

# Alcohol Abuse in Policing

by Andy Callaghan

About two years ago, several Police Officers got together and started a support group for cops who have issues or concerns about the abuse of alcohol in their lives. The name of the group became Bottles and Badges. There is more information about this group and several resources at [www.bottlesandbadges.org](http://www.bottlesandbadges.org).

The group is approaching its second anniversary and has become well attended and successful. We have had cops show up at the meeting on their own and have also had referrals from several commanding officers who are trying to help cops in our department. Although it doesn't matter how they get there, they all leave with information about alcoholism and find they can get real support from their peers in the FOP. I would like to thank President McNesby for supporting this effort. The group meets at the FOP Hall every Wednesday night at 7 PM.

Alcohol abuse represents an important issue in police work. Several studies have shown that alcohol abuse among Police Officers is double the rate of the civilian population. Some of the contributing factors are high stress, peer pressure, poor coping skills, family issues and a family history of alcoholism.

One of the common myths

is that alcoholics are "brown bag bums," or that all alcoholics drink daily or crave a drink at a certain time of the day. The key to understanding alcoholism is realizing that once alcoholics start drinking they don't have the ability to stop when they want to and they can't control the amount of alcohol that they consume. There are several assessments or "tests" that are available to help evaluate whether or not you are an alcoholic. I have found that one way to determine this is to ask yourself two simple questions;

1) Once I start drinking, can I stop when I want too?

2) Once I start drinking, can I predict the near future?

If you are a supervisor in the police department you can also look for warning signs. The most common signs are: chronic lateness and/or sick leave abuse, inconsistent work quality, signs of fatigue or stress, poor uniform maintenance or appearance, the odor of alcohol, bloodshot or red eyes, A.W.O.L, complaints of problems at home and an increase in careless injuries or risk taking. Early intervention from a supervisor can often lead to awareness or treatment and can prevent a serious tragedy.

Most police officers do not see that they have a problem when they are drinking excessively. The officers truly be-

lieve that a tragedy will not happen to them. Officers that fit in this mold are in "denial." The easiest way to understand denial is to know that denial is an unconscious defense mechanism characterized by refusal to acknowledge painful realities, thought or feelings.

Over the last couple of years I have been directly involved in the treatment of officers who have lost their jobs, killed people in car accidents and destroyed their families and careers. Alcoholism is also a contributing factor in many police suicides. One of the officers that I had contact with was a long-time veteran from a major metropolitan police department; this guy was a great cop with a stellar career. One night of drinking led to an auto accident where this officer killed someone. While he was in treatment he discovered that there were numerous indicators present and that he should have been in treatment long before this incident. When he was being discharged from the treatment center he stood up and said that he was the "poster child" for why you should not drink and drive. The officer also emotionally stated that his career was over and that he felt that any good he had done in a long career was wiped out by one night of drinking.

The goal of this article is to educate and prevent another

tragedy from occurring. Treatment for addiction often leads to freedom and a much better life. Early intervention is the key to preventing many bad situations from occurring. Please have the courage to confront your co-workers (or subordinates) and suggest that they attend the next Bottles and Badges meeting at the FOP.

Another project that we are working on at the FOP is a Peer Support Network. Who better to help a cop than another cop? Peer support is not a replacement for the other professional resources that are available. Peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience and emotional, social or practical help to each other.

We are also very fortunate to have some really talented people working on this project. Lou Campione, Bill Kennedy, Bill Brennan, Jonathan Josey

and Yvette Clark have been working hard to put this Peer Support system in place.

Lou Campione has been a tireless advocate and liaison who is always available to help with and push this venture.

Bill Kennedy is a retired Philadelphia Police Officer and a very experienced counselor who went on to develop and run two treatment programs for Police Officers across the country.

Bill Brennan is also retired from the job and he worked in patrol, Stakeout and the Advanced Training Unit. Bill is also a very experienced counselor that helped bring peer counseling to our brothers and sisters in the past.

Jonathan Josey and Yvette Clark have been working very hard to bring the "Shooters Support Group" to fruition. The Shooters Support Group

meets every other Thursday (opposite pay-day) also at the FOP. After training is complete and more volunteers are available, we are hoping to make this group available weekly.

Anyone wanting to become active in Peer Support can send an e-mail to me at [andycallaghan@fop.net](mailto:andycallaghan@fop.net).

As my first Sergeant, Eddie Brinkman used to say, "Be careful out there and back each other up!"

Fraternally Yours,  
Andy Callaghan

*Editor's Note: President McNesby is committed to the work being done by these dedicated volunteers. Brother Callaghan along with the other volunteers ethic of service for their brother and sister officers is unmatched and they epitomize the statement "we are only a phone call away."*

