

Episode 92

📅 Wed, 10/21 12:53PM ⌚ 52:08

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

officers, suicide, law enforcement officers, people, talk, kris, gun violence, brady, first responder, firearm, understand, day, home, blue, police officers, weapons, law enforcement, individuals, steven, numbers

SPEAKERS

Steven Hough, JJ Janflone, Kris Brown



JJ Janflone 00:08

Hey everybody, this is the legal disclaimer where I tell you that the views, thoughts and opinions shared on this podcast belong solely to our guests and hosts, and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Please note, this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay, we find it disturbing too. Hey, everybody, welcome to a very special minisode although I feel like I say they're all special. That's because they are. They're all special. Welcome to a minisode of "Red, Blue and Brady." Unfortunately, Kelly couldn't be with us today. But I am joined by Brady president and Kris Brown, and Steve Hough. Steve is the Secretary and Treasurer and co-founder of Blue Help, and Blue Help is a phenomenal organization, devoted to reducing suicide amongst law enforcement and first responders, and the stigma and shame surrounding suicide. Together, we're here to talk about why it is, in fact, that we lose law enforcement officers to suicide, in particular to firearm suicide. We've got a lot to cover, so I'm going to go ahead and jump off and get started by maybe, can I have my esteemed guests introduce themselves?



Steven Hough 01:31

Sure. It's, I'm Steven Hough, I am a inspector with the Walton County Sheriff's Office. And I'm a co founder and actually the secretary right now of Blue Help. Our organization is

there to help law enforcement officers overcome that mental health stigma, and we actually track suicides and work towards suicide prevention.



JJ Janflone 01:52

And Kris, just because I love the power trip of asking my boss to introduce herself, right, do you mind?



Kris Brown 01:58

Well, I'm happy to do it. For whatever reason, JJ. I don't judge. I'm Kris Brown. I'm the president of Brady. And I'm thrilled to be a part of this conversation today.



JJ Janflone 02:10

And I want to go ahead and just start off right off the bat with, can you maybe tell our listeners who might not be familiar a little bit about Blue HELP, what what you all are?



Steven Hough 02:19

Sure, Blue HELP actually started back around 2015. It came about from a critical incident myself and my partner were involved with in 2011. We recognized the need for family support and officer support during critical incidents. And it kind of morphed from there, to when we started digging into things a little bit further, we understood that there was a missing piece there which was officers that actually commit suicide. There's, there was little to no support. Obviously, there was a dealing with a mental health stigma there. And that's where really Blue H.E.L.P. came from, and and jumped in. HELP stands for honor, educate, lead and prevent. So we have different, our different little mantras for helping individuals education, providing that training, prevention, all of those things. And we just we take our time, and we've, we've gone nationwide, we've we've conducted some training across the United States. We present, we provide the ability for officers and their families to get in contact with individuals, maybe if they need counseling, or those types of things, especially following an officer suicide. We're pretty much there for anybody that needs that help to get over that mental health stigma of being in law enforcement or being a first responder.



JJ Janflone 03:38

And so if this is impertinent of me, and if you're not comfortable, please feel free to tell me

now, you know, would you feel comfortable sharing your experiences?



Steven Hough 03:46

Oh absolutely.



JJ Janflone 03:47

Because I know that you yourself are a survivor of gun violence, in addition to being a police officer, so so I think you occupy multiple identities within this space.



Steven Hough 03:54

Yes. And that's, and that's one of the reasons why we, this is one of the reasons why we did Blue H.E.L.P., right, was because myself and my partner, because, you know, I was the guy that took the, that got shot. And I say this when I travel around and talk about the shooting, but I wasn't the only one that got shot that day, right? A whole lot of other people got shot. I took the bullet, but a lot of people got shot. And what I mean by that is they had their own traumatic experience from my experience. So some of the things that that really I had to contend with I had to get to grips with, and I'm going to give a shout out to my wife Tanya, she was awesome during this time, when we were, probably the first two or three years of dealing with this. I was very withdrawn, I would start to withdraw from family members, from friends. I even withdrew from my son for a while. Until she pretty much, she almost, it was almost like she just came up and smacked me on the back of the head and said, "Hey, you need to knock it off. You got people out here that are here for you and care for you" and we, we've had, we had to have several conversations like that, in making sure that I rebounded correctly. There was the, like I said, the withdrawal issues, the anger issues, there are to this day, I still have have to deal with those things. And I probably will, it's a new normal, you know, it's one of these things that I have grown from, but I will still have to contend with it. I had a trach put in so I could breathe when I got shot in the face, so it broke the jaw. So every day when I shave, you know, I'm looking in the mirror at myself, missing part of my nose in my, where the trach used to be. So it's a constant reminder, every day, of where I was, and where I've gone since that incident, and I talk about that all the time, there's so many more things that we can discuss. And I know we're running out of time. But there's so many more things in the backside of that story dealing with family members, and friends. I received cards from people in Alaska. I didn't know anybody in Alaska, but I was receiving cards from them. So that ripple effect that we were talking about really came into play with my recovery and being able to, to bounce back off of that.



JJ Janflone 06:17

I want to thank you so much for sharing that.



Steven Hough 06:20

Absolutely. And that is no problem. And that's, and that's what Blue H.E.L.P.'s about, right? If I can't get up, if I can't practice what we're preaching, we've got a problem. So I, you know, that's just one of those things. It helps me tremendously to talk about it and I want to make sure other other officers, other first responders understand, hey, look, if I can do it, you can do it.



Kris Brown 06:40

Steven, I just have to say, after listening to that, I was a little bit speechless. That is just truly amazing. Thank you for your service. Thank you for what you've done, for your community, for public safety, and thank you for all that you've done to really amplify and lift up this issue.



JJ Janflone 07:02

And I wonder if you could just expand on that a little bit. From what I understand the group sort of came out after a book was written called "The Price They Pay?"



Steven Hough 07:11

That is correct. So Dr. McGill, Jeff McGill, he's another founder, and Karen Solomon, they got together and wrote a book called "The Price They Pay." And this is where we really took off is when the book was presented. It discussed officers and their and their need for assistance, really is what it boiled down to, and the family's assistance. The book had several different stories in it. If you haven't read the book, I would recommend highly recommend you read it. It's an excellent read. Dr. McGill provided the the actual forwards for each chapter. In his, in his studies for becoming a doctor, he was able to write a couple of different articles and papers that were used. And when we, when the book finally really came out and really took off. That's when Blue H.E.L.P. started to see a surge. That's when we started to notice, people were reaching out to us for assistance to help primarily family members, but then other officers came about. Because there's always a, when we have a suicide, there's always that ripple effect. And this is one of the things that we learned during our during our critical incident, is that it affects so many other people that you're not aware of, until it's there. And then once it's there you go, "Wow, how do I handle that."

And then the book, of course, when those same stories were showing up repetitively with everybody, everybody kind of has along the same, I don't want to say the same story, but the way that story reads is almost the same, is that individuals are trying to reach out they're trying to reach out to agencies, they're trying to reach out to other officers and that support just wasn't there. And that's where, that's where Blue H.E.L.P. really came into play.



JJ Janflone 08:58

And on that note, I think, Kris, I would love to hear your input too, because you, and Brady more broadly, has been doing, has been present in doing work a lot to prevent firearm suicide, but especially in, I would say, the last two years. And I'm wondering on Brady's end, why is it so important to focus on suicide prevention of police officers and first responders?



Kris Brown 09:21

JJ, thank you for that question. I mean, I guess, to just start off, I think that any anytime I talk about the issue of firearm suicide, most Americans are really surprised to learn that three out of five gun deaths in this country, result from firearm suicide. That's about 60% of all gun deaths in this country. And we know through research into this issue that if we address access to the firearm, we can save lives. If we think about police officers in particular, and their exposure to risk, the trauma that they experience day-to-day in and out of their job, police officers are at a higher risk of suicide than any other profession. Suicide is so prevalent right now in the profession, that the number of police officers who died by suicide is more than triple that of officers who were fatally injured in the line of duty. That's really stark, if you think about that. And I think it's something that, you know, most Americans would be shocked about. Researchers are attributing these statistics to the unique combination of easy access to deadly weapons. Of course, most officers are issued service weapons that they keep at home. So that's part of the access issue. The stress of the job, extremely intense stress, if you think about the stress that each of us have on a day-to-day basis in our job, and understand that few of us are actually really putting ourselves in harm's way, but most of them are. And then, of course, the devastation that police are exposed to on a daily basis. And that's what the backdrop that I understand many of our listeners who are adamant and really believe that police reform is necessary. None of that is taking any of that away. But I think all of us understand that many, many, many good people are drawn to this profession and are truly putting themselves on the line every single day and carrying that out. And the stress and the impact of that on their lives is very real. I just to give a little bit more statistics, and I don't want to do too many of these, JJ, but I think it's important to understand that if you look at 2018, which is the most

