

MN Law Enforcement Family Support Network Chief's Survey Report

In early 2006 the Minnesota Law Enforcement Family Support Network or MN LEFSN began working across law enforcement agencies to identify critical gaps in family support for the 9,700 active peace officers and over 300 active part-time peace officers in Minnesota. Family support in this case is defined by the identification of resources and information family members must have to effectively support peace and police officers in their day to day jobs. In an effort to obtain accurate and timely information and family support perspectives, LEFSN has held family and department focus groups and met with law enforcement partners across Minnesota. We have begun the process of identifying department and organizational needs as they relate to the subject of family support. LEFSN has also actively sought support and buy-in for addressing these gaps through a cross agency state wide law enforcement family support network.

Executive Summary

Among the MN Chief's who responded to the 2007 Chief of Police conference survey, 72.5% had more than 15 years on the job. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents are in positions of upper management. The ideas they share come from valuable longitudinal perspectives.

In general, responding Chief's strongly supported the idea that families play a critical role in contributing to officer preparedness. It is interesting to note that despite strongly agreeing that an officer's family life had an impact on and officer's job performance and that healthy family functioning contributes to officer preparedness these representative departments, by their own admission are clearly not addressing the reported education/training needs of families, nor are the Chief's recommended *outreach methods* for families widespread. At the same time the family training/information topics that the Chief's prioritized are among the *least available* to department families keeping in mind that **23.2% of the respondents currently offer no outreach/education whatsoever.**

Although there are obvious limitations to this 'snapshot approach' from the MN Chief's of Police survey, there are also some safe assumptions.

Assumptions

1. More can be done to broaden the options available for connecting local departments with their officer's families.
2. Training and educational topics for families need to be expanded to meet the currently identified needs in Minnesota's law enforcement departments.
3. Known barriers exist in the effort to connect with law enforcement families and the perspectives of seasoned administrators and family members will be important to keep in mind when designing family outreach strategies.
4. Engaging family members must be a priority when moving this work forward.
5. Designing outreach and training to address police officers understanding and knowledge about the importance and value of family engagement will be important.
6. Building momentum with departments who supported **fiscal partnership** for family support and outreach will be needed.
7. Exploring sustainable funding options for family support must be a collective priority.

Sue Dion, M.Ed.

Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice
dion@csp.edu

Conclusions

Results from the recent survey of Minnesota's top law enforcement representatives has helped identify perspectives and uncover needs related peace and police officer job performance & support. The issue of supporting law enforcement families as it relates to police officer job performance is overwhelmingly supported by top law enforcement representatives in Minnesota. Addressing these gaps from a holistic perspective will be important if we are to continue to provide Minnesota's citizens with the culture of excellence they have come to expect from our law enforcement agencies. Holistically approaching the preparation and support of law enforcement officers and their families will maximize Minnesota's investment in their law enforcement personnel. Combining resources in a strategically designed, cross agency family support network is one critical strategy identified to address these unmet priorities.

For more information about the work of the Minnesota Law Enforcement Family Support Network contact; Sue Dion, MN LEFSN, Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice, Saint Paul, MN 651.603.6155
dion@csp.edu

Full Survey Report

At the 2007 Minnesota Chief of Police conference Chiefs and other representatives of MN Police Departments were asked to provide their perspective on issues related to family support. The surveys were made available during two conference break out sessions on the topic of Officer Suicide. Session attendees were invited to fill out the surveys and return them. Specific set aside time for survey completion was not provided. A total of 58 surveys were returned. An accurate return rate will be challenging to assess due to the way the surveys were disseminated. To see a copy of the survey please contact, Sue Dion, dion@csp.edu

Biographical Information

There are over 400 law enforcement departments in Minnesota with an average sworn staff size of 5. Our survey sample appears to be fairly representative of the greater Minnesota law enforcement community department settings with returns from 8 urban (major regional urban area), 19 suburban (communities surrounding major population centers) and 29 rural (communities under 10,000) responding. Two respondents did not provide geographical information. The average number of sworn officers in the responding departments was 23.7 with the largest amount of sworn staff being 71 and the lowest 2. Non sworn staff size ranged from 1-120 with an average of 9.6 non sworn staff.

This MN LEFSN survey effort intentionally did not include the largest MN departments, Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Sheriffs and the State Trooper's organizations. Leadership in the State Trooper's organization was surveyed at a separate meeting in May and the Sheriff's will be surveyed at an upcoming June 07 meeting. A Saint Paul department specific survey is planned for late summer/fall of 07. Surveying Minneapolis department members is planned future work for MN LEFSN.

Sue Dion, M.Ed.
Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice
dion@csp.edu

Officer Stressors

Ninety percent (90.0) of chiefs surveyed strongly agree or are certain that an officer's family life had an impact on an officer's job performance the remaining 10.0 percent agreed. Eighty eight (88.7) percent of respondents strongly agree and/or are certain that healthy family functioning contributes to officer preparedness and the remaining 11.1% agree.

Chiefs were asked to rank stressors that impact officers' job performance. Family situations and routine job related stressors like shots fired, high speed driving and use of force situations were ranked 1 and 2 followed, in order of importance by critical incidents, shift work, and department policies and procedures. Respondents also mentioned day to day politics and dealing with press and media as other notable stressors.

Addressing Family Support Issues

Among those surveyed, only 4.9% weren't sure if preparing families for their role in the law enforcement community was an important part of department training and overall support. The remainder indicated positive agreement, about departments taking a leadership role to address this need.

Chief's expressed the following comments related to prioritizing family support in their departments;

- 'should but don't'
- 'we have no contact at all'
- 'not a consideration'
- 'it won't happen without dollars attached'
- 'city administrations see it as an add on'

Seven percent (7%) of departments indicate no barriers in their current outreach and connection to their department families. The remaining 93% indicated specific barriers in the following in order of priority;

- small department everyone already knows each other
- confidentiality and trust are reasons families give for not participating
- officers don't want their family members to participate
- family members don't get the information and say they don't have time
- departments and families are geographically spread out.

Additional comments regarding connecting with department families included; 'lack of information to share', 'no information is offered', 'challenges getting officers buy in', 'never actually thought about addressing this'.

Family Outreach Strategies and Topics

Twenty three percent (23.2%) of the responding departments admitted to having *no family directed outreach*. Other departments identified multiple strategies for connecting with families. Forty six percent (46.4%) of responding departments rely on social functions/networks for family outreach, and 51.7% rely on informal family networks. Nineteen percent (19.6%) of responding departments have open training available through their department and 14% use service projects as a vehicle for family outreach.

Thirty five percent (35%) of the departments self identified as not providing or addressing any family directed educational outreach. The remaining departments stated that the following topics were available to family members;

- 21.4% Disaster preparedness
- 23.2% Pandemic health emergencies
- 16.0 % Emotional survival in the law enforcement family
- 14.2% Stress patterns in law enforcement families
- 8.9% Critical incident protocol for families
- 3.5% Suicide prevention and child development
- 1.7% Recognizing & preventing mental health issues and career levels and changes in family stressors
- 0% Raising healthy children in a law enforcement family

The respondents were asked to rank in order of importance family training topics. Emotional survival in the law enforcement family, stress patterns in law enforcement families and recognizing and preventing mental health issues in the LE family were ranked 1, 2, and 3. Raising healthy children, critical incident protocol, and career levels and changes in family stressors were ranked 4,5 and 6. Child development, suicide prevention, pandemic health emergencies and disaster preparedness were indicated as the final priorities presented in the survey choices.

Family Outreach Preferences

Respondents were asked detailed questions about the methods of family outreach followed by their beliefs regarding the most effective or BEST methods for reaching department families.

Currently 53.5% of responding departments provide outreach to families through the use of health insurance EAP plans. Thirty seven percent (37.5 %) provide support face to face when officers and families request services, and 14.2% use scheduled training or courses for outreach purposes. Seven percent (7.2%) hold department sponsored discussion groups and 1.7% hold critical incident debriefs and provide telephone triage with dedicated staff in place to respond to calls. None of the respondents provide online courses or tutorials and 16% of the respondents provide none of these methods listed above.

Best Approaches

Respondents were asked to indicate which outreach approaches would be the most effective (check all that apply) they (37.5%) responded by telling us that a combination of all of the approaches listed would yield the best results. Individual percentages were as follows;

- 32.1% Through the use of health insurance EAP plans
- 28.5% Scheduled training or courses
- 26.7% Face to face when officers and families request services
- 23.2% Department sponsored discussion groups
- 14.2% Through a centralized web based clearing house
- 12.5% Via online courses and tutorials

The Future

A total of fifty one percent (51.7%) of the responding Chiefs state wide strongly agree (35.7%) or are certain (16%) that they supported the idea of a cross department family

support network. An additional thirty-three percent (33.9%) agree with the concept. Only 3.5% of the respondents indicate a 'not sure' rating and none disagree with the idea.

When asked to predict their troops or officer's willingness to embrace the family support network concept 48.2% were not sure how their officers would respond, followed by 26.7% who felt that their officers would agree. Three (3.5%) and 7.1% percent of Chiefs surveyed strongly agreed or were certain that their officers would embrace the concept. One respondent predicted that those 'officers over age 40 wouldn't buy it, younger officer would engage'.

When asked to predict their officer's family's willingness to embrace the concept, 51.7% were not sure, followed by 35.7% who thought their families would agree. Another 10% were sure their officers families would either strongly agree (5.3%) or certain that they would agree (5.3%).

Priorities & Sustainability

Chiefs were asked to prioritize the engagement key groups needed to move this work forward. They indicated that training/educating officers should be first priority followed by educational outreach to family members and law enforcement administrators.

When asked about the likelihood of using direct department level funding to support this work, a total of 47% of respondents indicated that they agree (32%) strongly agree (14.2) or were certain (1.7) of direct funding support. Forty six (46%) respondents were not sure with 4.6 % disagreeing.

Comments from the unsure respondents included;

- 'depends upon costs',
- 'small budget in small departments'
- 'no line item funding in budget'
- 'budgets backed by Chief's can be undermined by city council votes'

Respondents were asked to recommend additional ways to sustain a state wide, cross departmental family support network. (Check all that apply) Private foundation and government infrastructure funding were the top two recommendations, followed by legislative mandates and licensing fees. Fees for training and technical assistance and city, county or regional funding sources were the least recommended support methods.

Discussion and Assumptions

It is obvious that the concept of supporting families as a way of contributing to officer preparedness has widespread support among police Chiefs in Minnesota. Eighty nine (89.1%) percent of responding Chiefs believe that a fully implemented state wide family support network could make a positive impact on officer preparedness in their organization. None disagreed with this statement and only 8.9% were unsure.

Among this group of seasoned respondents 72.5% had more than 15 years on the job. Eighty percent (80%) of them were in positions of upper management. The ideas they share come from valuable longitudinal perspectives. It is interesting to note that the primary

Sue Dion, M.Ed.

Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice
dion@csp.edu

family outreach strategies that these representative departments currently use are clearly not addressing their reported education/training needs, nor are the priority outreach methods recommended by these same Chief's in place. The family training topics that respondents prioritized are among the least available to department families keeping in mind that 23.2% of the respondents currently offer no outreach/education whatsoever.

Administrators agree that to move family engagement work forward in Minnesota we must prioritize the education of family members about their critical role in officer preparedness. The full continuum of recommended methods for engaging law enforcement families in Minnesota is currently not available.

Respondent's recommendations for exploring additional funding sources must be followed including looking to private foundations and government agencies to support a portion of this work.

Although there are obvious limitations to this 'snapshot approach' from the MN Chief's of Police survey, there are also a few safe assumptions.

Assumptions

1. More can be done to broaden the options available for connecting local departments with their officer's families.
2. Training/educational topics for families need to be expanded to meet the currently identified needs of Minnesota's departments.
3. Known barriers exist in the effort to connect with law enforcement families and the perspectives of seasoned administrators will be important to keep in mind when designing family outreach strategies.
4. Engaging family members must be a priority when moving this work forward.
5. Design outreach and training to address police officers understanding and knowledge about the importance and value of family engagement.
6. Build momentum with the departments who supported fiscal partnership for family support and outreach. Address questions and provide additional information to other departments and explore other funding options until critical funding momentum is achieved.

Conclusions

Results from the recent survey of Minnesota's top law enforcement representatives has helped identify perspectives and uncover needs related peace and police officer job performance & support. The issue of supporting law enforcement families as it relates to police officer job performance is overwhelmingly supported by top law enforcement representatives in Minnesota. Addressing these gaps from a holistic perspective will be important if we are to continue to provide Minnesota's citizens with the culture of excellence they have come to expect from our law enforcement agencies. Holistically approaching the preparation and support of law enforcement officers and their families will maximize Minnesota's investment in their law enforcement personnel. Combining resources in a strategically designed, cross agency family support network is one critical strategy identified to address these unmet priorities.

Sue Dion, M.Ed.

Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice
dion@csp.edu

MN Law Enforcement Family Support Network Administrator's Survey
Chief's Conference, April 2007

Sue Dion, M.Ed.
Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice
dion@csp.edu