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**Larimer County Sheriff's Office**  
**Peer Support Team Survey Project**  
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A 2024 study using the *Peer Support Team Utilization and Outcome Survey* (survey) was initiated on 2 April, 2024 and concluded 22 April, 2024. The Larimer County Sheriff's Office (LCSO), Fort Collins, CO was once again surveyed using a Google Forms electronic version of the survey. The 2024 study was the third LCSO project utilizing the survey. Previous LCSO surveys were conducted in 2018 and 2022<sup>1</sup> as part of a multi-agency peer support team utilization and outcome inquiry.

*Survey methodology 2024*

The survey was distributed via LCSO email to full-time sworn and civilian employees. Completion of the survey required that recipients open the email, respond to survey questions, and click on the "submit" button. This last action sent survey responses to data collection. Like the previous surveys, completing the 2024 survey was voluntary and anonymous. As such, it depended upon the willingness of employees to complete the survey.

*Survey completion and return rates*

The 2024 project distributed 441 surveys to full-time LCSO employees. Of the 441, 286 (64.9%) were sworn (comprised of the sheriff, 270 deputies of all ranks, and 15 LCSO park rangers) and 155 (35.1%) were civilians. Of the 441 surveys sent, 246 were returned. This represents an overall return rate of 55.8%.

Of the 286 sworn and 155 civilian employees that were sent surveys, the return rate for sworn was 57.7%; for civilian 52.3%. More than half of both sworn and civilian employees returned the survey.

Historically, the return rates of electronically distributed surveys are quite low. They average about 33% (Lindemann, 2021). The 2024 LCSO survey return rate was significantly higher than average. This return rate increases the "confidence within limits" that survey results represent agency-wide perceptions and attitudes of full-time LCSO employees.

*Completed-survey population composition*

The 246 employees that completed surveys were comprised of 165 sworn and 81 civilian personnel. Of the sworn personnel, 79 were assigned to the jail, 64 were assigned to patrol (includes park rangers), 11 were assigned to investigations, and 11 were assigned elsewhere. Of the 81 civilian personnel, 13 were assigned to communications/jail control, while 68 were assigned to CSI, records, administration, emergency services, and various other units. In total, sworn personnel represented 67.1% and civilian personnel represented 32.9% of those that completed the survey.

<sup>1</sup> For complete results of the 2018 multiagency survey and information relating to the 2022 survey visit [www.jackdigliani.com](http://www.jackdigliani.com).

## Survey findings

Of the 246 employees that completed the survey, 144 (58.5%) reported having participated in an interaction with the peer support team. [45.3]<sup>2</sup> Of the 144, one survey was incomplete. The following information is based upon 143 responses. Of the 143:

- 126 (87.5%) found peer support to be helpful to very helpful in aiding to better address the issues discussed or better manage the stress associated with the issues. [88.7]
- 108 (75.5%) were advised or reminded of peer support confidentiality limitations. [66.1]
- 111 (77.6%) would seek peer support in the future if needed. [76.8]
- 131 (91.6%) would recommend the peer support team to others. [88.1]
- 90 (62.9%) reported it helped them to better perform their job. [58.7] (14 N/A)
- 72 (50.3%) reported it helped them improve home life. [46.8] (24 N/A)

Of the 246 employees that completed the survey, 95 (38.6%) reported not having participated in an interaction with the peer support team. [52.2%] 7 reported being “uncertain” (total of 102). Of the 95 that “have not participated” responses, 1 survey was incomplete. The following information is based upon the 101 employees (94 “have not participated” and 7 “uncertain”) that responded to, “*I have not utilized the peer support team because: (check all that apply and/or fill in reason).*”<sup>3</sup> Of the 101:

- 71 (70.3%) reported they had not had a need for peer support. [77.0]
- 17 (16.8%) reported that they are not the kind of person that asks for peer support from the peer support team. [12.2]
- 16 (15.8%) reported not knowing how to initiate peer support. [4.1]
- 4 (4.0%) reported not knowing they were eligible for peer support. [<1 “for this reason”]
- 16 (15.8%) reported lack of trust in peer support confidentiality. [4.4 “for this reason”]
- 3 (3.0%) reported not having heard of the peer support team prior to this survey. [not assessed in the 2017-2018 LCSO survey]
- 13 “for this reason”...(of the 13, most employees cited information included in the above options. Other reasons included, use of family/friends/outside therapists for support, concerns about how utilizing the peer support team might affect their career, and being judged by coworkers)
- Total number of responses: 140. The total exceeds 101 due to the “check all that apply and/or fill in reason” directive.

Of the 102 employees that reported “not having participated” in an interaction with the peer support team or “uncertain”:

- 45 (44.1%) reported “likely” (28) “most likely” (10) and “very likely” (7) to seek peer support should stressful circumstances arise. [62.0%]
- 49 (48.0%) reported “not at all likely” (18) and “slightly likely” (31) to seek peer support should stressful circumstances arise. [38.0%]
- 8 (7.8%) reported not knowing enough about the peer support team to rate whether they would seek peer support should stressful circumstances arise [not assessed in the 2018 survey]

Of the 246 employees (except where noted) that completed the survey:

- 121 (49.2%) reported being contacted and offered peer support by their peer support team. [57.4]

- 51 of 245 respondents (20.8%) (1 “deputy sheriff assigned elsewhere” did not respond to this item) reported experiencing a work-related incident where they felt they should have been contacted by the peer support team and were not contacted. [18.0]
- 174 (70.7%) reported being “confident” (45) “mostly confident” (47) and “very confident” (82) in peer support team confidentiality. [74.8]
- 20 (8.1%) indicated they did not know enough about peer support team confidentiality to rate their confidence. [7.9]

<sup>2</sup> Numbers in brackets [ ] are percentages of LCSO employees responding to the same item in the 2018 LCSO survey.

<sup>3</sup> Note: this item moves the respondent from “participation,” which may or may not have been self-initiated, to “utilization,” which implies self-initiation.

## 2024 Survey Information, Conclusions, and Observations

Survey information is useful only to the degree that it is utilized to implement actions directed at addressing identified issues or deemed necessary for improvement.

Drawing conclusions from survey data is best left to the peer support team, their clinical supervisor, and appropriate others. They are in a unique position to interpret and evaluate survey results. For LCSO, survey results may help identify areas of desired improvement or generate new ideas relevant to the enhancement of peer support.

While survey results are best interpreted by the LCSO Peer Support Team, several general observations can be made:

1. A notable difference between the LCSO 2018 and 2024 surveys was observed in the percentage of those that reported using peer support, 45.3% in 2018 compared to 58.5% in 2024.
2. Over one-half of surveyed employees reported participation in peer support interactions.
3. Peer support is helpful for a remarkable majority of those that have used it. Nearly 9 out of 10 employees that reported peer support interactions stated that peer support was helpful to very helpful in addressing the issues or managing the stress associated with the issues discussed. Nearly 8 out of 10 employees reported that they would seek peer support again in the event of future stressful circumstances, while over 9 out of 10 employees reported that they would recommend peer support to co-workers known to be dealing with stressful circumstances. Over 6 out of 10 employees that participated in peer support reported that it had directly or indirectly helped them to better perform their job, and 5 out of 10 reported it had helped to improve their home life.
4. Over 4 out of 10 employees that reported not having participated in peer support interactions stated that they would be likely to very likely to seek peer support should future stressful circumstances arise. This finding reflects the positive standing of the peer support team within LCSO for over 40% of employees that reported not having used peer support. It also suggests that there is a proportion of employees that would not readily seek support from the peer support team for various survey-identified reasons.
5. There remains significant employee confidence in the confidentiality of peer support interactions. However, when compared to the 2018 LCSO survey, a slight decline in this area was observed, from 74.8% in 2018 to 70.7% in 2024. Nonetheless, the relative stability of confidence in peer support team confidentiality remains the likely result of three factors: (1) the policies, operational guidelines, and statute designed to provide for peer support team

member confidentiality, (2) the consistent exemplary behavior of peer support team members and their adherence to the above-mentioned documents and the peer support team code of ethical conduct, and (3) the steadfast support of agency administrators and supervisors.