recent data set that we have, the calendar year 2018, about 167 law enforcement officers died by suicide. That number is projected to increase during 2019. And as of August of this year, of 2020, a total of 134 officers have committed suicide with four months of the year still left and unaccounted for. Obviously, that seems to be trending higher than even the prior year. Many who are looking at this, don't think that these numbers reflect the true number of suicide, as some families choose not to report the cause of death as suicide, or instead transcribe the death as accidental. And I'm sure, JJ, you're gonna help us understand why that is. And there's no judgment there. It's just simply a fact. That's why from my perspective, Brady's End Family Fire program is so critically important. That obviously is our program that combats "family fire," that's the unintentional injury or death of a loved one with a gun, with an unsecured gun in the home, that campaign details and seeks to prevent family fire. And we have launched now a second phase of this campaign, focusing solely on combating suicide. And I'm so happy we're having this conversation now because obviously, the suicide rates of law enforcement officers is something we should all be alarmed by, and something all of us should be working very, very hard to combat. And I personally, and I know you agree, believe that the End Family Fire program can have a special place and lifting up all of our consciousness about that, and to make a big dent in this problem.



JJ Janflone 13:43

I'm actually excited that you brought up all of the stats because, in a little bit, I'm going to talk about why Blue H.E.L.P. is one of the few groups out there that has the stats. So you really you introduced something there too, in addition to a lot of really, really important information that I think our listeners needed to know.



Kris Brown 13:59

Happy to. Yeah.



JJ Janflone 14:01

And so Steven to push over to you. I wondering if if we could talk a little bit about some of what I think Kris mentioned, which is and what I brought up. Which is that, I, a lot of people don't seem to know what police officers actually interact with on a daily basis, and that so many unfortunately, we lose to suicide.



Steven Hough 14:22

Well, and one of the one of the things that Kris said, to follow up on what Kris said about good people joining the profession. What we're, a lot of times what we see is we see individuals that that join for the noblest of reasons that they truly want to get out there and help people, they truly want to make a difference and they want to be, they want to be part of that greater good. And when our officers go out there and they start accumulating this, this stress that they that they're getting put under it's, it's primarily on a, it's the daily interactions with those types of incidents that go on all the time that a lot of times most folks don't know or, or understand exactly what's happening, you know. When you got officers responding to domestic violence calls, or child abuse calls, or fatalities of some kind, of one type or another, and this is going on for, you know, it could, it could run every day for a week, or it could happen once a month. But the bottom line is, is over the, over time, in dealing with those stressors, it just wears people down. The the idea, and the notion behind being a law enforcement officer is is great. I mean, I love being I love being a cop, as do most everybody else that I know that has been in law enforcement. But when you start seeing those stressors start to affect people in the sense that when they go home, and they just, they just kind of want to crawl into a little hole and hide away from people. Because let's face it, we as as law enforcement, we're not superhuman, we deal with the same stressors that everybody else has to deal with at home, except when we're at work, we have to go help people deal with their stressors. So when we get home, we don't want to have to deal with that. We don't want to have to be burdened with little Jimmy who didn't do well on his schoolwork or, you know, trying to figure out what to do for dinner, or have to deal with the in-laws coming into town, or whatever the case it may be. These are things that we want to compartmentalize, and we want to put it away. So it's it's important for everybody to understand that, you know, these law enforcement officers, kind of like what we were talking about earlier, they deal with those things that you don't want to deal with in your bubble. For the majority of folks out there, they're happy and content, as long as whatever it is, isn't affecting them. And that's that's just the way people are. But we have to go in and have to take care of, either sometimes be a social worker, sometimes be a an EMT, or another first responder of some type. And sometimes we've got to go in unfortunately have to use that deadly force to to quell a situation. So when when people have a hard time understanding why law enforcement officers are, why we see these numbers of so many officers committing suicide, it's, it's really, it's really kind of hard. And that's what Blue H.E.L.P. has worked on, is putting that information out there. Just like when we talked about the book earlier, this gives a, gives you a view into the world of some of these law enforcement officers. And you're talking about 800,000 people at this point, 800,000, strong and law enforcement. So it's a difficult task to be able to put that out there for for the general public to understand say, "hey, look, this is exactly what we're going through." And this is exactly why the guy that started five years ago, who was so happy and ready to save the world, is now having a difficult time dealing with it.

