional instructions. The volunteer shares the completed form with family members to make sure the family is aware of the volunteer's wishes.

When a Volunteer Dies

When an active volunteer dies off duty, the volunteer manager becomes the agency lead, coordinating department participation in the service. The manager notifies the department's administration, consults the service request form, notifies the department chaplain of the wishes of the volunteer, and arranges for a meeting of the chaplain, the family, and the manager. The manager has the task of notifying all the volunteers either by e-mail or, for those close to the deceased, by phone. Once the details of the service are finalized, the manager passes that information on to all volunteers and department staff.

Flowers and a card are sent with sympathies to the family and a memorial brick is purchased to be placed at the community center walkway. If the family needs assistance securing a location for a reception or providing food, the manager will work with the department to ensure that it is taken care of. If the family wishes, the department chaplain and staff will conduct the funeral service. All staff members and volunteers attending the funeral will arrive in uniform to honor the volunteer, at the request of the volunteer. A volunteer chaplain and the manager are peer counselors and are available to support any volunteers who are having difficulty dealing with the loss of the volunteer.

When a volunteer dies while on duty, the manager immediately notifies the department administration and the city manager. The manager, a division commander, and a department chaplain notify the family in person. The Lodi Police Department follows the procedures described above and is able to provide additional services. Depending on the wishes of the volunteer and his or her family, the department can have all available volunteers and staff attend the funeral in uniform, provide a motor escort for the family, have the mayor, the chief of police, the division commander, and the manager speak at the funeral, host the reception and provide food for it, provide a full police honor guard at the service, present a wreath at the cemetery, and invite surrounding agencies to send representatives to the funeral.

If an inactive or retired volunteer dies, the department offers support upon notification. The manager contacts the family to obtain information about the service, and a department chaplain contacts the family to offer assistance and offer to speak at the service, if the family desires. The volunteers send cards and flowers to the family and the manager and volunteers attend the service in uniform.

With 100 volunteers, all of whom are senior citizens, the Lodi Police Department realized it was essential to have procedures in place to work with the family and to help volunteers cope with the loss of their friend and colleague, recognizing that if it were not for the relationships that volunteers develop while with the department, the retention rate of volunteers would not be as high as it is.

San Diego, California, Police Department

The San Diego Police Department serves 1.2 million people in southern California with 1,901 sworn officers, 779 civilian employees, and 728 volunteers. The volunteers work in area command, Volunteers in Policing, the Crisis Intervention Program, and Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP). The San Diego Police Department's volunteer program relies on the support from each area command to manage their volunteers. It is the area command coordinators who work most closely with the volunteers, getting to know them and their families. The volunteers contributed more than 130,000 hours in 2006.

The members of Volunteers in Policing work in the crime lab, the property room, the supply room, the records office, the patrol divisions, the storefront substations, the Cal Gang computer system, the chief's office, and the facilities development and administrative functions. The RSVP program is open to those 50 and older. Volunteers perform uniformed patrol, You Are Not Alone checks, vehicle evidence, fingerprinting, traffic direction, abandoned vehicle abatement, vacation house checks, accident follow-up, computerized license plate reader and stolen vehicle checks, and school patrol.

The Crisis Intervention Program volunteers offer short-term emotional assistance and information to victims and families of victims of violent crimes, serious vehicle collisions, and deaths. These volunteers provide support and assistance to displaced citizens during evacuations. They also work with coroners to notify next of kin once detectives have identified the body of a deceased victim. Finally, they make arrangements to have biohazard cleanup companies clean crime scenes.

Handling a Death in the Agency

Volunteers are regarded as equals in the San Diego Police Department, which follows the same procedures in response to the death of a paid employee or a volunteer. When a volunteer dies, the area command takes the lead on working with the family and handling any requests, and the Office of Volunteer Services is available to notify all divisions citywide if asked to do so by the area command. Most volunteer deaths occur off duty in San Diego, and when they occur the Volunteer Services Unit is the liaison to the area command in which the volunteer worked and ensures that volunteers and employees from that area command learn of the volunteer's death. The sergeant of the Volunteer Services Unit is the main point of contact with the area command to coordinate arrangements with the family. When a volunteer dies in the line of duty, the department's Medical Assistance Unit works with family members to coordinate services and benefits to ensure that agency participation matches the family's wishes.

When the department learns of the death of a volunteer, the sergeant asks the family whether the deceased had any wishes that involved the department and whether the family would like the department color guard or any other representatives of the agency to be present at the memorial service. Some volunteers have asked to be buried in uniform. Once the services are complete, the department presents the family with a shadow box that contains the volunteer's badge and identification.

Members of the command staff of the department show their full support for volunteers in life and death. Recently, a volunteer died in a police facility while off duty; four department chiefs arrived at the hospital and were waiting when the wife of the deceased was brought to the hospital. If a fallen

volunteer was active at the time of death, representatives from command staff, area command chiefs, members of the volunteer services unit, and volunteers attend the service, if their presence matches the wishes of the volunteer and his or her family. Most volunteer deaths occur after the volunteer has retired or is inactive. When notified of the death of an inactive volunteer, the volunteer services unit ensures agency representation of employees and volunteers at the funeral, pending the family's wishes.

The Crisis Intervention Program volunteers are on hand to offer support and services to volunteers and employees when a volunteer or employee dies. The crisis intervention volunteers have helped other agencies when they have experienced the death of a volunteer.

Resources and Support

Many VIPS programs have dealt with the death of a volunteer, either off-duty or in the line of duty, and while no agency wants to deal with the death of a volunteer, every agency should be prepared to handle it. The national VIPS Program can provide support and referrals for agencies dealing with the death of a volunteer. The VIPS Program will work with a registered VIPS program to gather expressions of sympathy from other VIPS programs across the country and around the world, make referrals to technical assistance providers, liaison with federal officials, and celebrate the life of a volunteer through the VIPS Web site, electronic newsletter, or other means as requested by the program in consultation with the volunteer's family. The VIPS Program is not able to provide legal advice, liability insurance, or direct financial assistance.

For Additional Information

Delray Beach Police Department

Andrew Arena

Officer

Phone: 561-243-7873

Fax: 561-243-7816

E-mail: arenaa@ci.delray-beach.fl.us

URL: www.mydelraybeach.com/Delray/Departments/Police/default.htm

Lodi Police Department

Jeanie Biskup

Special Services Manager

Phone: 209-333-6864

Fax: 209-333-6792

E-mail: jbiskup@pd.loodi.gov

URL: www.loodi.gov/police/

San Diego Police Department

John Trent

Sergeant

Phone: 619-533-5729

Fax: 619-531-1520

E-mail: jtrent@pd.sandiego.gov

URL: www.sandiego.gov/police/

VIPS Resources & Products of Interest

VIPS Program Directory

- Law enforcement agencies can register their volunteer programs and search for others in the online VIPS program directory.
- Citizens can locate volunteer opportunities with law enforcement agencies in their communities. The directory allows users to search by zip code, state, key word, and type of program.

VIPS Resource Library

- Browse and download sample documents from law enforcement volunteer programs, such as application forms, program policies, and volunteer handbooks.

VIPStoVIPS

- This moderated online discussion group was established for law enforcement volunteer program leaders of registered VIPS Programs to share information and ideas. Archives of past discussions are located on the Web site.

All resources and products can be found at www.policevolunteers.org.

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program works to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. VIPS serves as a gateway to resources and information for and about law enforcement volunteer programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the White House Office of the USA Freedom Corps and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.



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