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Newsletter November 2015

Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support

Firefighters Helping Each Other

GREETINGS from Lt. Matt Olson, ILFFPS Director

Dear ILFFPS Team Coordinators, Team Members, Illinois Firefighters and Family Members,

It's been a busy year and quarter at ILFFPS! We have seen a number of positive changes and are extremely excited for 2016! Josh Jessup has worked with our coordinators to create a Regional Coordinator position which will relieve some of the burden our coordinators had in communicating with our peer supporters. The structural changes will I believe, make it much easier and more efficient to communicate with everyone who has generously donated themselves and their time to this charity.

Dr. Cody Todd, one of our Clinical Consultants has created a modified curriculum that empowers ILFFPS firefighters to teach our firefighter peers our peer support program. We worked from this new curriculum in Collinsville with much success! Jada Hudson, our other Clinical Consultant is working with our peer supporters to identify capable therapists that we may refer to across the state of Illinois. This database when complete will make it much easier for our peer supporters to recommend to a peer a counselor when requested. I cannot say thank you enough to them for both of these ongoing efforts.

I have been working with Josh and Cody to create an outline that we can freely share. It is our intent to assist anyone who asks for help with the creation of their own peer support program to have access to what we have learned. This outline will document the steps that we have taken and will suggest a curriculum that may either be taught as is or modified to meet the needs of their own state. In just one example, we have been approached by the state of Alaska and have worked with their Fire Marshall's office to assist them with a program. Jason Dexter has even offered to help them lay out their web page and social media outreach so they have internet presence.

Josh, Cody and myself will be leaving this December for Palm Beach County, Florida where we will teach a peer support class that will also serve as a "train the trainer". Palm Beach is a large fire department



ILFFPS Mission Statement

To serve the fire service family by providing trained peer supporters who can give confidential, appropriate, and supportive assistance

ILFFPS Vision Statement

The Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support Team seeks to participate in the contemporary movement toward holistic wellness in the fire service by allowing peer support to become an integral part of the organization.

Value Statements

The Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support Team values the concept of Brotherhood in which firefighters have supported one another. This includes understanding that we have a duty to all firefighters equally, and that we are all deserving of genuine support by our peers in a time of need, no matter the need.

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with 1,400 members and are making efforts to create an internal peer support program to accommodate the needs of this deserving group of firefighters.

Kevin Kelly, one of our peer supporters was able to work with a friend of his, Joe Evans, on a poker run/raffle that raised \$9,000 for our peer support charity. THANK YOU BOTH for your efforts and kindness!

I have spoken with the Elmhurst, Northbrook and Manhattan fire departments about our peer support program and why I believe it is an important part of the fire service. I will this year speak to the group at the DuPage county silent parade to honor fallen firefighters about emotional wellness in the fire service and why it is so important.

Paul Gardner has generously agreed to be our Rosecrance Liaison and is helping to see that each session during this very important healing process for those at the Florian Program has a ILFFPS presence. This is a great opportunity to provide peer support to many in need. Each peer supporter I speak with who has attended a session is overwhelmed at how good it feels to be able to give back to these guys and gals.

I am excited to once again talk about FDIC 2016! We have been invited to present a 4 hour workshop on peer support. Josh, Cody and myself are working on modifying our curriculum to meet the needs of the workshop and also have our core curriculum available to anyone at the conference. It is important to me to recognize that we are a charity first and it is our mission to bring peer support to any firefighter who wants it. Our 501 (C) 3 charity is a thing, peer support however is a concept. This concept belongs to everyone and what we have done has energized me and hopefully will help the fire service as a whole when we share what we have learned. This is an awesome thing we have created and we won't sit on it, we will share it with those that ask.

I think about all of the peer supporters who have made time for this program, who have spent three days with each other sharing experiences and learning from one another. The peers who have left class and reached out to us in new and exciting ways to be involved with the charity and who have selflessly allowed themselves to become vulnerable in an effort to see that another firefighter doesn't struggle. It is an awesome thing to me. I have had a feeling of peace in my heart since so many of you have given yourselves to the concept of peer support first and the structure of our charity second. It feels great.

In closing, I saw a Dove a few weeks ago and began considering what the dove represents. In many ways it is representative of what we are trying to do here. The Dove symbolizes love, grace, promise,

*Another Firefighter
Peer Support
Training is Complete!*



On September 9th, 10th, and 11th, the Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support leadership team and **8 firefighters, paramedics and chaplains** gathered to complete another “Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support” training! We spent three days together getting to know the ILFFPS Team, its mission and goals, discussing specific personal and professional firefighter/paramedic concerns, and practicing firefighter/paramedic peer support.

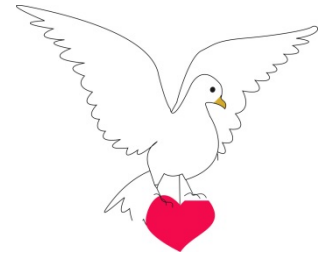
We believe that this class continues to be a very powerful experience for all and an incredible growing opportunity!

We look forward to our fifth training in November 2015!

We would like to acknowledge ALL of our team members thus far as they are creating and being part of something powerful and a growing resource for the Fire Service in Illinois!



commitment, sacrifice, hopefulness. These are the things that make up a peer supporter. These are the things that a firefighter in need is hoping to be able to connect with in their lives through us. The Dove also represents awareness. They have been hunted for centuries and have learned how to be aware of their surroundings, to recognize danger. ILFFPS peer supporters are all trying to bring a message of self-awareness as well as awareness of the things that can and will become harmful to us in our careers and personal lives. Most importantly to me, the dove represents peace. Peace is what I am able to hold in my heart after a dangerous year where I searched within myself high and low and wasn't able to find it. I finally found peace through a conversation. A conversation first and a call to action second; a call that each and every one of our ILFFPS peer supporters have responded to without hesitation and without fail.



I am proud to be one of you. I am thankful for the peace you all have brought to my heart and to another firefighter who may be struggling.

Take care,

Matt

Congratulations

...to all the firefighters and paramedics who have completed the ILFFPS Training

Brian Barna	Jack Berry	Matt Anslow
Brian Blaauw	Mike Bloom	Derek Bergsten
Craig Bowden	Art Zern	John Dempsey
Marc Doty	Pete Dyer	John Girone
John Elashik	Mark Findlay	James Graham
Robin Gorsline	David Griffin	Mike Kilburg
Tim Grutzus	John Halgren	Kevin Kalbach
Mark Klamut	Bill Leddin	Richard McCormick
Scott Moran	Tammy Morris	Andrew Perry
Jon Davis	Art Raunch	Tom Roate
Andy Scott	Troy Snider	Paula Tomczak
Ron Two Bulls	Chuck Wehrli	Brad Carter
Matt Daly	John Antos	Jeff Hall
Jason Boyles	Charles Jeanblanc	Danielle Fary
Kelli Krupa	Chad Lovell	John Sardina
Mary Robbins	Andy Dina	Dale Smith
Brian Sleighter	Todd Anderson	Dave Ashby
Stuart Blade	James Childers	Chris Coats
Paul Cundiff	Rhonda Foster	Todd Hitt
Chris Humer	Jon Jenkins	Barry Miller
Randy Smith	Jimmy Zindars	Ryan Hanson

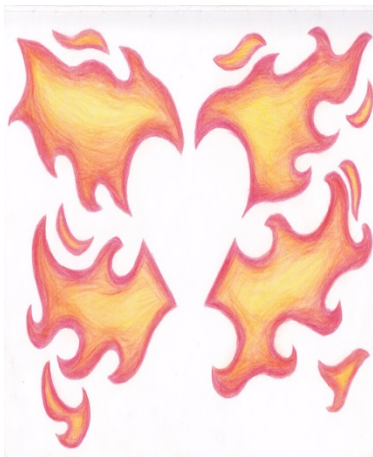
Taking the Plunge

Dr. Cody Todd, ILFFPS Clinical Consultant

The following few articles are written by our fresh Peer Supporters that took the plunge and completed the September 9th-11th Peer Support Training in Collinsville, IL.

A few of them graciously volunteered to share their experiences about the class so others who may be interested or unsure about what the class would be like would have a bird's eye view into their experience. It is also to help our existing Peer Supporters get to know some of our newest members.

Our hope is that as you read through this you will also have an understanding of the amazing humans that are choosing to be a part of the Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support Team and that it may also re-ignite or support your passion for this powerful mission and group each of us are a part of.



Paul Gardner
Jim Nichols
Doug Deadmond
Craig Krsek
Bob Martin
Joshua Jessup
Dean Jamrozek
Kevin Leverage
Michael Schnaper
Jason Rector
Tripp Wilson III

Kyle Dillon
Jason Dexter
Mike Karban
Paul Martin
Dave Foreman
Joe Corl
Matthew Knott
Phillip Nedved
Rebecca Tyo
Chip Haake
Matt Olson

Tom Howard
Daniel DeGryse
Kevin Kelly
Tom Rafferty
Jim Scharnhorst
David Hoppe
Randall Leek
John Bolling
Josh Way
Tim Rainey
Kurt Litteken

The Bravest Thing I Can Do

FF/PM Kurt Litteken, Collinsville Fire Department

Hello everyone. Let me introduce myself. I am a firefighter; a typical firefighter. Tough, proud, do it all, nothing can bother me firefighter. So maybe I've only been in the fire service 10 short years, but what a time it has been. Started as a volunteer in a small town, joined the Army, deployed to Iraq as a combat medic, returned home, had to fight for my job as I was passed over for employment while I was gone, became involved in the union, eventually moving to the position of president, worked through difficult negotiations and an even more difficult arbitration, and recently sustained a work injury. I've dealt with a pretty decent amount of stress and I'm still going strong. I bet I can relate to some of these guys and gals in the fire service that are struggling. You know what, I'll take that peer supporter class coming to town.

So, you've just read my game plan. This is what spiraled through my mind...the reason I felt I'd be a good candidate to become a peer supporter. I believed it then and even more so now.

Now off to class. We went around the room sharing personal experiences that affected us through our lives, some issues at home, some with our careers. As I sat in the class and listened to the introductions, I soon realized there was a whole lot more to me than what I knew. I became painfully aware of the tragedies in my life that I've bottled away since the beginning.

Then it was my turn. As I began to introduce myself, I was overwhelmed with emotion. The hardships I experienced as a medic in Iraq I had kept to myself for 8 years...until the moment of my introduction. All of the sick reality of the war I was a part of, along with the faces of every child, women, and soldier I couldn't save came to the surface. It was one of the most horribly emotional moments of my life and interestingly enough, the most refreshing and relieving. It

We All Need Each Other

Chaplain Dave Ashby, Champaign/Urbana Fire Department

There's an old saying, 'Confession is good for the Soul.' Well, that being true, I've got a confession to make right from the beginning of this article: Sometimes I struggle with the sheer weight of all the things that I have to deal with in life. I'm talking about everything! There are things at home, things at church (remember, I'm a Pastor), things with my friends, things with the first responders I serve, and then there's my own 'stuff'. And to be honest, it becomes quite a load. Then, throw in a 'curve'... You know, the unexpected situation, event, problem, crisis and it's a struggle.

A couple of weeks ago I was hit with a number of unplanned issues and came to Sunday morning feeling like I was at the end of my rope. Not being one to easily share my pain it was with great difficulty that I shared my need via social media/Facebook, 'I need you to pray for me.' The response was immediate.. life impacting.. a real game changer. It made a real difference to know that there were people who cared and were willing to share with me. All of which contributed to

was easy to see I needed Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support much more than it needed me.

After the first day of class I was able to reflect on the past 8 years and certain things that I had previously blown off all seem to make sense now. A bad call put me on edge. Union issues put me on edge. Even simple things put me on edge. Unfortunately, my wife and kids suffered the brunt of it all.