K

Kris Brown 17:56

I've been very interested, obviously, in my work, and and I do a lot of reading on the issue of trauma. And if I think about America, having lived overseas before, I think that gun violence in the manner, the ways in which it's carried out, how common it is, is creating huge amounts of trauma in communities across this country. And certainly those on the front lines, police officers experienced that in a unique way compared to many other Americans, but not in a unique way compared to some Americans who live in communities who experience everyday gun violence. I'm very curious about how you think about this as someone who has served in this way. I read an article a couple of weeks ago that talked about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which of course is an actual diagnosis, something that folks who are suffering from PTSD can be diagnosed with. And one of the things that the article noted is people who are living in communities that experience every day gun violence, actually don't have a post traumatic stress disorder, compared to those who perhaps have been in combat and left combat, and are living in kind of different circumstances safe and away from the things that caused the trauma. For many of these people, they're experiencing perpetual, right, not post, but perpetual traumatic stress disorder. And I wonder how you think about that thought or notion or idea and what you might comment on that from your own work, with with police officers, who have their own version professionally of PTSD, and your thoughts about that.

S

Steven Hough 20:01

So, first off, I agree wholeheartedly with what you said. There is no doubt that in my 25 years of working law enforcement, and even I work in the panhandle of Florida, so the areas or the counties that I've worked in, there are areas that are, they're not as violent. But you can, you can definitely understand there's a different way of living when it comes to being there, right. So it's like you turn down a road, and we step back in time. So, or we turn down a road, in some places I've seen, we turn down a road, and it looks like something you might see from overseas in a third world country. So there is no doubt that individuals that, that live in these areas and, and not to say everybody that that lives there may have that perpetual stressor. But it is a different feel, when you live in an area where gunshots are going off maybe every other night, or, or in some places like maybe Chicago or some other bigger, larger cities that have really, really big areas where individuals are living in poverty, or living below those means, and drugs or other crimes are way of life. You know, that there is there's without doubt that these people are feeling this. From the time they're, they're young, till, till they're, till they're older. I mean, I've talked with plenty of grandmas and grandpas who back in the day, they were running those streets pretty hard. And we used to be able to sit down and talk about that and laugh about it. But the reality behind it is, is the stressors are there. But at the same time, you've got to take a look at it from like, let's say, our perspective, your perspective and my

perspective. We can go down there and work there for eight hours, twelve hours out of a day, but then we come out of it and we go live our life with our family in a nice house or in an apartment or whatever. And we don't have to contend with that day after day. Do they build up resiliency to that? Absolutely they do they still have to contend with the stressors of living in an environment like that. Absolutely they do. There's no question about it.



Kris Brown 22:30

I appreciate that. And I think that that's something that, frankly, in our society isn't discussed enough. Because if you think about trauma and understand trauma that has a profound impact on people's lives. And I think that's part of the reason why we have to approach the gun violence epidemic, the 40,000 people a year who lose their lives, the more than 80,000 others who are injured and then have to live with those injuries for the rest of their lives -- as a public health epidemic. I think if we did that, we would have a very different approach to helping individuals and communities actually experience what we say is the "American Dream," right? That every individual has the opportunity to move forward to excel in their world. It's a lot harder to do that, let's face that, if you're living in a community riddled with gun violence, than if you're not. And so I think it's important to think about it that way. And I appreciate your insight as someone who is a police officer around this, tremendously, in that regard.



JJ Janflone 23:45

And and so sort of on that note, too, because this, this got brought up about how I think because Kris, I think a lot of what you're talking about, when you're talking, and you too Steven, is that when you're talking about stigma and what people interact with, is there's not a lot of transparency. I think a lot of people in the US still feel really uncomfortable talking about suicide.



Kris Brown 24:05

Yeah.



JJ Janflone 24:05

I think I think right now, having conversations about policing are really uncomfortable for a lot of people.



Kris Brown 24:10

Yeah.



JJ Janflone 24:11

And so I think when you combine all those things together, it leads to a lot of awkwardness and a lot of fear. And then there's this added layer to it, which is you know, so Blue H.E.L.P. is devoted to collecting data on police officer, well law enforcement/first responder suicides, but why has the organization had to have taken on that tracking?



Steven Hough 24:34

So it was, obviously when we decided, "hey, look, we need to look at these officers who have who have committed suicide," we need to understand the totality of what we're dealing with here. This is another one of those epiphanies that we had as we started moving from probably around 2013 or 14, into 15. When we actually said "hey, look, we're collecting this data." We actually went in and we were like, "Hey, we can't fix what what we don't know." So that's when the that's when we started saying, look, there's websites out there, ODMP (Officer Down Memorial Page) is out there tracking officers who were killed in the line of duty. We've got the FBI tracking, not only that, but officers feloniously assaulted every year. But then we noticed nobody was tracking the number of officers that are, are committing suicide. So at that point, that's when we made our determination, hey, we've got to take a look at these numbers to see what exactly is going on. To better understand, we can't help if we don't know, the full extent of the the, the, the entire, the totality of everything that we're dealing with. So in 2015, that's when we started collecting our data. Our numbers are on our website, BlueHELP.org, we've got our numbers laid out consistently. And they been fairly consistent from, there's a little bit of fluctuation in the numbers between 2015 and last year. Last year, we saw that big spike. We're at, I think now we're at 235 for last year, those numbers continuously grow as more people report. So the numbers are, once, we're getting to a point now where our actual data is going to start to be able to tell us, give us an idea, a map, so-to-speak, of of what we're dealing with, and why some of these things are happening. It's over 20/25 collection points at this point. So we're asking individuals to report all types of information so we can see, get a better understanding of "why?" We know a majority of it has to deal with that stigma that machismo, if you will. That officers are not supposed to, we're there to take care of people, nobody needs to take care of us. And that's where our officers are getting into trouble is they're just, I don't want to say they're afraid. But hey, look, we're the cops, we're supposed to be taking care of folks, nobody should need to take care of us. And the numbers are pointing us in directions, just so we we have a better grasp of, of was there

other outside influences on on the mental health of that officer at that time?



JJ Janflone 27:19

You know, it's strange, because you saying, you know "what we don't know, we can't fix" is something that I've literally heard Kris say?



Steven Hough 27:27

Yes.



JJ Janflone 27:27

Because there's just so little data about gun violence there, period.



Steven Hough 27:32

Exactly. And I mean, even even to take it that step further, I think Kris was wanting to talk about, or you asked, about why officers, the majority of officers that commit suicide is by a firearm. And this is one of those things that that data helps support, it helps to sit there and say, hey, look, yes. Are they committing suicide by other means? Absolutely. The majority is, is by firearm. Now, we don't, we don't collect any information as far as was it service weapon or anything like that. At this point, that's, that's really irrelevant. If if it's, if they complete suicide by firearm, that's what they did. And these sorts of things between that and other, other data points that we can grab, help kind of guide us, if we're going to put on training, or if we're going to go talk to an agency, or an officer that may need help. That kind of stuff really helps us out in where Blue H.E.L.P. is going to go.



Kris Brown 28:34

I have to say as an American as an as someone who leads a gun violence prevention organization, I would say that most Americans when asked, like so many sub issues related to the cause of gun violence prevention, would really be alarmed at what Steven is telling us here, which is that basically no federal agency keeps an official count of how many law enforcement officers commit suicide each year. That strikes me as really not good. When we know that most officers die of suicide, at a much higher rate than die of shootings and traffic accidents combined. It just leaves me incredulous. I don't understand. It's a problem that cries out for better answers, and remedies. And I feel like I don't understand why we're not doing better by those who are serving us. And Steven, you

must feel this way. And I just have to say, you know, on this podcast, thank you. Thank you so much for what you are doing to draw attention to this, but I wish that you had more support in our government, to help those who are putting themselves on the line to really combat this.



Steven Hough 30:00

Times are changing, right. So we know, as a as an organization, we know that there are now, bills being introduced, there's legislation being introduced, that is requiring agencies or federal agencies to start tracking this information. So is it scary to know it has never been tracked? Absolutely. Are we thankful that because, of course, what we believe, is that our work has kind of propelled this to a forefront, where people are finally starting to take notice and starting to say, "hey, look, this is this is a real problem." And we, we need to figure out, just like Blue H.E.L.P. did, it started with an Excel spreadsheet tracking these officers, you know. It's time for other entities, other governmental agencies, or even local and state agencies to start tracking within their own purview. And and seeing exactly what we're dealing with here. We know that those numbers that are being reported are low. We know that those, just as you said earlier, that officers are not being reported because of family members, either A: they're just not ready to report, and that's and that's totally respectable. The loss of a loved one is is tremendous. And I couldn't imagine going through going through some of these things that our families have gone through. But the other thing is, is the agencies, some of the agencies try and keep this quiet. You know, there's other, there's other things behind it, that it just doesn't come to the forefront. So having, having the bills and the legislation out there now, that's saying, "hey, look, you guys have got to start tracking it." It's definitely a step in the right direction.



JJ Janflone 30:40

And I wonder in terms of, sort of, steps in the right direction, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about some of the things that Blue H.E.L.P. has, has done to help make these conversations a little bit easier, to make officers view, either asking for help, or for their family members or for their partners. Because, as you and I were talking about before we started rolling, you know, for for a lot of people in law enforcement, their "work family," you know, becomes their family. Kris has an experience that happens with nonprofits too, at least gun violence prevention nonprofits, where you, you're at the office a lot. But you end up you form a family, and so people reaching out to say that, you know, "I'm worried about my partner." I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how to reduce that stigma, so that more people get to come home and stay safe.



Steven Hough 32:37

One of the biggest ways obviously, that we that we've come across is, you would be actually kind of surprised that when we do conferences, or we do, we'll go talk with agencies, once it's out there, that other individuals are having the the same difficulties at work, due to, you know, just the stressors of everything, it really kind of takes on, it manifests itself and other officers come forward. Just to use that example we were talking about before we started, before we started really talking, when, when we were involved in that, that shooting, one of the things that a group of us would do is we just get together just to see how each other were doing. And what we started talking about were the same things. How one of us would get angry, for no reason, or one of us would be in the middle of a store and totally forget what they were doing or, you know. So in and amongst my little group, there were discussions going on that, for lack of a better term, were like debriefings. So we were literally talking about all these things that bothered us. And when you put other officers in front of a group of officers, you can surely expect at least a handful of them to come forward and say, "hey, look, I've been doing the same thing", or "I've been feeling the same way." And then that's where we can step in and say, hey, we've got a partnership over here we can let me see if we can help you out. Or, hey, we've got Camp April coming up where the kids can attend and the family members can get together and mourn together. It's this, this whole thing about coming together and doing your debriefings, and having those family members together. Blue family or your home family, is nothing new. You know, many times we discuss and I've discussed this with Jeff many-a-time, about the theater of war. There's a play that was put on about Ajax, is a Greek general, that was he was having problems, mental health problems, and this was way back in, this was this is we're talking history, long history ago, that we talked about these things were If people would just come forward individuals, officers, guys out in the field, as far as being overseas in battle, if they come forward and talk, it will make you feel better. This is nothing new. It's, but same thing is, the stigma is not new. The stigma has always been there. And what we have found is, as we put more information up on our social media websites, Instagram, we talk to other officers and go, "hey, look, yeah, we've had some of those problems as well," we start to see that kind of come to the forefront. And that's where we're at now we're getting such a, I don't want to say such a following, but the understanding of, hey, look, it's okay to start talking about this, is one that is moved to the forefront. Now we've got a new, as you were saying you're an older millennial, right? We've got



JJ Janflone 35:54

I believe elder millennial was my term.



Steven Hough 35:55

Elder, ok elder. So we've got, you know, we've got a new group of law enforcement coming in. It's not like, not like me, I stayed in one place for for 25, you know, 20 years, and then moved to another agency. Your dad stayed in one place for a long time, and, and didn't move. And these individuals are all about moving around and staying in the same profession, but doing different things. They're also, what we've noticed, is they're more apt to talk about things that bother them, then my age group, or perhaps the age group below me. So we're starting to see a difference in the the type of officer that's coming in. And that's also helping to bring that stigma to a forefront because they've already been used to talking about issues that they may have dealt with, maybe not even as a law enforcement officer, just maybe dealing with home life, or school life or whatever was going on at the time, in their in their lives. So we're definitely starting to see that shift. But it's, we're far from being done, far from it.



JJ Janflone 37:03

I wonder, if you do you think that there will ever be a shift to in, sort of, officers and you know, taking their, their their guns home with them. So because that's, I think, you know, the elephant in the room that we think we're talking about, because so many officers, when they do die from suicide, they die from firearm suicide, and they do so with their service weapon. And I'm wondering, do you think that there ever be a shift in sort of how people talk about storing their service weapons when they're when they're at home? Or if they own, you know, I'll be honest, every cop I've ever met, has owned multiple guns, you know, storing storing their other weapons and in a different way. Do you think that people are open to having that particular conversation? Or do you think it's, it's sort of more of a different conversation that needs to be more focused on mental health and safe storage, as opposed to maybe safe storage first?



Steven Hough 37:52

I would say it's a it's a good healthy combination of both. So I will tell you, as your as you are familiar, and I'm sure Ms. Kris is familiar, the majority of your law enforcement officers would would push towards the side of, of a mental health concern rather than a firearms concern, and that's just the way our beliefs are. Now there are going to be officers out there that side with saying, "hey, look, we need to do better about putting our arms away." Or if we're having an episode of some type of panic attack, or we're starting to feel like we're, we're having a problem with that mental health, that, hey, those guns are put away immediately. Now, Also, keep in mind, though, we've got over 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States, and quite a few of them require their officers to leave those

weapons. Either they come out of uniform, they may leave their weapons at the station, or they may lock them away in a certain space. Some, you know, some agencies just won't even let their people wear their uniforms home. So that is that, and that's been going on for quite a while. So there is that conversation on that side of the house that's saying, hey, look, we've got to take better care of our officers, as far as to separate that a work from home kind of thing. The the flip side of that with with the firearms issue is it's, it's a, a big hill to climb. I'll say that. Because you've got myself and, as you pointed out, other officers that own multiple weapons at the home, and even some of, like I said, some of our officers though they chose not, they chose a different way to to commit that suicide. So you're going to have an argument on one side of the house that says, "hey, this is readily available. If this gets taken away, they'll find another way to do it." And then we're going to have folks on the other side of the house that say "hey, look, if we take better care of our officers, this becomes a non issue." If we provide our officers with the ability to, to discuss those things that are really bothering them and take care of their mental health, then the other issue becomes a moot point. So that's that's kind of a, you know, you're almost in a catch 22, so-to-speak situation. Half of your officers, or some of your officers, are going to side one way, and some of your officers are going to side another way.

K

Kris Brown 40:30

The issue that we know from the work that we've done, which has taken about 15 months to craft, the End Family Fire campaign focused on suicide prevention, in particular. And we talk to law enforcement officers and veterans as part of this process is, ultimately, everyone agrees that the prevention of suicide is a top priority issue. The issue we have in our country is a misunderstanding, it's, it's sad, because it's just so basic, that the means matter. If you have easy access to guns in the home, and what does that mean? That means a loaded, unsecured weapon in your kitchen drawer, in your bedside table, in your front drawer, anywhere in the home, that is a means to suicide that is unobstructed. And what most people don't know, and we we know, this writ large for many communities, and I don't think law enforcement are immune to this is that means and access matter. So if you can find ways or barriers to get access to that loaded unsecured weapon, you have the opportunity to save a life. And when I talk about this, I think about the many people that I have talked to who've lost loved ones to gun suicide, and that is a pain you can never get back. And for most of these people, this is not something that they plotted and planned over a long period of time, it was a situational crisis, and access to something that is decidedly lethal. And I don't want to put more statistics in front of people. But I think this is important to note. Because really, there are a few things in life where you can find a more stark statistic. If you have a gun that is loaded, and unlocked and unsecured, and you have access to it, and you complete a suicide, 90% of the time or attempt suicide 90% of the time, you will complete that suicide, that's nine out of 10. Think about that.

That's compared to every other means of suicide, where on average 3%. And just for the people who want, you know, the full facts, that doesn't mean nine out of 10, that means point 03 out of 10. That means out of 100 we're talking about three people. And out of 100 it means 90% of the people with a gun, 90. What we're saying here is the gun matters. And what I really want to drive home too is, access to the gun matters, and that means everyone in the home. So if you have someone who's at risk, please make sure that the gun is unloaded, that it's secured, meaning safe, away from everyone. And that ammo is also away. That is critically important. We don't want people to have easy access to guns if they're high risk. And what we've heard from Steven is there may be particular instances in which that happens, and so we all have to work together. This is just like designated driver, secondhand smoke, other kinds of campaigns. Family fire is really focused on making sure that all of us understand the risks of loaded, unlocked unsecured guns in the home, and the very basic things we can do. It's not anti gun at all. Just securing that gun in the home, all guns in the home, can save you can save the people who are on the front lines of protecting your community, law enforcement officers everyone. I can't understate it

