

Reducing PTSD for Veterans and Emergency Service Providers

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Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health diagnosis that can result from exposure to both stress and trauma. PTSD negatively impacts a disproportionate number of veterans and first responders and is related to a variety of negative health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, chronic health issues, and suicidality. These health issues cost the government billions of dollars each year. This project responded to this problem by helping design, implement, and evaluate a community-based, peer-led initiative to teach mind-body self-care skills to veterans and first responders in the Wichita, Kansas's community. Veteran facilitators were trained and certified through the Center for Mind-Body Medicine to lead a 10-week intervention designed to reduce PTSD symptoms and increase overall functioning of participants. Interviews with participants indicated that veterans and emergency service providers greatly benefitted from this project. Participants described having increased self-regulation, mindfulness, and peer support and decreased PTSD and stress symptoms. These types of community interventions that utilize veterans as leaders can be a cost-effective alternative for providing leadership training and mental health support to other veterans and first responders in Kansas communities. Next steps for this project include additional research and expansion of services for first responders and veterans.