Caddo Sheriff's Office to participate in BR critical incident stress debriefings

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What was expected to be “routine” stress management training for Caddo Sheriff’s deputies in Baton Rouge this week took a different turn when three Baton Rouge law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty July 17.

Five CPSO deputies were already planning to attend the Southern Law Enforcement Foundation’s Critical Incident Stress Management In-Service and Basic Academy when news of the ambush attack spread. Now after concluding their training this week, they are staying behind in Baton Rouge to help coordinate and conduct debriefings for officers there.

Critical incident debriefings use peer supporters to help police officers, other emergency responders, and sometimes even civilians with their immediate reactions to stress brought on by traumatic incidents like an officer’s death or cases involving children. Debriefing teams include trained peers who share a common background with the traumatized officer. They also include CISM-trained clergy and mental health professionals.

Teams use a seven-step process that encourages participants to talk and tell their own stories in a group setting and connect with the stories of others. Dialogue is confidential and is not an investigation of the facts of a case. Peer supporters work to pair themselves with like officers during a debriefing, such as SWAT, Communications, or Patrol.

Caddo Sheriff’s Deputy David Boone is coordinator of the CPSO CISM Team and coordinator of the Southern Law Enforcement Foundation’s team for Region 3, which includes officers and deputies from 29 parishes.

“Our purpose is to help officers work through the trauma and bring them back to being effective first responders, effective dads, and effective moms,” Boone said.

Attending this week’s training in Baton Rouge after the deaths of the three local officers made their training mission “all that more surreal,” he added.

The Caddo Sheriff’s Office has 25 deputies on its CISM Team, all of whom are on call and ready to respond to Baton Rouge if needed.

“Police officers and sheriff’s deputies are normal people who are often put in abnormal situations,” said Caddo Sheriff Steve Prator. “Citizens often think we get used to the things that we see, but the fact is, we are all human, and we feel things just like you.”

When debriefing officers after a traumatic incident, a department doesn’t use its own team, Boone said. They receive support from those associated with the Southern Law Enforcement Foundation. The foundation conducted over 1,000 debriefings following Hurricane Katrina. The Caddo Sheriff’s Office was heavily involved with those debriefings, he added.

Of the five CPSO deputies attending this week’s training, three, including Boone, are veteran peer supporters who have conducted briefings throughout the state. Two are new to the team.

Agencies attending the training are the Caddo, Iberia, and West Feliciana sheriff’s offices; Shreveport and New Orleans police departments, and the Louisiana Office of Probation and Parole.