6. While there was significant improvement compared to the 2018 survey (66.1% in 2018 to 75.5% in 2024), greater consistency is still needed in the area of advising or reminding peer support recipients of the limits of peer support confidentiality before engaging in peer support. Disclosing or reviewing the limits of peer support confidentiality is an ethical obligation of peer support team members wishing to do the best they can for recipients of peer support.

7. The peer support team has done well with reaching out to employees and offering peer support when appropriate. However, 2024 survey results revealed that slightly over 2 in 10 employees reported that they had experienced work-related circumstances where they felt they should have been contacted by the peer support team and were not contacted. Contrast this with the under 2 in 10 employees that reported similarly in the 2018 survey. As in 2018, this information suggests that the LCSO peer support team needs to reexamine their “threshold” for peer support outreach. It is possible that some employees are more stressed by their involvement in particular events wherein neither the event nor their involvement would normally generate a peer support contact. It is also possible that the event never came to the attention of the peer support team or that individual employees, especially if on the “periphery” of an incident, were simply missed and not included in peer support efforts. Special attention in any threshold and outreach reexamination should be given to investigators (as revealed in the 2024 survey), communication personnel, CSIs, evidence and lab technicians, records personnel, and other civilian employees.

8. Survey results suggest a need for relevant intra-departmental presentations and distribution of information pertaining to peer support team composition, confidentiality, and support parameters.

## **Epilogue**

As in the 2018 survey, the 2024 LCSO study supports the use and efficacy of agency peer support. This finding was confirmed in the 2022 LCSO survey, however it was based on a response rate of only 34.7%, a bit higher than the average electronic-survey return rate, but inadequate to establish sufficient confidence in the finding.

When taken together, the 2018, 2022, and 2024 surveys suggest that agency peer support provided by trained and clinically supervised peer support teams is a significant resource for those that use it. It has also been shown to be a significant potential resource for those that have not used it. Law enforcement agencies without a peer support team would be well advised to consider developing one.

Agency peer support programs have become an integral part of “best practices” for sustaining employee wellness. To help employees better manage the unavoidable stressors of policing, the cumulative effects of work-related stress, and the traumatic experiences frequently associated with law enforcement critical incidents, there is simply no substitute for a well-trained, appropriately structured, clinically supervised peer support team.

## **Why peer support?**

Peer support teams occupy a support niche that cannot be readily filled by either health plan counseling services or an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This is because well-trained peer support teams provide support that is qualitatively different than that provided by health insurance therapists or EAP counselors. In fact, peer support teams provide support that it is

qualitatively different from the counseling of even the best police psychologists. The difference? The *power of the peer*. The power of the peer is the factor that is a constant in the support provided by peer support team members. It is the factor that is not present in other support modalities. If an agency wishes to do the best it can to support its employees, a peer support program is necessary.

Incidentally, a peer support team is one of the most valued resources for a police psychologist. Experienced police psychologists understand the power of the peer, which is the reason why many police psychologist counseling and proactive support programs are designed to incorporate the efficacy of peer support.

Further research with the *Peer Support Team Utilization and Outcome Survey* or similar assessments is recommended. It is only with additional research across various law enforcement and other first-responder agencies that a reliable body of data pertaining to agency peer support can be generated and further evaluated.

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For more information about peer support, to download a copy of the *Peer Support Team Utilization and Outcome Survey*, or to contact Jack A. Digliani visit [www.jackdigliani.com](http://www.jackdigliani.com)

## References

Lindemann, N. (2021). *What's the average survey response rate?* <https://pointerpro.com/blog/average-survey-response-rate/>