

The Role of the Real You Program for First Responders

In 2012, André Marin, then Ombudsman of Ontario, published the following report, “Investigation into how the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services have addressed operational stress injuries affecting police officers”. It was called “In the Line of Duty”.

The report outlines case studies, provides research across first responders, and summarizes events resulting from operational stress injury. Mr. Marin provides a list of 34 recommendations¹ in his report. The theme of the recommendations are in providing comprehensive support, education and training to all first responders and their families, while ending the stigma of operational stress injury.

The conclusions² provided in the report acknowledge the attempts of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to address operational stress injury. However, the conclusions highlight the ongoing need to for dedicated programming to support first responders.

The Real You Program and the Ombudsman Report

The Real You Program has been the exclusive wellness provider for Ottawa Police Services (OPS) for over ten years. The focus to date has been on the care of OPS members and on the continued growth and development of the program to better serve the needs of first responders. Given the ongoing challenges associated with operational stress injury, mental health concerns, physical health issues and suicide within first responders, a review of each recommendation provided in the Ombudsman Report of 2012, in relation to the Real You program and outcomes, has been completed. Based on the information in the Ombudsman report, the Real You is in a strong position to fulfill the majority of its’ recommendations. The table below provides a summary of four recommendations discussed in the report.

¹ Andre Marin, “in the Line of Duty” (2012), p136-146.

² Andre Marin, “in the Line of Duty” (2012), p135-136.

Recommendation	How the Real You Program Addresses the Recommendation	Applicable Real You Program Outcomes
<p><u>Recommendation 1:</u> The Ontario Provincial Police should take additional steps to reduce the stigma associated with operational stress injuries existing within its organization</p>	<p>The Real You Wellness Program has helped to eliminate any stigma related to operational stress injuries and bolster the importance of psychological well-being among the OPS organization by creating a culture of awareness and wellness that normalizes psychological counselling. With participants having seen a psychologist as part of TRY preventative wellness program, it normalizes psychological counselling and makes participants more inclined to seek help when they are acutely in need. Participants also report stronger workplace relationships and improved attitudes towards health and well being in the OPS organization, further reducing the stigma of operational stress injuries and increasing the likelihood of an officer reaching out for help when needed.</p>	<p>As reported by Real You Wellness Program participants: 90% agreed or strongly agreed that TRY program has contributed to improved attitudes towards health and well being among OPS members. In addition, a third party evaluation of TRY program revealed that the majority of program participants interviewed reported that TRY Program led them to be more willing to seek psychological help when needed.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 7:</u> The Ontario Provincial Police should, in consultation with police stakeholders, develop a plan to allow officers access to longer-term specialized support for operational stress injuries, absent the</p>	<p>The Real You Program is a 6-12 month program with the option of staying engaged longer, as required. By completion of the 12-month program, the majority of participants had reached their physical and mental well-being goals.</p>	<p>Approximately 30% of participants rated their health as 7-10/10 before beginning the Real You. By Program completion, almost 90% of participants were within the 7-10/10 range. Most participant interviewees continued to implement the nutrition principles and to exercise regularly up to 6 months after the end of the Program.</p>

<p>restrictions of the existing Employee Assistance Program.</p>		
<p><u>Recommendation 12:</u> The OPP should, in consultation with police stakeholders, the Canadian Forces, Veterans Affairs Canada and other police organizations, provide direct access for its members to psychological services, through retaining outside consultants, pursuing partnerships with other organizations or creating a physically separate, enhanced Psychological Services Section.</p>	<p>The Real You Wellness Program offers participants direct access to regular psychological services. These services are further enhanced by the integration and close co-ordination of the psychological care with nutritional counselling, fitness training, and comprehensive medical screening. The Real You team has been providing whole-person care to the OPS for over 10 years, during which time, a separate enhanced Psychological Services Section was not required, as the success of the mental health outcomes within the coordinated care plan have been exceptional.</p>	<p>As reported by TRY program participants: 60% reported having better or much better mood after completion of the program. 48% reported having better or much better self-esteem after completion of program. 56% reported having better or much better stress levels after completion of program. 60% reported improved mechanisms for dealing with stress. 45% make time for mindfulness and relaxation</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 15:</u> The Ontario Provincial Police should, in consultation with police stakeholders, research and implement a comprehensive, proactive and preventive “Safeguard” or enhanced education and mental wellness checkup program, available to all its members.</p>	<p>The Real You Wellness Program is a comprehensive, proactive and preventive "Safeguard" as it focuses on prevention and early intervention of illness through comprehensive assessments and screening tests. Treatment approaches are holistic, education-based and focused on lifestyle interventions. Through early intervention and its holistic approach (by improving mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health), the Real You Program is able to safeguard participants against the impact of future physical and emotional trauma with improved physical and mental resiliency.</p>	<p>New medical diagnoses are regularly made in 70% of Real You participants, despite the fact that 95% of these participants have a family doctor. These conditions range from vitamin deficiencies to cancer. The Real You has demonstrated a 65% reduction in risk factors in participants. Participants reported 20% fewer sick days after completing the Program, as well as 33% increase in the number of days they were able to concentrate at work after completing the Program. Notably 60% of participants reported improved resiliency for dealing with stress.</p>

As outlined in the Ombudsman Report, the Real You Program is a comprehensive program which provides support, education and training. An overall view of the Program is provided in this figure:

The Real You Circle of Care



A Unique Approach: The Real You Philosophy

The Real You Program is based on the philosophy that every individual owns their health. This is a very different approach to health care; as we are currently trained to do as our medical

professionals tell us, without taking ownership and leadership in our own health. All Real You health care providers are trained in prevention; the root of the program is to educate and empower the participant in order for them to take the necessary actions required to make positive changes in their life, ultimately improving their health, happiness and stability. The Real You Program believes that a person must be viewed in its entirety while addressing any specific issue. Someone with a chronic illness will not be able to address mental health issues without addressing their physical health.

Program Review: Key Findings from Independent External Review of the Real You Program 2011-2014

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (Malatest) was contracted to conduct the evaluation of the Real You Wellness Program on behalf of the Ottawa Police Service (OPS). This is the first formal evaluation of this program and covers the period 2011-2014 (corresponding to the first three phases the program was implemented after a brief pilot test in 2007).

The key findings with respect to program objectives were:

- The majority of stakeholders interviewed believed that the Real You Program aligns with long-term OPS health and wellness objectives and was consistent with the commitment of the OPS to the health and wellbeing of its members;
- However, a small minority expressed the view that the responsibility for employees' health rests should rest with employees rather than their employer, and some senior management held the view that the program represents a big investment in the health of a relatively small proportion of members and they would prefer health and wellness programs that would benefit a bigger proportion of the membership;
- Although there were many limitations in the data available for this evaluation, in general, an analysis of the available health data and survey responses for program participants suggests that the program has helped most participants improve their health and wellness and adopt a healthy lifestyle, at least in the short-term:
 - Approximately 70% of Program participants reported that the program medical team identified previously undiagnosed health conditions (which ranged in severity from vitamin deficiencies to cancer);
 - By the end of the program, Real You Program participants as a group experienced statistically significant improvements in body composition, including weight loss, body mass index, percentage of body fat, and waist-hip ratio;
 - By the end of the program, Real You Program participants as a group had significantly reduced levels of bad cholesterol;

- By the end of the program, Real You Program participants as a group had statistically significant improvements in the number of push-ups and partial curl-ups they could perform;
- Approximately 4 in 5 Real You participants reported that they had experienced positive health changes;
- Approximately 4 in 5 Real You participants reported that they had improved their eating habits and nutrition;
- Approximately 4 in 5 Real You participants reported that they had made physical activity part of their daily life;
- Approximately 3 in 5 Real You participants reported improvements in posture and balance, sleep, energy levels, mood, stress levels;
- A smaller percentage of Real You participants reported other health benefits such as reduction in blood pressure, pain, alcohol consumption, or smoking.

Although it was not possible to use objective data to compare Real You program participants to OPS members as a whole in terms of levels of engagement, productivity, or workplace conflict, survey responses suggest the program may have had a positive impact on some organizational outcomes:

- Approximately 3 in 5 Real You participants reported increased engagement, productivity, and reduced absenteeism; and
- About half of Real You participants reported a reduction in workplace conflict; However, past program participants that were interviewed suggested that their levels of engagement and productivity were already high prior to participation in the program and were not impacted by participation.

Conclusion

We are confident that, as aligned with the Ombudsman Report (2012), the ongoing reviews being done by the OPP will yield similar findings; comprehensive support, education and training to all first responders and their families. The Real You Program has proven, with over 20 years of experience and 10 years working with OPS that this is the program that addresses all findings.

The Real You Program will not only work with individuals to guide them with the ailments which they are currently suffering from, but it will ultimately be a way to provide the tools to prevent operational stress injury and chronic disease.

The OPP has the opportunity to put a pilot in place today that will begin to make a noticeable difference within a short period of time, as provided by the OPS and the Malatest report.