



## New Wellness App Links Mamaroneck Police Officers to Local Mental Health Support Services

**Chief Sandra DiRuzza has been a police officer for more than 18 years and chief of the Village of Mamaroneck Police Department (VMPD) for almost two. She understands how police officers usually view seeking help.**

“We don’t. We’re about helping other people. We don’t help ourselves,” says DiRuzza.

But now more than ever, DiRuzza worries about the emotional health of the officers in her department.

“Officers are feeling disheartened,” says DiRuzza. “They’re doubting the value of their work—that maybe what they’re doing isn’t worthwhile. We know that’s not the case. But you can’t tell someone how to feel.”

She also knows that her officers, like many uniformed personnel, are unlikely to take the time they need to process their feelings. Although small geographically, Mamaroneck has one of the busiest police departments in Westchester county. Officers are often going

from one dispatch to the next, with limited time to think about the last call they answered.

“They may go home and talk about their day, but they won’t go into detail about what happened. They don’t want to traumatize their families. They may talk to their fellow officers, but many don’t. They just hold it in. And that’s not a good thing,” says DiRuzza.

To make it easier for officers to seek the help they need, VMPD is using a portion of its CARES UP grant to purchase the Cordico mobile wellness app. Officers and their families can use the tool to assess their behavioral health needs and access a variety of wellness resources.

“We want our officers to seek help,” says DiRuzza. “The app makes it easier for them to do so.”

## MOBILE WELLNESS SUPPORTS

The app that VMPD is using is available 24/7 and is entirely confidential. It includes several features:

- › **A self-assessment** for the most common problems experienced by public safety employees, such as substance misuse, sleep disorders, financial stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Officers can assess their own needs or families can use the assessment if they suspect that a loved one's behaviors have become problematic. "The app alerts them to the problem, but also directs them to what to do next," says DiRuzza. "It's that next step that's crucial."
- › **Local behavioral health resources.** VMPD is working closely with the app developers to compile a list of local therapists and religious advisors with experience treating first responders. "These are local people who have indicated that they want to participate in the program and know what to expect," says DiRuzza. "They understand what police officers see and deal with every day." Officers will be able to access these supports through the app.
- › **Online activities to support behavior change.** Examples include meditation and mindfulness apps, soothing sleep sounds, yoga for first responders, wellness videos, and self-care checklists. "During an early trial of the program, one of our officers found the meditation app and began using it five minutes before every shift. Now he uses it to get into the right mind frame to start the day," says DiRuzza.

What sold VMPD on using a mobile app was its ease of use and the self-assessment.



### CARES UP in Mamaroneck

Over the next two years, VMPD will implement a comprehensive set of wellness supports, including:

- › Participation in New York State's Division of Criminal Justice Services Public Safety Symposium (selected officers)
- › Participation in the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation's Assisting Individuals in Crisis training (selected officers)
- › Participation in SAMHSA's Shield of Resilience Training (all officers)
- › Access to the customized Cordico app (all officers)
- › Dissemination of wellness resources (e.g., 988 and Crisis Text Line information)
- › Participation in Westchester County Suicide Prevention Coalition
- › Guest speakers to train officers on mental health and resiliency

“Who doesn’t have their phone on them? In a quiet moment, when they have some down time, officers might grab their phone and start looking around. Complete an assessment. And it might alert them to an issue they’ve been struggling with that they didn’t even realize was an issue. And once you can identify an issue, you can start getting healthy,” says DiRuzza.

## TAILORED TO MEET DEPARTMENT NEEDS

VMPD’s wellness app is branded with VMPD icons and screenshots. To populate the resource list, DiRuzza and her team are partnering with a variety of local mental health agencies, including the Larchmont Mamaroneck Community Counseling Center, Child and Family Institute of Westchester, and Westchester County Psychological Association. The organizations are helping VMPD do outreach. The team is hoping to compile a list of up to 25 therapists, comprising a mix of genders.

“People don’t want to go through the process of finding the right person,” says DiRuzza. “With this app, we do the legwork.”

The app is one part of VMPD’s overall wellness plan, which also includes officer mental health and resilience trainings, formalized peer support, and participation in the Westchester County Suicide Prevention Taskforce. These initiatives send the message that self-care is an agency priority, and that seeking help is a key to staying healthy.

“There’s a stigma about seeking help,” says DiRuzza. “Officers feel like they have to appear invincible. But the truth is, we’re all human. There are times when we all need that help. So, anything we can do to ease that process, we want to do.”

**NY CARES UP** 

**TO LEARN MORE** about **CARES UP**, a state-funded program to support Veterans, first responders, and uniformed personnel through wellness and resiliency to lessen the stress inherent in their careers, go to: [preventsuicideny.org/cares-up](https://preventsuicideny.org/cares-up) or email [CARESUP@omh.ny.gov](mailto:CARESUP@omh.ny.gov)