S

Steven Hough 44:57

Along the lines of the weapons, you know, I'm a uh, I wouldn't say that I'm a big gun guy, but I have multiple weapons, and I've always trained with them, and I've always made sure to understand, you know, a firearm is a tool, and you got to know how to use the tool properly. Just like you said, with the driving, I was going to use the same thing. Just like with a vehicle, you've got to know how to drive your vehicle properly, or you're going to, you know, that's, you can wind up in the same situations. Now, when it comes to, as you said, about folks who are at risk, absolutely. I couldn't agree with that more. If you know, somebody that is having a difficult time, and there's multiple weapons around the house, you would be remiss if you did not take those actions to, to mitigate that possibility. But, and especially with with law enforcement officers, and this is again, this is goes right back to the to that stigma that we've been talking about all day is, you know, how bad it is, we don't know, or the family doesn't know, because the officer wants to maintain that control. They want, they have that, they do it 12 hours out of a day, they feel like they should be able to do it at home. And without question that if if we know there are things going on, securing those weapons securing, and I say weapons, I mean, obviously our crux here is guns, but any of the weapons that can be used for to cause harm to yourself, you need to be aware of, you need to be cognizant of it so that you can take the necessary steps to protect your loved ones. These are things that can get worked through with the proper, with proper counseling or talking with other individuals. I can't tell you how many guys have come to us and just once they've gotten it off their chest, they feel better, and then they're in, they get in the right frame of mind, and then we move forward with

helping them better understand that resiliency and build that resiliency up, to move forward in their lives. So securing that and stopping that one harsh decision. Absolutely. I don't know that anybody would disagree with that.



JJ Janflone 47:11

And on that note, so Steven, you've been amazing. And I hope you come back. I'm going to ask you on air so that you feel you feel guilty and like you have to. Okay, it's a psychological ploy. She's good at it. I told you 13 year old girl skills, I'm going to be emotionally manipulate



Steven Hough 47:29

Oh, dang. Okay



JJ Janflone 47:32

But so I mean, I think we have to have you back. Because this is I think the very beginning, you know, have a much longer conversation, that, that all groups who are interacting in this space need to be having back and forth with each other. You know, I think because the more we talk, the more people can hear, have an opportunity to hear, and the more people hear, the more they have an opportunity to listen. But as our time is drawing to a close, I'm wondering if there's anything that you would want to share with listeners here, who if they are worried about themselves or others, you know, where can they find Blue H.E.L.P.? And where can they find assistance?



Steven Hough 48:05

Gotcha. Well, I can tell you that you could find blue help just about anywhere at this point. So you could go to BlueHELP.org. You'll see a list of our of our sponsors, as well as our partnerships that we have with individuals. You can find us anywhere on social media. As a matter of fact, I would encourage you, if you would. If you put notes in your podcast, put my email out there. If somebody wants to contact me, or they want to contact Blue H.E.L.P., they can do that at contact BlueHELP.org. The biggest thing that I can tell you is in, and I said this the other day, was the majority of what we're seeing our law enforcement officers, our guys and gals going through right now the stressors that they are dealing with, are, are overcome with, you can definitely overcome it. There's a lot of push in the media right now to shed bad light on law enforcement and that weighs heavily on our folks out there on the streets to actually doing the job, doing doing the work that

nobody else wants to do. Stay positive, and if you need that help, reach out to us. And we can definitely, if we can't help you, we're going to put you, we're going to put you with somebody that can. And to the families that have lost loved ones to suicide, first responder suicide, please contact us, we're more than happy. We send out care packages all the time, to the families of lost loved ones, just to let them know, hey, somebody is thinking about you and we're here to help. So I would encourage anybody that is listening to the podcast, hey, if if you know of a first responder that is the need of assistance, give us a call.



Kris Brown 49:50

I also want to say to all of you listening today that for those of you who want to get involved, who care about Brady, and what Steven is doing, please go to our website, Bradyunited.org. And also if you want more information, you can find their information about the End Family Fire campaign that we talked about throughout this webcast. It's a critical life saving campaign really focused, not only on ensuring that children aren't injured unintentionally with guns in their home, but also reducing the risk of suicide. So if you want to get more information, please go to Bradyunited.org or EndFamilyFire.org.



JJ Janflone 50:39

Are you interested in sharing with the podcast? Listeners can get in touch with us here at "Red, Blue and Brady" via phone or text message. Simply call or text us at 480-744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever! And you know what else you can share? Chocolate. Come join me in eating your 2020 feelings by shopping Hu's KitchenChocolate which is free of dairy gluten refined sugar, palm oil and cane sugar. My personal favorite are the dark gems. It's a bag bursting with 70% dark chocolate -- paleo style. Click on the link in the description of our episode to help support the show and to buy you or your loved one some tasty treats. Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's life saving work and Congress, the courts and communities across the country is made possible thanks to you. For more information on Brady or how to get involved in the fight against gun violence, please like and subscribe to the podcast. Get in touch with us at BradyUnited.org or on social media @Bradybuzz. Be brave and remember -- take action not sides.