

State Troopers Helping State Troopers

By any measure, the first ever Coordinator of the Department of Public Safety **State Troopers Offering Peer Support Program (STOPS)**, which commenced on October 1, 2007, is a formidable presence. Physically imposing, he has a garrulous personality somewhat on the scale of Mt. Rushmore. Larger still is his passion to do "the right thing" by his fellow troopers through his new position. Meet Sgt. Troy Anderson:

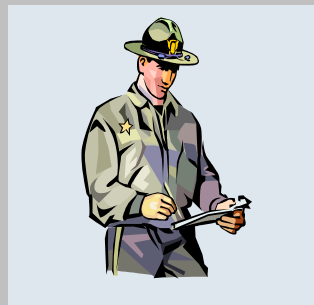
"You know, our troopers are well trained to serve and protect the public. I don't know how many people appreciate though, what it's like to respond to multiple roadside fatalities, homicides, horrific crimes against women and children and bad guys with guns on an almost routine basis. We learn to compartmentalize and then go home and kiss our loved ones. Sometimes it's hard though. We're professionals but sometimes you don't have an option—it's hard."



Exposure to Trauma is Inherent in Police Work

- ▶ One third of police officers exposed to work related traumatic incidents develop significant PTSD symptoms
- ▶ Research finds that 20% of front-line officers meet criteria for alcohol abuse
- ▶ Police suicide rate is 1.5 times that of the general population
- ▶ Police families experience significantly higher rates of domestic violence than civilian families

SOURCE: Am J Psychiatry 163:1, January 2006



Legislation Establishes STOPS

In recognition of the occupational hazards and attendant needs of State Police officers, the Connecticut General Assembly enacted legislation directing the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to establish a pilot program of peer counseling (officer helping fellow-officer) in the Dept of Public Safety Division of State Police.

For the past year, DMHAS has collaborated with representatives from the Department of Public Safety executive, union administrators, and rank and file troopers to design the **STOPS** peer initiative. **STOPS** currently features a cadre of 40 State Trooper volunteers who are trained to provide their colleagues with emotional and tangible support through periods of personal or professional anguish. The number of trained volunteers will increase to as many as 75 with additional training classes to be held in the future. **STOPS** services are an augmentation to the Department of Public Safety Employment Assistance Program, not a replacement.

Program Coordinator Sgt. Anderson is charged with managing peer operations and cultivating an environment where voluntarily seeking help is seen by Department of Public Safety personnel as a sign of strength rather than as a weakness. *"Look, our road troopers, as soldiers of the law, are heroic but not invincible. We are expected to function, no matter what, and there is the pervasive aversion to what may be perceived as weakness or failure to take care of business. There is real fear of stigmatization and negative job consequences such as a modified assignment to desk duty."*

In order to promote a personal sense of security among troopers in need, the **STOPS** training regimen inculcates peer volunteers with the imperative that interactions with colleagues are strictly confidential. The only exceptions are for mandated reporting and disclosure to manage imminent risk required under law.

DMHAS is proud to have worked with the most venerable State Police force in the nation to implement **STOPS**. It is the Department's hope that the experience gained from this program will be used to replicate future programs within our municipal police departments throughout the state.