

## Personal Story – Ambulance

### Purpose:

To be used to encourage your remaining personnel to participate in *Answering the call – beyondblue's* National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing of Police and Emergency Services Personnel. The content can be used to promote the survey in any form of internal communication your agency utilizes for example newsletters, social media, or intranet posts. Simply copy and paste the content into your standard templates and/or emails and circulate to your staff.

### Timing:

This content should be used as a vital part of any communication strategies distributed in the final stages of the survey period. The content would have the most impact if it was distributed just before or at the same time the end of field reminders are sent out to staff.

### Content:



### **Complete *beyondblue's* Answering the Call survey and save lives**

**Ambulance Victoria Acting Senior Team Manager Ringwood/Croydon branch Darelle Barrett** has opened up about her personal story.

She explains why mental health must be a focus in our workplaces, and she encourages anyone invited to participate in this groundbreaking survey to take the time to fill it out.

This is an opportunity for Australian emergency services personnel to again lead the world, not just in caring for communities, but in supporting themselves and their colleagues.

***Check your email inbox now to see if you're eligible and complete the survey.***

### **DARELLE BARRETT: Black Saturday a turning point for ambulance personnel**

A dislocated jaw, facial bruising and permanent scarring sustained as a graduate paramedic was an unfathomable introduction to the ambulance service for Darelle Barrett.

The now Acting Senior Team Manager at Ambulance Victoria's Ringwood/Croydon branch was assaulted towards the end of her student time while attending a callout to an inner-city pub in Melbourne.

On finding an unconscious person on the ground, Mrs Barrett assessed the situation, placing the privacy of her patient ahead of her own safety.

She moved the person to the back of the ambulance to get them away from the gathering crowd.

It was when Mrs Barrett placed a blood pressure cuff on the patient's arm that she was besieged by a flurry of punches.

Her next memory was regaining consciousness with the knowledge the patient was in police custody.

"I learnt so much from this experience, personally and professionally; a part of me is almost grateful it happened," Mrs Barrett said.

"In the days following the assault, my physical injuries caused me to go to my GP who was quick to highlight my mental health as I hadn't slept and had withdrawn from my kids, partially because I was mindful of scaring them with my facial injuries."

The incident occurred at a time when mental health awareness was nowhere near as prominent as it is today within the organisation, a time when Mrs Barrett's peers encouraged her to "get on with it".

So, she did.

It was the kind of pressure that came with trying to earn her stripes.

"There was the old school attitude of putting our mental health to the background and finding our own way to deal with things which, as a graduate at the time, was a little daunting, but it felt like something I had to do to fit in," Mrs Barrett said.

"It wasn't until I made contact with Peer Support (in the days after the incident) that I started to make my mental health a priority."

Mrs Barrett had joined Ambulance Victoria (then the Metropolitan Ambulance Service), just days after the loss of two officers who were the first to ever die while on duty.

Paramedic Robert Bland, 50, and student paramedic Phillip Oakley, 33, were on their way to an emergency when their vehicle left the Maroondah Highway near Healesville, east of Melbourne, and hit a tree, killing them instantly.

"I joined a service that, at the time, was in shock and in the midst of processing the accident," she said.

"There were strong discussions around personal physical safety at the time and there were some relatively minor discussions around mental health, but certainly not to the degree it is today."

Five years later, Australia's worst ever natural disaster proved a turning point in mental health awareness at Ambulance Victoria.

"My assault caused me to be far more aware of my mental health, however, I feel a large shift occurred across the organisation post the 2009 Black Saturday fires," Mrs Barrett said.

"I and multiple other colleagues have some degree of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) due to either our professional or personal involvement in this incident and its aftermath.

"Since then, it feels like our mental wellbeing is genuinely important and it is safe to put our hands up and say we're not feeling 100 per cent."

Mrs Barrett said Ambulance Victoria's focus on mental health was commendable, "but there is always room for improvement".

She relished the opportunity to fill out the **beyondblue Answering the Call** survey after being randomly selected to take part.

The largest study of its kind in the world, it will build a comprehensive picture of the mental health and wellbeing of police and emergency services personnel across Australia and the best ways to provide support.

"This year we seem to have been inundated with surveys regarding different aspects of the organisation, however the *beyondblue* survey is one of the most important I have completed," Mrs Barrett said.

"It was not overly time consuming and has the potential to improve the services we have access to.

"Having the knowledge that it was an anonymous survey, I saw it as an opportunity for a mental health debrief – am I happy with where I sit as an employee? Am I doing everything I can for my team? Am I supported by my organisation to provide best care for the community?"

"Being able to give honest answers and knowing it could lead to change was a great incentive."

Mrs Barrett encouraged others who have been selected to take the opportunity to complete the survey as it will go a long way towards demystifying mental health.

And it will help the service continue to provide world class care to those in need.

"We attend to people having their own emergency; whether it appears to be minor to us is irrelevant," she said.

"We are taking care of a patient who is potentially having the worst day of their life.

"A paramedic who is physically or mentally unwell will never perform at their best and this in turn increases the risk of something going wrong, therefore exacerbating the issues of an already struggling paramedic.

"Being proactive with the mental health of our workforce and being present before an issue becomes overwhelming is our highest priority."

### ***beyondblue's Answering the Call* survey**

The world's largest study on mental health across emergency services personnel is happening right here, right now.

Some of you have been invited to participate, with the aim of the **beyondblue Answering the Call** survey to collect invaluable information about the issues affecting the mental health and wellbeing of police and emergency services personnel.

The data will give *beyondblue* the evidence it needs to determine the best ways to provide support.

The survey investigates the prevalence of common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide risk.

It will also collect important information about stigma, use of support services and programs, and factors that impact on the mental health of police and emergency services personnel.

Since October 2017, about 100,000 current and former employees and volunteers in police and emergency services agencies across Australia have been invited to participate.

***Check your email account now to see if you've been randomly selected to take part in the survey.***



This survey is funded by *beyondblue* as part of the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services with support from the Bushfire Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre.