



the Green sheet

Unsung support always present

The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) provides peer support and debriefing services for board staff exposed to traumatic events. There are 30 current CIRT members who have one goal: create a better work environment. The program is targeted toward individuals whose own traumatic experience has affected his or her work abilities or personal life. Whether the incident is work related or not, CIRT provides support in dealing with grief or trauma by debriefing victims on what they have experienced. They

provide information on programs and help groups to deliver assistance in dealing with grief acquired from distressing situations.

CIRT began early in 2002. Director of the Office of Reentry and Quality Assurance Cindy Daub saw the importance for such a group when she experienced first-hand the impact these traumatic occurrences can have on people. During her career as a parole agent, Daub experienced an incident where an offender killed a citizen and then proceeded to take his girlfriend hostage. "It was a daylong rampage," Daub said. "When it was finally over, I had absolutely no support to help me deal with it."

By engaging in various critical responses as her career progressed, Daub realized that a peer support group needed to be established for the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole.

Former board member Jim Fox approached Daub with the same vision and helped with the initial construction. Daub later joined forces with Jody Baker, an Administrative Assistant, who shared a similar passion.

“It is important for our employees to know we care,” Baker said. “We primarily do this to help the people around us get back to a new normal by aiding them in times of great stress. Ultimately, we want our peers to know the agency is behind them no matter what.”

Modeled after the Pennsylvania State Police’s Special Emergency Response Team (SERT), CIRT provides tools for coping with high-risk incidents. SERT coordinator Govan Martin helped tremendously in the development and creation of the Board’s CIRT team.

Through Martin, Daub and Baker were able to reach out to the International Critical Incident Stress Management Foundation to obtain certification and information on how to effectively combat stressful situations. “Without his aid, we would not have such an effective and powerful resource team,” Baker said.

The CIRT team can be deployed for various circumstances, including employee deaths to parole agents facing a situation with a deceased individual. Available 24/7 at no

extra pay, the team actively combats Post Traumatic Stress Disorder by engaging in therapeutic techniques with the individual immediately after an incident has occurred. This provides a healthy outlet for any emotions or confusion that may have resulted from the experience.

The team sees a tremendous level of success primarily because of its operation under a strict confidentiality agreement. “It is 100 percent confidential,” Baker said. This means CIRT members cannot disclose the shared information to anyone unless the employee is threatening harm to themselves or harm to someone else.

“Our first and only priority is to help our peers through a tough situation,” Baker said.

While canvassing the state for members in 2002, an extensive process was pursued to ensure the selected members were able to embody the mentality of the CIRT program. The CIRT team is comprised of clerical workers, deputy directors, institutional parole managers, along with other staff positions. With an application requirement, and approval from the chain of command, 27 applicants were interviewed and processed.

In the end, CIRT accepted 22 team members when it first launched. “Since that time we have required new members to help bolster our membership to add in our representation across the state,” Baker said. All members of the CIRT team cultivate through all-encompassing training which requires three days of thorough

training two times a year in State College including extensive role playing.

Because CIRT is statewide, future plans for the team include expanding its membership and increasing knowledge of the services that CIRT can provide. CIRT is currently organizing presentations for each of the board’s district offices to increase CIRT knowledge and awareness. Through these presentations, CIRT hopes to reach all members of the Pennsylvania Probation and Parole Board.

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