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HELPING HAND

HELP FOR FIRST RESPONDERS » A3

MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

Program launched for county's first responders

By **Kathleen E. Carey**
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In between back-to-back night shifts, Ridley Township police Cpl. Leo Doyle stopped at the MVP Recovery Behavioral Health Center on Friday to help launch a support program specific to first responders.

Called S.H.I.E.L.D., standing for Strength, Hope, Integrity, Empowerment, Leadership and Dedication, the program is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week behavioral health service linking first responders and their families to peer support from an active duty first responder through MVP Recovery.

It can be accessed by calling 855-MVP(687)-2410.

It provides immediate, confidential, judgment-free access to behavioral health support for a wide array of first responders, including police, fire fighters, medics, corrections officers, 911 operators, medical professionals and the military, and not only those active in duty but also those who have retired or lost their job and the families of first responders.

"S.H.I.E.L.D., it exists to support those who support us," Brian Corson, founder of MVP Recovery, said. "On Sept. 12, 2025, we're all united here behind our Delaware County first responders to let them know: If you need support, we are here for you."

Doyle would know.

He's been out there on the

county streets, doing it on his own to support his colleagues.

"Before there was S.H.I.E.L.D., I was just giving my phone number out around Delaware County," Doyle said. "I think in the last five years, probably helped out about 150 first responders into treatment."

Doyle has served 15 years with the Ridley Township police force. In that time, he's also garnered a master's degree in counseling and psychology.

Having worked with the Delaware County Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, he initially wanted to help children victims.

Then, the COVID pandemic occurred at the same time he needed to get practice hours to gain his degree.

Discovering a need

He found a program working with military and first responders.

"I didn't know the first responders were struggling the way they were," Doyle said. "And I saw the barriers that Delaware County responders might see whether it's insurance issues or understanding how much treatment is out there."

Plus, they can bear an extra level of stigma.

"It's a huge stigma about raising your hand and saying, 'Hey, I need some help,'" Doyle said. "Part of that stigma is we're expected



KATHLEEN E. CAREY — DAILY TIMES

Brian Corson of MVP Recovery launches the S.H.I.E.L.D. program on Friday to support first responders.

to make very intense decisions and we don't all go home the same. One of the challenges is if you raise up your hand and say, 'Hey, I need help,' are you going to be questioned the next time you make a decision? Is your job safe?"

Doyle has seen both sides: as a police officer and as a behavioral health care provider.

"There are tons of first responders that have raised their hand up and gotten the help and now are back on the street being effective," he said.

Doyle also created the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome, a non-profit where he facilitates free trainings for first responders about how to go home, offering them techniques in how to decompress in healthy ways.

other warm handoff programs that linked almost 2,000 individuals to treatment in 2024 alone.

S.H.I.E.L.D. has its own angle, though.

"What makes it real unique is when a first responder calls, they have peer support because we link them to Leo and Leo understands the additional barriers that may exist for a first responder reaching out or the stigma that's there," Corson said.

Corson explained how S.H.I.E.L.D. works.

A first responder or one of their loved ones calls the MVP line — 855-MVP(687)-2410 — and a certified recovery specialist answers.

"Then, they're going to triage that to Leo and what Leo is going to do is follow that individual along their path in treatment," Corson said.

County partners

He expressed thanks for the support from Delaware County District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer, County Council, the Fraternal Order of Police, and state officials.

"Everyone in today's world needs to have somebody to talk to and available if they need help," Stollsteimer said. "What these guys do as first responders is extraordinarily stressful and it's so good and smart that chiefs of police and MVP recognize the need, and we've got a great officer

here leading the program."

Police in attendance were supportive that S.H.I.E.L.D. exists.

"Thankfully we haven't had much need for that in our department but it's great that it is there," Ridley Township Police Capt. James Dougherty said.

Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Special Assistant Margaret Eckels-Ray said timely support, connection and compassion are vital to a person's healing journey.

"I also understand how essential it is to have systems and people in place to respond not only to emergencies but also to the ongoing human needs that follow," she said. "This is why today is so meaningful ... This program acknowledges what we've known for a very long time: that behavioral health support is essential and that first responders deserve the same level of care and support that they provide to others every single day."

Delaware County Council Chair Dr. Monica Taylor said the S.H.I.E.L.D. program would provide life-changing support for first responders and their families.

"In moments of crisis or even just when the weight of the job feels too heavy, help is only a phone call away," she said. "We know that when first responders are supported, our communities are stronger."