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Compassionate Care – Best Practices Guide

When there is a critical incident and something major or traumatic happens, those behind the headset should be incorporated into the healing process. A Compassionate Care Program focuses on showing support to Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs) following times of crisis. This program can be used as a distraction to move past the negative feelings of helplessness that often follow traumatic events/calls.

Emergency Communication Centers handle critical and traumatic events every day. What happens when those that are trained to respond to these events are affected? They are often “forgotten” and left to grieve and heal on their own.

A Compassionate Care Program is designed to show support to the Emergency Communication Center following a time of crisis. This little ray of sunshine is meant to bring small snacks, gifts and other items to help your team move past the negative and helpless feelings that they may be experiencing, and let them know that they are not alone.

Define Your Program

Audience – Your Chapter

- Provide information on your chapter and how you want your area divided.
- List the coordinator(s), other points of contact, and where boxes are to be stored until needed. Some chapters created a new chapter board position for the main coordinator for the program.
- Create a name for your program. Some examples include Membership Support, Outreach Committee, Basket of Cheer, Sunshine Fund, and Totes of Hope.

Peer Support, CIT, and Mental Health Professionals

- It is important to remember that a Compassionate Care Team is not a substitute for mental health professionals, peer support, CISM, or CIT. It provides a positive and work-appropriate distraction for those who may need it.
- Consider adding information that includes any chapter-wide resources for peer support and mental health. Ensure that the receiving agency has access to local support or try to setup other resources that would be willing to reach out in a time of need.

Qualifying Events

- Define your qualifying events based on your area and what would make sense from a quantity perspective. Are these qualifying events rigid or flexible?
- Qualifying events can include but are not limited to Line of Duty Death (LODD), natural disasters, tragic/critical incident, Officer Involved Shooting (OIS), unexpected death of fire responder/coworker, serious injury to responder while on duty, or a mass shooting/mass casualty event.
- Work with your Chapter to determine what items should be sent to specific incident types. For example, this could include a full Compassionate Care box (contents of which would be determined by your chapter), a meal, a card, flowers, or gift cards.
- Are there any news events that would initiate an automatic send?

Price Point/Size of Gift(s)

- Do the guidelines for expenditures differ depending on the type of qualifying event?
- Consider creating one size or a couple defined sizes, based on the size of recipient centers within your chapter.

Contents of Care Package

- Cards should include words of encouragement with the intention of sharing a feeling of support. Some ECCs send or include two separate cards: (1) for the manager/director/administration and (1) for center staff.
- Books with a positive theme or message.
- Candy, snacks, and other individually wrapped non-perishable items.
- Toys that are work appropriate and silent. These can include fidget toys, adult coloring books, stress balls, puzzle books, etc.
- Personal care items such as tissues, over-the-counter pain relief, tums, etc.
- Challenge Coins from the sending agency or a collection of participating ECCs within the chapter.

It is suggested to provide a mix of the items above, as everyone reacts differently and may feel supported by the receipt of different items. This does not need to be cost prohibitive, and many things can be found at a local dollar store, or gathered as “extras” from vendors at conferences. It is important to note that an explanation should be provided to the vendor for what the procured items will be used for, and an appropriate recognition should be made for the vendor(s) for donating to/sponsoring the program. This could be as simple as a social media thank you for any donations received.

When and How to Deploy

- Deployable totes should be stationed at predetermined locations and in a “ready” state. It is beneficial to divide the chapter up into reasonable travel distances and assign totes to specific ECCs. Stage a minimum of one tote in an area and one tote that acts as a float.
- Include information within the tote with options to pay it forward and provide refill items, or how to return the tote when empty.
- Determine if you will have automatic deployments or confirmed deployments, or a combination:
 - Automatic = Deployed on each event
 - Confirmed = Only deployed after confirming need/want with recipient center
 - Combination = Some defined events are automatic and others are confirmed

Funding

Work with your chapter to determine a price point for each deployable tote, and try to keep this as equal as possible for all involved. Eg: Large tote = \$50, Medium tote = \$30, and Small tote = \$15. Try to determine the size of the department(s) that are in your area. For example, a large tote could accommodate 50+ staff members, a medium tote could accommodate 30-50 staff members, and a small tote could accommodate centers with less than 30 staff members.

How to fund the initial fill of totes?

- Create a budgeted line item
- Donations from chapter members and local businesses (Kiwanis, Junior League, Goodwill, etc)

- If your chapter is a designated 501(c)(3), consider reaching out to local Lions Clubs, American Legions and VFW Clubs.
- Receiving center can pay it forward by restocking with items or gift cards for future purchases
- Chapter can give a small financial start up donation
- Partially fund through chapter membership dues
- Apply for Grants
 - Seek out telecommunicator or public safety grants
 - Look into grants such as the Joseph Burn grant
 - Companies transporting gas (gas lines) typically have public safety grants or resources available
- Approach vendors at shows for leftover give-a-ways to be included (stress balls, etc.)

Distribution / Deployment Process

The distribution and deployment process will rely heavily on the decisions made by the chapter board and the overall structure of the program.

Awareness

Someone makes the board aware through a regional coordinator or similar position, word of mouth, or direct request from agency.

Confirmation

Designated contact reaches out and confirms event, establishes if a tote is appropriate and/or wanted, or if there is a separate need by the impacted agency.

Preparation

Designated regional coordinator confirms tote is prepared and ready for deployment.

Deployment

Regional coordinator drops off tote to impacted agency. Movement and deployment of the tote should be tracked in a travel log or similar document, accessible by other region coordinators and the board.

Collection/Re-stocking

Regional coordinator picks up tote approximately two weeks later. Tote should be reused whenever possible to avoid additional funding needs, and restocked with any necessary items to return it to a ready state.

Staffing

The chapter should define where and how the program would be managed. This can include within:

- Chapter ProChrt Committee
- Regional Ambassadors/Coordinators
- Have a member of the board oversee

It is important that the board establish “job descriptions” outlining the expectations of the program and the responsibility and authority of those appointed to positions under the program.

If You Are A Recipient of A Tote

If your agency is on the receiving end of a tote, it is suggested to send a thank you note of appreciation or some other response to your local program. As a recipient, you see first-hand the value of the program and the impact that it has on your agency.

How to Get Started

We suggest you contact a group/chapter nearby that is already undertaking a similar program and review ideas to help get started. Check the Resources section below for some starting points, including a Compassionate Care Best Practices webinar with presenters from states that have very active and well-developed programs.

Resources

[Totes of Hope – MOAPCO – Missouri Chapter of APCO](http://moapco.org/totes/) (<http://moapco.org/totes/>)

[PSC Magazine \(PSCS\) - March/April 2021 - Totes of Hope — Sharing Love and Support \(pscmagazine-digital.com\)](https://www.pscmagazine-digital.com) (https://www.pscmagazine-digital.com/pscs/0221_march_april_2021/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=1659122#articleId1659122)

[APCO Member & Chapter Services Fall 2021 Compassionate Care Best Practices Webinar Recording](https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/6260641618171017231) (<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/6260641618171017231>)

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