A light bulb went off. I wasn't helping anyone by keeping this crap to myself...not my family, not my coworkers, certainly not me. But why didn't I say anything earlier? Because I *thought* I was too tough, too proud, I could handle it all, and nothing bothered me. The truth is, I wasn't going strong like I thought. I always knew it affected me deep down, but I suppressed the hell

out of it because firefighters are supposed to be all those things I listed above. And the fact of the matter is, I would still be interpreting my situation the very same way if not for this incredible class. Matt and Josh truly made it safe to speak up. The environment they created made it easy to share, as painful as it may have been.

So what did I learn from this class? We all experience tragic events that impact us in different ways, there's always someone ready to listen to help us navigate through these difficult times, the power of conversation is truly remarkable, and most of all...I'm not alone. I was very fortunate to be part of this program and meet incredible individuals from throughout the state, all with their own stories to tell. It was a small class, but every one of us had painful issues to deal with. It made clear that firefighters everywhere can benefit by taking a moment to realize the bravest thing they can do as a firefighter is ask for help. I'm confident I'm in a better position to handle the daily stress I experience and listen to others if the need arises. Thanks to Matt, Josh, Cody, and all who shared their stories and listened.

What is This Peer Support All About?

Cpt. Doug Deadmond, Collinsville Fire Department

I found out about the Illinois Firefighter Peer Support Team at a union meeting a few months prior to attending the training. I knew very little about the peer support team, but thought it sounded like a very good thing that was needed in the fire service. After agreeing to be the point man for hosting a class, I was able to find a suitable location. I was also interested in taking the class and our fire department



helping me 'get my head on straight' and move forward.

Now I share this with you because it points out the fact that WE NEED EACH OTHER. This ultimately is what Peer Support Is All About--Helping Each Other.

There's an appropriate passage of scripture that comes to mind (remember, I'm a Pastor). Bear with me...

'Two can accomplish more than twice as much as one, for the results can be much better. If one falls, the other pulls him up; but if a man falls when he is alone, he's in trouble. Also, on a cold night, two under the same blanket gain warmth from each other, but how can one be warm alone? And one standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer; three is even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.'

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

The wisdom of Solomon speaks clearly. We need each Other:

1. Because we get more done... Two are always better than one.
2. Because we have someone to pick us up when we fall... And we all inevitably 'fall' in our lives from time to time.

administration was on board with sending three members to the training.

Like I said, I knew very little about the team and really didn't know what to expect from the class. I arrived the morning of the first day, which started with donuts, coffee, and registration, which is a normal routine for most fire service classes. After registration and small talk, the instructors introduced themselves. Having been to more classes than I can count in my twenty five plus years in the fire service, I was expecting the normal introduction of name, rank, department, years of service, etc. I was wrong!



The first instructor introduced himself, mentioning all the stuff above, but went far beyond that. He explained his story, mainly the hard times he had went through in the fire service. He opened up to us the worst time in his life and how he recovered from it. It was not an easy thing for me to hear, and not an easy thing for him to do.

The second instructor also introduced himself in the same manner as the first. He also went well beyond what an introduction would typically be. He talked about the difficult times in both his personal and professional life. Like the first instructor, he too offered how he had recovered from the difficult issues he had dealt with.

As most classes go, it was then our turn to introduce ourselves and tell why we were taking the class. Personally I don't like talking in front of people, but generally have no problems introducing myself. This introduction I knew was going to be different because of what the instructors had shared with us. They wanted to not only know who we were, but really know why we were there.

Unlucky for me, I was the first student to get to introduce myself. It was difficult at first, but once I got started it became pretty easy. The instructors had just shared their difficult stories, and now it was my turn. So I told my story about the most difficult time in my life. I had been in the fire service for a lot of years and had hit a point in my life where I could not go to the firehouse. After seeing doctors, a therapist, and going on medication, I was able to go back to work. I told them the reason for



there I Am in the midst

3. Because it gives us added strength... As every good firefighter knows.. If You're going to be good at your job, you've got to know how to handle a rope... and the stronger the rope the better. A 'triple-braided cord' is the best!!

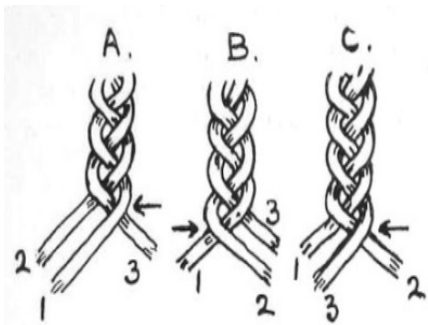


FIGURE 66.
Plaiting a three-ply braid rope.

Let's never forget—We're In This Thing Together. WE NEED EACH OTHER! taking the class was to help fellow firefighters through similar issues. know if the



ILFFPS was around for me during that difficult time, it would have been a tremendous help for me. The rest of the class was made easier by the instructors and other students because they made it “safe” for me to talk about my personal struggles. I'm sure the rest of the students feel the same way.

As far as the rest of the training goes, the scenarios were very helpful for me to understand what peer support is all about. It also taught me to be a better listener, which is the biggest part of being a peer supporter. As I told the class on the last day, going through the class was an eye opening experience for me. I learned that most people in the fire service have dealt with, or are dealing with some type of issue in their life that they could talk to a peer about. My hope is to spread the word about the Illinois Firefighter Peer Support Team so firefighters know that this **VALUABLE AND NEEDED RESOURCE** is out there.

What I Now Know

Cpt. Tim Rainey, Collinsville Fire Department

I began my career in 1987 when I joined the US Air Force as a firefighter. During the past 28 years I traveled to countless places, met a myriad of people from different countries and cultures, and saw many tragic events which should have made me reconsider my career choice. However, I continued in the career I loved and I have endured many additional tragedies alone and in silence. Tragedies such as the ones I experienced while deployed to the Persian Gulf; events that are indelibly etched on my mind and heart. Yet, I continued with my chosen profession and added to my knowledge base by becoming a Paramedic in 1994. This added responsibility only added to the repeated tragedies I experienced and increased the pain I hid for so many years.

Then, in the early 2000's I responded to an off duty fire to help an undermanned crew at a house fire with children trapped. I arrived and aided the lone firefighter trying to conduct a primary search for the missing 18 month old child. After finding and removing the child, who at this point was not breathing and did not have a pulse. I began CPR as I ran to the front yard to meet the arriving ambulance. The memory of this lifeless child in my arms and the memory of the skin separating from the child's face and remaining on my lips each time I breathed into her lungs will never go away. I became haunted by this experience for decades. It changed my outlook on my professional and my personal life. It made me angry at the city for not protecting the community appropriately, it caused me to lash out at those I loved and it made me despise myself for not doing more. More tragedies

Firefighters and Eagles: A Shared Heart

**Jada Hudson M.S.,
L.C.P.C., ILFFPS Clinical
Consultant**

Strong, brave, and fierce are adjectives you may use to describe a firefighter. They are also appropriate adjectives to describe an eagle.

For most of us, eagles are a sign of dignity, inspiration, and strength. The bird makes a fitting national symbol of our country. In fact, eagles are so important, when they began facing extinction because of their precarious environment, the country launched a campaign to remedy the situation with a change in attitude towards the environment.

Firefighters also operate in difficult environments, and the ILFFPS is trying to change the negative behaviors and attitudes that exist concerning the need for emotional support within the fire department.

Like eagles, firefighters are worth fighting for. But the similarities don't end there..

Eagles are the only birds that love the storm.

While other birds flee for shelter, eagles anticipate the storm with excitement. As the winds rise, they catch it under their wings and use their frame

followed, which only solidified my pain, anger and untimely apathy for the situations I faced.

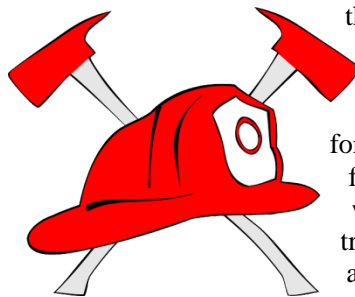
Fortunately for me and all my Brothers and Sisters, the Illinois Firefighters Peer Support group made itself known and I attended one of their training classes for peer supporters. I entered with trepidation and fear of what was to occur, and left with a feeling of rejuvenation and empowerment. I told my story and quickly realized I was not the only person in the room that harbored tremendous pain. All the participants were welcomed with open arms and I felt I was in a safe place where everyone was as confused and "broken" as I.

I left the class with a new hope and optimism for the future. While I still have work to do in my life, I know now there is a group of men and women who I can feel safe offloading my fears and concerns. This is a group that will not judge me but will support me in my journey. Additionally, I felt weighed down, figuratively, by the buckets that stored away my feelings. As new events affected my life I would simply add another bucket without ever emptying the earlier ones. Now I have a way to slowly empty my buckets and relieve some of the pain and anguish I have. None of us will ever be truly free from the horrors we experience, however, with the support of fellow firefighters we can all be safer.

My Peer Support Training Experience

FF/PM Jon Davis, Alton Fire Department

My name is Jon Davis. As a FF/EMT member of the Alton Fire Department, I was able to participate in a peer support training offered in Collinsville over a three day period in September. Our department has steadily sought out resources that might support our people through the difficulties we see with our job and personal lives.



I am convinced that ILFFPS is a good fit for people in our line of work. From the first day of training, personal experiences were encouraged and shared among the trainees. The training environment felt safe as each of the instructors and trainees had a personal connection to the fire service that helped each of us relate with the various levels of sharing that occurred each day.



to lock their wings in a fixed position to stand against the fiercest storm.



Likewise, firefighters anticipate danger and never shrink from it. Instead, they face it head on, using their own unique gifts to weather whatever comes their way. One of these gifts is the ability to bravely face the unknown, especially when they are called to care for community members at their most tragic moments. It is a unique trait I recognize in every firefighter I've ever met and truly comprises the heart of what they do.

However, Tim Grutzius, who is a Regional Coordinator on the peer support team and a lieutenant with the Alsip Fire Department, says that while those are good attributes to have, the same traits can become a detriment to the firefighter with respect to taking care of his/her own behavioral health. "The prevalent culture of the fire service dictates that it is a sign of weakness to admit that a firefighter needs help with respect to behavioral health and therefore would rather suffer in silence than be ostracized by peers," he says. Tim explains that the Illinois

Our training concluded on Friday, September 11th and I remember thinking throughout that day how much pain first responders are faced with on a regular basis and how rarely those same people take time to triage their own physical and emotional needs.

That same day, I made a commitment to be a peer supporter because I believe in the purpose and mission of ILFFPS and care deeply about my brothers and sisters in the fire service and the families that count on them. ILFFPS is a valuable network for Alton first responders and anyone else around the state in need of peer support. I am grateful to know that others have already stepped up before to take on this type of care for first responders and I am glad to be aware and a part of ILFFPS now.



Embracing Change

Colleen Murphy- ILFFPS Family and Significant Other Coordinator

Yesterday I dropped my 4 year Old Owen off to his first day of pre-school at a daycare he has been attending for the last year. It was his first time in a new room with a new teacher, so lots of change for the little guy. We arrived early so that I could get Owen comfortable with the classroom before leaving. I stuck around for an hour participating in the morning lesson holding on to a very nervous and sobbing Owen. He broke down a few times in my arms and told me he "didn't like it there and wanted to come home" all while hugging his blankie for dear life. He finally said to me "just go" he knew I would be leaving him eventually and just wanted to get it over with.

The second I got to the car I burst into tears and balled like a baby the entire way home. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, why this moment was so upsetting to me. I was crying as if I had lost someone and the pain was tremendous!!! It was in those ugly moments that I realized I was reliving my own first day of school and what a difficult time that marked for me in my own childhood. My first day of school was the beginning of my mother slipping into a depression over her fathers battle with cancer who then later passed the following school year. Watching my mother walk away that day as the tears rolled silently down my face while I stood all alone in the kindergarten line was symbolic of the emotional disconnect I was about to endure when her depression rolled in.

Firefighter Peer Support Team was created to enable a shift in this cultural view by assisting brother and sister firefighters in need. Through tireless, proactive means such as education and outreach, ILFFPS has garnered the attention of the firefighters in Illinois, other states, and even the country of Ireland.

However, Tim feels there is still work to do to make this cultural shift a permanent and lasting mark on the fire service. "Much like the eagle that can soar above the looming storm, the firefighter should always have the courage to take the high road in the face of adversity," he said. "Firefighters should never hesitate to ask for help, for it is just a phone call or an email away."

Eagles support their young.

Despite their reputation for ferocity, eagles are protective, patient parents. When it is time for their babies to fly, the eaglets are systematically driven from the nest until they have no choice but to fly. As they take that step off the nest and fall through the air, their



Seeing Owen cry was like watching a reflection of myself as a child and knowing that hurt, emotional neglect, and feelings of abandonment, with my mother were around the corner. Several things I learned from this experience 1. This was an opportunity to heal myself and understand my mother's depression was not my fault, that she is human and was dealing with some tragic circumstances that would probably pull any parent away from their child to a point. 2. Owen is not me! He is a completely different person and I need to honor that and understand protecting him from what I experienced as a child is not what's best for him. 3. Owen has his own journey in life and there will be times that he brings me back to my own memories, some more painful than others. I understand much like "fight or flight" when these thoughts begin to surface for me as his mom, I can either face them head on and cry them out or I can keep them buried and let them detour me from what Owen needs the most which, is a someone to raise him according to his personality and not what did or didn't work for me as a child.

I've learned to live in the moment with him, I observe his play from a distance at times and I listen to his thoughts and concerns and from there I build confidence in his character. I try to softly send the message, that he has the power to make himself happy in life regardless of any circumstances that come his way. I will always be there to guide, but I can't be the one to fix it, or live it for him and that is really what parenting is all about. Separating your own upbringing from what your child's true character really is and honoring who they are as a person and not what we wanted for ourselves.

When I got home last night I warned Dan to be prepared if this hasn't happened to him already as a father it's probably common for many parents I would assume. Seeing the world through your child's eyes and not your own can be a challenge to your past and can stir up some painful memories. Don't run when it happens, face it, and understand here's your chance to LET IT GO and your child is a gift and opportunity to make it right.



mother will catch them on her back if they fail to take flight on their own. Again and again she will repeat the process until they are able to soar independently. This illustrates the patience and selflessness that we see from leaders at the Fire Academy as well as the Peer Support Team. When fellow firefighters “fall”, others are there to catch them, train them, support them and make sure they have all the skills they need to succeed in life, no matter how long it takes.

Eagles never give up living.

Many people believe that when an eagle becomes old or injured they will retreat to a mountaintop by themselves. They will shed their beak, talons and feathers and over a five-month period they will regrow their removed body parts to regenerate and extend their life. Only in their lowest condition, after shedding their



weakest parts, are they able to regrow stronger, more resilient body parts to complete their life’s journey. This is representative of the Florian Program for firefighters at Rosecrance. As one patient

Here's what Owen really learned yesterday:

Crying is ok and acceptable
Change is scary
How to self-soothe
Mom or Dad always come back

The result: He is looking forward to his next day of school and he is building confidence in himself. He is learning that change is a part of life and that he has gotten through it on his own now once before; thus making it easier for the next change that comes his way.

Are We Balanced?

Engineer Joshua Jessup, ILFFPS Lead Peer Coordinator

I was given a good, hard, well-deserved smack in the face a few weeks ago. I had been extremely busy at work with shift trades, overtime opportunities, meetings, travel for a conference and helping to organize and complete training for ILFFPS and the CFD Peer Support Team. I had neglected my most important "job" and was failing at home. The smack was delivered in the form of a very emotional, frustrated, angry, and upset 8 y/o boy named Jack. Jack is my Type A, rule following first born son. Jack reminded me how important his daddy is to him and how much he, his brother and sister and their mom, the love of my life, