

Empathy and Resilience to Address Officer Health and Performance

Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello everyone, and welcome to *The Beat*. I'm your host, Jennifer Donelan. Today, we're speaking with Jared Seide and Rich Goerling from the Center for Council. The Center is an organization that delivers programs and trainings that promote communication, enhance well-being, build community, and foster compassion. They have developed and administered two programs that are law enforcement-focused and help officers better absorb and dissipate the inherent stress related to a career in policing and help increase mutual understanding and respect between law enforcement and communities. Jared and Rich, welcome to *The Beat*.

Jared Seide

00:53

Thanks, Jen. It's great to be here.

Rich Goerling

00:54

Yeah. Thank you, Jen. Good to be here.

Donelan

00:56

I'm really excited to have you and I can't wait to dig in. So what I want to do first for our listeners is introduce both of you and I'm going to have you do that yourselves, if you don't mind. I'm going to begin with Jared. Can you tell people about yourself and the Center for Council?

Seide

01:09

Sure can. So my name is Jared Seide. I'm the Executive Director of Center for Council. This is a non-profit that's based in Los Angeles and has programs throughout California, throughout the country, and actually internationally now as well. The programs really do the work that you have described, Jen, I appreciate it, in promoting communication and well-being, and building community, et cetera, and really focus on how it is we can embody compassion. And I am excited to talk about that because I think it's often misunderstood what compassion really looks like. It's not about hugging everybody and it's not soft. It's something that I think is required for living in a complex world. Council is a practice that we

have built all of our programs around and it is really what animates our work. We'll talk more about what that looks like and how it really is a kind of an expression of mindfulness, of paying attention, of coming together, and figuring out the kind of folks we want to be both in terms of being able to maintain our own health and wellness, but also the relationships that are important to us in our lives and at work, and to contribute to society in a good way to really be out there caring for folks in the work we do and resourcing ourselves so that we can sustain ourselves through our week, through our career, and through our lives.

Donelan

02:19

And this is such a timely topic. It's a hot-button topic. You've got a lot of people asking questions: How do we improve? How do we change? How do we build? And a lot of what you're talking about—I didn't miss the fact that you said it's not soft, I can understand there that you are trying to make sure that your folks like don't tune us out—that this is actual applicable programs and practices that we can apply to sort of really directly attack some of which has been brought up, a lot of which has been brought up, as points of concern by the community. But it's not just about community relations. This is about the law enforcement officers themselves. So let me now move to Rich Goerling. Rich, tell me about yourself, and how you're connected to Jared and the Center for Council.

Goerling

03:01

Thank you, Jen. Yeah, Jared first and foremost is a friend and he's a collaborative partner. My work is in training mindfulness skills to police officers primarily. I also train firefighters and medics and military veterans. I'm a retired police Lieutenant. I spent 24 years in civilian law enforcement. I had a parallel career in the U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve—27 years there. And I don't know, about 15 years ago, I started looking at occupational trauma and its impact on our humanity and human performance. And that led me to this thing called mindfulness. And it led me to a lot of science around mindfulness and, you know, kind of fast forward to today I'm faculty on two different universities, Pacific University here in Oregon at our Mindful Health and Resilience Lab, and Portland State University, where we conduct research on mindfulness and policing.

And Jared speaks to this idea that compassion isn't soft and it really parallels this philosophy that we have at the organization I run called Mindful Badge, that compassion is fierce and it's kind and it holds boundaries. And it's a critical ingredient to not only the health of the police officer, to the humanity of the police officer, but to the human performance in the field. And so the one thing that I recognized early on in my career was that there's a need for change in policing in America. And you all can't see me, but I'm a White male and I spent my career in policing, obviously, as a White male. And just recognizing how maladapting to occupational trauma erodes skills like compassion—and it is a skill. It's not a choice, nor is it a policy. We really need to learn: How do we train this skill of compassion? And that's what Jared and I are doing together.

Donelan

04:50

I think compassion, too, it's one of those things where not only is it not soft, it requires great strength especially in the face of perhaps others around you who may be pressuring you, or you don't want to appear a certain way. And these are, you know, mindfulness, compassion, resilience—these are the buzz words. They're not going away and they're not buzzwords; they're practices, and law enforcement agencies across the United States are engaging and embracing these as we move forward. So this may be a beginning of a conversation, but it's one that's not going away so I love that we're going to be talking about this.

Now, I want to talk about the law enforcement programs that are run by the Council, and I want to talk about two in particular. I want to start with POWER and I'll give a little bit of an overview as I understand it. And please, Jared, I'll move to you and have you sort of flesh this out. The POWER program was highlighted at this year's International Association of Chiefs of Police Officer Wellness Symposium in a presentation that was entitled "Mindfulness and Resiliency Meets Community Engagement: Empathy, Awareness, and Procedural Justice," led by both Jared and Rich, our guests.

In 2018, the program was piloted with officers from the Federal Bureau of Prisons followed by several cohorts from the Los Angeles Police Department. POWER is now certified by the California Commission on Police Officer Standards and Training and provides professional credit to police and correctional officers throughout California. Let's get down to it. Jared, what is POWER? What is the POWER program?

Seide

06:14

So it's an acronym that stands for "Peace Officer Wellness, Empathy, and Resilience." It really is a sustainable approach to shifting culture, to creating a culture of wellness for individuals who are suffering at really intolerable levels. And Rich can talk a little bit more about what we understand about not just occupational stress, but you know, what it is we sign up for when we joined the force, what we can expect to find as far as how the job takes its toll on us. POWER presents an awareness of ourselves in terms of our body and mind and emotions and relationships. We'll go into that, hopefully in more detail, because I think how we cultivate that self-awareness is real important, but also our capacity to regulate our stress and dysregulation and really effective management of our reactivity.

It develops this through a great deal of science-based, evidence-based work that is offered in both sort of the pedagogy, but also in very interactive exercises. It's offered one-on-one and it is sustained through the course of six months. So this is a pretty deep dive into bringing this work into the lives of the agencies and the individuals, and really leans on this practice of council, which we call huddles where folks huddle up with each other without a sort of an expert or an outsider. Unpack some of the work that we're doing over the course of these six months together in small groups over 30, 45 minutes together, maybe five or six officers working together.

This kind of peer-to-peer work becomes sort of an undergirding for how we take the things we understand better and really implement them in our lives both on and off watch, and understand how these are really affecting us on a day-to-day basis in terms of our health and wellness. I think it understands that these issues need to be addressed upstream. We can look at issues like excessive use of force and officer-involved shootings, and we can hear politicians and lawmakers talking about this, but I think that's a real downstream effect of something that really points to a lack of good training and resources upstream, where we train.

And so training folks to have better self-awareness, capacity for self-regulation, and an understanding, helps us regulate our nervous system. It helps us develop more wholesome and skillful relationships on the job and at home and work that work-life balance and then resources us to meet the community in a good way. We can't be held accountable for being skillful with compassion in the community if we haven't figured out how to take care of ourselves and how to really cultivate the relationships we want to see in our lives and at home.

So, bottom line: I think that the program improves health and wellness. It provides tools for managing stress and dysregulation for mitigating the excessive use of force and our sort of maladaptive approaches to ways we handle the stress that arises in critical incidents. And it fosters more positive police community relations, which is so critical, but is really something that we can apply once we've learned these skills and develop these resources.

Donelan

09:12

Now I may be oversimplifying this, Jared, but it's basically getting our officers into a better place so they can be in a better place in dealing with the community, but really getting down to it, right? This is a career which, historically, you don't talk about your feelings and that was sort of looked down upon and you were hesitant to raise your hand and say, "Hey, you know what, I'm stressing out. My family life is taking a hit. I'm personally taking a hit, and it's kind of spilling over into my dealings with residents in the streets." And this is trying to really attack that, and that's what I'm asking you. Am I gathering that correctly?

Seide

09:45

Absolutely. I think you're right on it, Jen. And I think that the important thing to understand about mindfulness and compassion is it's really about paying attention and then deciding to do something. I think it's all right to sort of take another stab at understanding compassion. Compassion is not sympathy. Compassion is not even empathy. Compassion is feeling genuine concern about the suffering of others and having a desire to do something about it, attending to the suffering that we see around us when folks are in distress. And it also includes an awareness of our own suffering and attention to those things that are eating away at us. That's part of compassion as well.

So it means developing selfcare skills to self-regulate and sustain ourselves throughout our career and be healthy so that we can exercise insight and our sort of ethical core and stay balanced. But we need to resource ourselves to stay grounded in this and to really be able to listen to what's around us, what's coming up in the folks we serve, but also in our agencies, and in our own physiology that requires a capacity to listen better, listen more deeply. Listening is at the core of everything we do to pay attention. And I don't mean listening like sounds we hear with our ears; I mean paying attention to our bodies and our emotions and our minds, our mental state, as well as our relationships.

And I think these really define us and we often neglect to pay enough attention or to attune well to that. And these are things that really do require our attention. We have to listen to the conditions of others around us in the community. And, frankly, we have to listen to the planet. We have to listen to the world we're living in. We have to develop this capacity to listen deeply in order to embody this compassion in the world and also to lead a healthy and a satisfying life and to do our jobs well and to make the world a better place.

Donelan

11:28

Absolutely. I love that. Rich, you come from a law enforcement background and for someone who's at home listening to this, who's maybe got 10 years on... Sounds nice, but really can I really, can we make this real-world? You talked about the six months in the groups and so what is the real-world application? How is this working? Give us a bird's-eye view of the program itself.

Goerling

11:53

Well, Jen, if I could maybe step back before we dive into the strategic lens of the program and let's talk about trauma for a moment. What we have failed at as an institution in policing is to really bring the contemporary science around trauma and human performance together. And I've just created a lot of tension out there in the audience, probably, but we failed. We have failed to address occupational trauma and the ways we have addressed it are clearly not working well. And so we have an epidemic of human suffering behind the badge, and I don't mean that like, "Oh, we should put on kid gloves and change our voice to some sing-song voice and talk softly." No. I think we need to be gritty and practical and tactical around our understanding of trauma. You said earlier that we don't like to talk about our feelings.

I think that that's commonly how we think about getting real is: "Oh, we're going to hold hands and sing songs and talk about our feelings." No. What we are going to do, however, is understand the latest body of neuroscience informs us that emotion is a neurophysiological response to the world around us, and it is not an optional phenomenon. And so what we want to do is when we use these skills of mindfulness to train police officers, to notice emotion, to notice other things that we think are emotion that actually are not, to be attuned to the physical body, attuned to the thinking mind, and attuned to the emotional climate that we have as a human being, and to regulate it skillfully.

So rather than try to avoid stress and trauma, I want to teach police officers how to get good at it, how to step into the middle of human suffering—both their own and others—and perform their tradecraft exceptionally and come back from the crisis, and then take informed actions towards the kinds of interventions that are necessary to move into healing and recovery and set conditions for post-traumatic growth, which is something we're not talking about. And shame on us for not talking about the possibility of becoming stronger through all of this.

And so our culture is built around a fixed mindset, around occupational stress and trauma injury, and it's not working. And what I tell police officers day one in our training with the POWER program is you will be trauma injured over the course of your career. This is what the data tell us. And it's also what the lived experience tell us, right? So we have science and wisdom informing us that, "Oh yeah, this job is a trauma profession and I'm going to bear witness to human suffering and bring those skills of compassion," right?

As Jared described that, I see that there's suffering happening and I have a desire to act. And it requires us to cultivate skills to be able to do that, right, to resource ourselves to be able to step into those spaces where there is suffering and do the work that we signed up to do. And that means getting real. That means recognizing when we're experiencing stress injury, trauma injury, occupational injury, however you want to frame it. I use stress and trauma interchangeably because they're effectively on this range of the same phenomenon. So this is about teaching police officers how to be attuned to what's a normal part of the human experience, and then how to do something about it rather than how to move into this experiential avoidance, which is a very common thing so that we want to avoid discomfort. We want to move away from it.

So that's why we see maladaptive behaviors such as alcohol misuse and risky sexual practices and violence and other kinds of things that get in our way of being pro-social and create cognitive failures on the job as well as in our social lives. So we have a lot of work to do to cultivate these skills. And just simply the act of cultivating these skills we are pushing culture a different direction because the current culture says, "I don't want to talk about this. I'm so strong. If I were really a strong warrior, I wouldn't be injured." No. If you're really a strong warrior, you'll be aware that injury is there and you'll do something with it because that's the real world.

So we're shifting the relationship of the police officer to trauma. We are creating trauma competency. We're going well beyond knowledge, academic-based trauma informed to a trauma competency. We're getting good at stress and trauma.

Seide

16:10

I just love everything that this insight that Rich has been able to articulate so well into this very specific culture. I think there are some things that we fall into in the pursuit of noble causes. We can talk about altruism and integrity and empathy and respect and engagement. These are something that this wonderful scholar on compassion, Joan Halifax, talks about as Edge States, but there's such a thing as

pathological altruism, where we hurt ourselves in the process trying to take care of somebody and ultimately that doesn't help anybody. There's empathic distress. There's moral suffering. There's a lot to parse in doing our jobs well, trying to do the right thing.

And we fall into traps when we're not well-resourced in pursuing those things that seem so clear. There is a lot more complexity in there. And I think it's important to take a moment and just understand mindfulness is paying attention. That's what it is. If you want to go a little bit further, the working definition of mindfulness is paying attention on purpose to the present moment without judgment. That's a definition from Jon Kabat-Zinn, molecular biologist and the father of MBSR, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. I think another way to think about this is it's the ability to really listen, to pay attention to what's around us, and to what's coming up inside us.

And when you think about communication, I think you have to think about how we listen to our bodies, to stress and fatigue and the sensations our bodies feel, to sleep we're getting or not getting, especially on shift work that doesn't allow for proper sleep and navigating circadian rhythms, to nutrition. We have a gut biome that feels poisoned when we pour a lot of processed food in there and white sugar. And that sends us a stress signal from our guts up. Our mental state is constantly affected by attitudes in our inner critic and the bias that we all carry, biases we've learned and biases that are hardwired in and unchangeable.

And as Rich says, our emotional lives—the anger and joy and care and trauma—drives a lot of our behavior. And sometimes we're not aware of that and it's important to pay attention. And, finally, I think our relationships are critical and we often don't spend time cultivating really wholesome, positive relationships with good communication, both in terms of people we work with on the job and our families at home and even the communities. I think it's really important that we understand as an ecosystem, and there's a lot of awareness to bring to all of these levels.

And this POWER program really gives us the time to talk about the physical and the mental and the emotional in what we call the social, you know, the way we show up in the world, because it's all connected. It's all connected in terms of our capacity to function, but also in terms of what we call procedural justice in the world. And those factors that really cultivate positive relationships between police and community are really predicated on skillfulness around all of this.

Donelan

18:51

Thank you, Jared. I'm glad that you explained mindfulness because that was going to be my next question, just to sort of like, let's start with the ground zero definition of mindfulness. Personally, I've been through a situation, a highly stressful... It ended with me having suffering a cardiac event. And I went into counseling and mindfulness is what was immediately presented to me. And there are exercises to this day that I still practice when I feel myself getting stressed, or I feel myself recalling that traumatic event and getting fearful.

And it's literally breathing and paying attention to what is around me and paying attention to the sounds I hear and paying attention to literally what I feel. And at the time I remember feeling like, "Really? Is this what's going to do it for me?" And here we are 10 years later and I'm still practicing. I still whip these tools out when I feel myself becoming overwhelmed or stressed out and they actually work. So let's move into sort of what you're doing with these officers through the POWER program that are giving them these tools to actually practice mindfulness and resiliency and how you actually apply it.

Seide

20:01

I mentioned Joan Halifax. She's studied this in great depth and she says, "compassion is not teachable, but compassion is made up of non-compassionate elements that are trainable." And that's why we train in attention and self-regulation and listening well, ways to cultivate better communication and relationality. These are all things we can train in, and there's a variety of ways we can approach this that are science-based. We know enough about the autonomic nervous system to understand that we have a very basic fight-flight freeze, sympathetic overdrive response to stress.

And the stress, as I mentioned, can be, you know, an immediate exigent situation where we're stressed because there's screaming and yelling and lots of chaos, but it also can be the meal we ate or the lack of sleep. There are a lot of ways our body experiences stress and goes into this sympathetic tone that creates a reaction in our body that actually is hurting us. It can lead to a catastrophic event and thank goodness you were able to get the intervention you needed when that event happened to you.

But there are a lot of folks who aren't as lucky, but in the course of experiencing inflammation, which is the condition that's so dispositive, excessive amounts of stress, there are all kinds of things we're doing to our bodies when, to use Rich's expression, we have maladaptive responses to this stress. I think we can teach ways to whether it's a breathing exercise or whether it's taking a walk, whether it's better nutrition or whether it's understanding sleep and how to get to sleep. There are ways we can intervene and bring on the parasympathetic nervous system that creates a kind of cyclicity in our autonomic nervous system that is more healthy. Without that cyclicity, with a constant over-aroused sympathetic state, we are killing ourselves.

We are literally killing ourselves and the way in which we are hurting ourselves is evident in catastrophic ways, as well as just stress-related illness that is chronic over time and leads to a mortality rate and age that is just extraordinary as we understand law enforcement is creating folks who are dying 10—by some estimates 20—years earlier than average population. There's some horrible things we're doing to ourselves because we're not regulating our stress well. And what we're teaching are ways to intervene, to recognize what's happening and to come up with a plan and come up with practices.

And so the exposure in the training we do is based on science at first, but it really is based on experience. And every week officers who participate receive assignments that involve exercises to do, activities to be involved with, things to consider and contemplate, and maybe even journal on or write about, and then to really kind of get into in a conversation with your peers. So you've got every week, 45 minutes to show up and talk about conversations you had or stress you experienced or ways you, you

know, kind of thought about the food you're eating that week, in a very directed way that moves through all of these spheres of awareness and relies on the collective wisdom of your peers at work, as opposed to an expert or someone from the outside.

And over six months of deep consideration of this, I think we create different kinds of habits that lead us to a more healthy way to approach our wellness, to optimize the performance, the way we do our work, and also to be ambassadors of this kind of capacity for compassion as we meet the communities, all of these things are downstream of doing this work. And I think the curriculum in the presentation of the program is something that has a really important and positive impact on a lot of different levels.

Donelan

23:18

So, real world application: How has this been received? I mentioned earlier that you had the pilot program in California. How has this been received? Real world, you know. I can see executive staff, command staff, or anyone quite frankly, looking at their schedule and saying, "How am I going to fit this in?" But despite the fact that it's unbelievably important, how's it been received, and is it doable? And those listening say, "You know what, it's that important. We'll figure out a way to get this fit in."

Seide

23:45

Yeah, I think that's the case. And I want to sort of defer to Rich in terms of agency culture, but I'll just say that the imperative is there. Here in California, we have legislators that created a grant program that enabled us to develop this—not only with Bureau of Prisons, but then with the Los Angeles Police Department, which is a pretty sizable agency. I think starting small with cohorts, seeing the impact it has on the units that are participating in this program has convinced command staff that this needs to be really scaled up.

So within an agency, we take one step at a time as we go through the first six months. We understand that there are certainly anecdotal evidence and data points regarding how folks are sleeping better and how they're experiencing their own wellness, but we're also measuring along validated scales, academic scales, pre, mid, and post to really see the changes happening. I think in a lot of the reporting you have officers who say, "Well, I don't know that this is working. I mean, my wife says I'm a nicer person and I am sleeping better and my kids want to hang out with me and I'm feeling a lot more energy and I have a better attitude, but I'm not sure this is really working."

And it's like, well, okay, so fine. I think we can understand something that's going on that's different, and that's what's important. And I think it's consistent enough to see the impact, and you're right. It's a big commitment to talk about, say 25 officers moving through six months of training. But I think when you activate folks, when you see the really extraordinary difference in their disposition, when you see the lights go on and this awareness increase and their own self-reporting, you begin to realize this is invaluable and it is necessary before there's another reported suicide, before there's another person who's engaged in a maladaptive behavior that leads to all kinds of repercussions, not only in their

health, but in their lives. We must be moving in this direction. It is well overdue and it works. So it's a question kind of of economics, but I want to sort of throw to Rich at this point, because I think you have a lot more insight and visibility on the direct impact it has on agency culture and individuals.

Goerling

25:38

Yeah. I mean, I can speak to the individual a fair amount because I've trained hundreds of first responders, hundreds of police officers over the last 10 years in mindfulness skills and they talk to me. Not only do they talk to me, but we also have data. So some of that data I'll just share with you. This is from Pacific University here in Oregon. We know that after eight weeks of skill building and mindfulness, that we see consistent results like reductions in anger and aggression, improvements in compassion and empathy, less alcohol use, less reactivity, less what we call experiential avoidance, which means we're more likely to step into difficult conversations or difficult reflections around self as opposed to moving away from those.

And we also see reductions in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and that comes from a study at University of Wisconsin in Madison. And we're seeing a greater regulation of the stress neurochemical cortisol, and that's a significant factor in the inflammation of the body, which is probably the underlying factor—inflammation—in a lot of diseases that we're seeing show up in law enforcement that are chronic. And John Violanti out of Buffalo, New York has done research on this. His team published a study a little over a year ago that looked at duty-related illness deaths from things like cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer, and it's an alarming increase over the last 22 years based on his team's research and paying attention to those things is critically important.

So we have sort of the data from research that says this is impactful. I think the qualitative data, the anecdotal data from police officers, is that mindfulness skills training when it's embodied is transformational. I mean, I've seen it transform relationships with partners, spouses, children, and really it resources police officers to show up, to come back to the foundation of that warrior ethos, but it adds this humanitarian component to it that is sustainable, and it allows them to show up in their community in new ways with all of the skills of their tradecraft. So they're not giving up anything.

They're actually getting more skillful with what they have and they're able to hold humanity, or they're able to bring a deeper embodied level of compassion to the work that they do, even when they might have to use force in a situation. And I think that what we're able to do with mindfulness training—this is sort of my hypothesis because we can't measure this just yet, we're working on it—but I think we're going to see reductions in the awful but lawful force response that we see really in every agency. Right? And again, that's one of those, you know, you just set on fire statement, but it's the real world. We need to have real conversation about teaching police officers to self-regulate, to regulate the normal human phenomenon.

So I believe very strongly that dysregulated anger and dysregulated fear and dysregulated ego are the three primary forces that create organizational toxicity and that create cognitive failures in the field when it comes to not just force response, but just how we interact with the community members. And

notice I said dysregulated because anger and fear and ego are critical components of the human experience, and we just simply need to regulate them because we need them, but we get reactive. We get dysregulated, and that state of dysregulation creates harm. It's that classic hurt people hurt people. We know this intuitively, right?

Anybody knows that. The science is telling us that. And the science is also telling us that skill-building and mindfulness, or said differently: Skill-building and attention and compassion is a game changer. It is also a disruptor to police culture as we know it today, which means that there's a bit of a convincing. There's a bit of engagement we have to make with police leaders to convince them that this is the direction to go. And it's much less of a challenge today as it was 10 years ago or even longer when I first started those conversations with police leaders, who, frankly, in many cases just summarily dismissed me for being somebody who wants to levitate.

Donelan

29:56

That's like kumbaya. Yeah.

Goerling

29:56

You're right. Now—

Donelan

29:56

But I'll tell you what, you're absolutely right. We are in such a different place than we once were. I'm listening to you and I'm smiling because you're explaining it so beautifully. And I want to say to someone, "Hey, this means check yourself before you wreck yourself. Get it?" Like, that's basically what this is, but it's doing so... It's giving people the tools and the permission to do so and it's making them better human beings. It's making them better police officers. It's making them better spouses. It's giving them outlets. What is the translation on the streets? You talked about that, but I want to dig a little more into that because of community-police relations and investment like this both time and perhaps financial, the commitment of it, spells what in the end for the community, in terms of those officers that will be out there answering those calls for service?

Someone who's gone through a program like this, someone who is being mindful, someone who is compassionate has been taught and given a permission to be compassionate, who's got less cortisol, less of that inflammatory situation both mentally and physically, you know—what does that spell for the community?

Seide

31:02

I'm really glad you asked that question. This is not a police problem. This is not an activist problem. This is a human problem, and it's something we all have to get on the same page with on some level. And I'm going to further set fire to this podcast, perhaps, by talking about this, but I think it's important to. The work that we did really began with an understanding of the need for social and emotional learning skills in schools.

We started this in education a couple of decades ago, and it migrated over to work with incarcerated populations. We were working in prisons a great deal, understanding that criminogenic factors that we understand to lead the criminal behavior—lack of empathy, lack of impulse control, antisocial attitudes, antisocial friends, and behavior—really are affected by bringing online these skills and resources and putting people in these Council huddles, where they can recognize their shared humanity.

What we saw happen on prison yards—and we're in 27 different prisons now in California—as a result of the extraordinary impact it's had on culture, on the yard, not only in terms of violence and infractions on these prison yards, but in terms of grants of parole. And folks who are incarcerated, who go through a very similar program and wind up kind of entering the next chapter of their lives in community in a very different place. You know, that really was where this POWER program was born, frankly.

Donelan

32:16

Is that the Circle Up program? Is that the one I mentioned at the beginning through the Cops and Communities?

Seide

32:21

So the program is called the Prison Council Initiative, and what it does is it brings a very similar kind of methodology to groups of inmates, cohorts of 25, who go through six months in the same kind of way. And in this case, they're often coming at this program from a lot of different places, different ethnicities and gang affiliations and such, and they learn this work together and they come out of it affecting the culture of the prison and actually entering into society. Virtually everybody that we've worked with in the initial cohorts that have gone to their parole board have gotten grants. And it's really an amazing thing to see them come out into the community.

We, as an organization, we train folks not just in prisons and in schools, but healthcare professionals, first responders, folks in business. In every instance, the situation is different. The culture is different. We talk about different things, but the skillsets are the same. And I think there is a point where we have to understand that it's a lot easier to work with folks with whom we are familiar. We've built some comfort. We understand like-minded, like-hearted groups kind of like they say "lowering the affective filter" when they teach ESL. We have to get comfortable.

You can't have LAPD and Black Lives Matter all enter a room with placards and screaming and yelling and expect you're going to have a productive day. We need to really build these skills separately. But soon enough, we begin to recognize who is not in the circle, who we don't even want to be in the circle with us, who we're not ready to sit with, some understanding of the other. We actually set a chair for those folks. And for one reason or another, they're not here with us, but we realized that we may have something to say to them, whether it's the community or officers or incarcerated folks, we may have something to say to them. And they may have something to say to us, we're not ready to sit with them, but we're ready to start thinking about it. And after a minute, we have an interest in calling them in. And I think that's the point at which we realize we are resourced enough and skillful enough to go beyond our like groups and start to merge and blend. We've had a sort of parallel play environment where folks are learning these skills separately, but when we merged them, some extraordinary things happen.

And I think when we look at a concept like procedural justice, going by the DOJ definition, that it's about fairness and transparency and community voices being heard and impartiality. We understand that these are skills we are training in, essentially, how to give folks the feeling they are being listened to and that somebody cares. We all need that. And there is a skillfulness around this that enables us to meet each other in a way that feels productive. We don't have to hang out. We don't have to have the same hobbies or vote for the same politicians—

Donelan

32:21

Right.

Seide

34:49

But we have to get along. We have to recognize that we all need to live in a fair and just world and we all need resources. And if that doesn't happen, there's going to be conflict. And I think that's kind of at the root of this very lofty concept of beloved community. We don't have to agree all the time, but we have to get along on some level and have the big picture of the whole human family and our kids, frankly. Our grandkids will be growing up in a world in which they're going to be connected to the kids and the grandkids of those we think to be our adversaries, as well as our friends.

We owe it to them to figure out a way to get along and to cultivate positive relationships. I think it has an enormous impact. I think it begins with learning the skills to take care of ourselves, to sustain our health and to do well at our jobs. But we understand we can use those in creating a better world.

Donelan

35:32

And you're right. It can't be pie in the sky.

Seide

35:35

Right.

Donelan

35:35

This is real.

Seide

35:35

Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

Donelan

35:35

This is our world. This is our lives. It's going to be something that happens for us, but we have the future. Our children have to grow up in this world. And if we're not talking to one another, and if we're not listening to one another, we're not going to get anywhere. So I love that. It creates those safe spaces for you to build these skills in order to create those atmospheres and environments where these discussions can take place. And that we actually hear one another so that we can proceed forward together. Because I can tell you this: You're right, the state of affairs as it stands now, we can't have police officers dying as young as they are from the stress in their lives.

Obviously the status quo is on the table at this point in terms of how we behave with one another as a society. And something's got to give, right? And this surely seems like a path forward to that. I want to make sure that I don't leave you two hanging on anything that you might want to talk about that I haven't touched on. Rich?

Goerling

36:32

Yeah, Jen. I would want to say too, you asked how does this translate to the streets and the community? Let me frame it this way: So as a police officer with mindfulness skills training that I've embodied, I'm more compassionate. I am more regulated and I'm more open to possibilities. So that means that embodied in my cognitive paradigm, there is a curiosity that asks what else could be true. And there's an awareness of my emerging judgments and bias, and I'm more skillfully equipped to work with those things. And this all enhances my ability to take in information.

It enhances my ability to make sense of that information and my ability to make decisions in that moment. And this is the outcome of a lot of hard work. And the thing that's different about this training and other mindfulness training models is that this really is hard work. This is bad-ass warrior skills training, unlike anything that we've introduced in policing probably in the last three decades, maybe longer, because it requires us to confront ourselves. And that is a very difficult confrontation to make. And so we facilitate that and there's also other interventions that can facilitate that with integrated medical care and the psychotherapy and social connection and other things.

We talk about those things as well, but this is hard skills training and it's not a check-the-box kind of training like so many other trainings are. And the other thing I would say is that this is where we began. Mindfulness, Council, is where we began to really actually embed other principles of social justice within

policing that we've tried to do for a number of decades like restorative justice, like procedural justice. And now, you know, ideally like anti-racism, right, and other things that are noble good efforts to improve policing in America and connect police with their community instead of create greater barriers between the two.

And it really begins with this organic technology of self and that's where mindfulness brings us. It brings us to this capacity to be attuned to oneself and therefore be more equipped to make informed decisions about how to regulate, how to seek external interventions. Again, back to psychotherapy, back to social connection, back to pursuit of spirit, awe, adventure and joy, right? All of these things that are critically important that are adaptive ways of working with this profession of suffering that brings us front and center with trauma and crisis.

Donelan

39:08

What I find so exciting about it is that it doesn't seem like this completely out of the world notion. I often say, "The only person I can control is me," and you're beginning with the person

Goerling

39:19

Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

Donelan

39:20

And you're right. This isn't something that anyone has really attempted to do in policing in 30 years so it's refreshing. It is absolutely refreshing. Jared, do you have anything you'd like to talk about?

Seide

39:32

Thanks, Jen. I think, yes. This is about health and wellbeing. Yes. There is a critical urgency around this. There is a crisis and we need to do something about it. There is science and there are ways we can intervene to keep folks who put on the badge healthy and to protect them. There are ways we can do that. And I think it goes beyond that as well. So what we're talking about here is not only health and well-being, we're talking about how to be a more compassionate, ethical, happy, and healthy person, individually, in relationships, and in community.

And I think it's cultivating a literacy, a vocabulary for talking about these things so that we can take care of ourselves and we can be allies. I think this notion of sort of the other is out there and something that this work enables us to do is to actually enjoy, or maybe even thrive in that ecosystem. To go beyond this idea of us and them, and really work towards creating the world that we're able to create for ourselves and our children and the next generation.

There are ways we can become more resourced to be the people that we want to be and to create the world we want to create and also to protect our health and well-being. And I think it's about time we prioritize this and we begin to explore ways that work and evidence that shows us that we can really make a difference.

Donelan

40:46

Absolutely. Well said. Thank you. Gentlemen, how can our listeners get in touch with you to learn more about the POWER program and the other programs that are offered by the Center for Council?

Seide

40:57

Thanks, Jen. The best way to do that is through the website. And that is www.centerforcouncil.org/le for law enforcement. So it's Center for Council, C-E-N-T-E-R-F-O-R C-O-U-N-C-I-L-dot-org-O-R-G-slash-L-E for law enforcement. There's a lot of information there and the ways to contact us and our team. We have the capacity to really get into some good conversations with folks all over the country and beyond. And we're really excited that there's a core rising of interest in this. We really want to be part of the conversation and look forward to folks reaching out and exploring what we can do better.

Donelan

41:35

Absolutely. That is just beautiful and I'm really excited. I was honored to have you both on the show. Rich Goerling, how would our listeners get in touch with you specifically?

Goerling

41:43

Yes. So for me, the best way to connect with me is probably through my website. It's mindfulbadge.com. That's M-I-N-D-F-U-L-B-A-D-G-E-dot-C-O-M.

Donelan

41:55

All right, perfect. Thank you, Rich. Thank you, Jared. We're going to be watching. I'm really excited about having you on the show and I'm excited that we're going to be able to connect our listeners to you as we all work towards improving and making the world a better place to be at the end of the day. Everybody, we want to thank you for listening to this edition of *The Beat*.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

42:14

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

43:11

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