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Employee Assistance Program Reached Out to Bradley Co-Workers

- Counselor spoke with co-workers shocked by operator’s accidental death

By NED RACINE

(Sept. 21, 2007) No one in South Bay Division 18 expected Gregory Bradley to be killed during his evening shift Thursday, July 26. But even while word of the operator’s death spread through the division, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) began to offer assistance to shocked co-workers.

Bradley, 35, was killed when an SUV ran a red light and crashed into the driver’s compartment of his bus. Bradley was thrown through the windshield and pinned beneath the right rear wheels of his coach. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Hope Morrow, MA, a certified trauma specialist for ComPsych (Metro’s supplier of psychological counseling services) heard media reports of the accident and called her supervisors, informing them Bradley’s death would require counseling.

Then Morrow headed for Division 18, arriving very early in the morning July 27. Announcements on the public address system and flyers at the mark-up window announced her arrival. Transportation Manager Cindy Karpman lent Morrow her office for confidential conversations.

Cheryl Brown, assistant transportation manager at Division 18, noticed that Morrow was there before she arrived. “She was on point and stayed on point,” Brown recalled. “She was here for the operators.”

“In this type of situation (a sudden death) and this type of setting (the Division 18 break room), my role is to provide what is called ‘psychological first-aid’,” Morrow explained. “Essentially, I was onsite to talk to employees as needed. This may involve chatting in the break room—if the individual is comfortable with that—or



Carol Holben has been Employee Assistance Program (EAP) project manager since she joined Metro in 2003. One of the services EAP offers is grief counseling, which it offered at Division 18 following Operator Gregory Bradley’s death in a bus accident. Photo by Ned Racine

About EAP

The EAP’s confidential assistance offers help for personal concerns, including

- Relationships
- Problems with your children
- Substance abuse
- Stress, anxiety or depression
- Job pressures
- Marital conflicts
- Grief and loss

chatting in a more private setting.”

Financial and legal problems

‘Psychological first-aid’

- Child and eldercare resources

Although Morrow calls her approach “psychological first-aid,” Morrow notes these conversations are not psychotherapy. She frequently responds to bus and rail accidents for Metro.

Not as well known as its Traumatic Injury Program, designed to help bus and rail operators with their reactions to a traumatic accident, EAP often helps staff members absorb a co-worker’s death.

Hector Guerrero, assistant manager of the Rail Division Transportation, requested a grief counselor at the Rail Operations Center following the sudden death of Charles Walker, a Rail Operations instructor, on August 11.

Counselors have also visited Auditing and other departments following employee deaths over the past year. “We tend to do more individual counseling with operators after accidents because that is just what occurs here more at Metro,” said Carol Holben, Metro’s Medical Standards & Compliance administrator and licensed clinical social worker.

Holben has been EAP project manager since she joined Metro in 2003. Metro’s EAP has existed more than 25 years.

Holben emphasizes that the confidentiality of staff members’ conversations with Morrow and the other ComPsych counselors is protected by the counselors’ professional code of ethics, as well as by state, federal and Metro regulations.

Program is confidential

“The program can only be successful if people feel they can go and talk about anything they need to and it’s not going to get back to their workplace,” said Holben, who helped companies recover from the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

“When an employee death has occurred, I usually do a lot of listening, and then, depending on the individual’s needs, I am usually teaching about any variety of topics,” Morrow said.

“I might be teaching about what to expect during the grieving process so that the individual knows that his or her experience is normal. We might discuss the tasks of grieving so that the individual understands what’s needed to gain a healthy resolution of the grief process, or what actions the individual can take to keep the grieving process more manageable.”

At Division 18, Morrow recalled, some operators talked with her and some did not. Morrow discussed with operators what they could do to support the Bradley family and the possibility of creating a Gregory Bradley memory book for them.

“It was a shock,” Brown reflected on Bradley’s death. “It was horrible. I don’t want to go through that again.”

“It is important for people to have a confidential, professional resource to help them deal with the challenges we all face in our daily lives,” Holben said. “We want this for the personal sake of the employee, but it also helps Metro be more efficient because people are able to really focus on their jobs and not be distracted by personal issues.”

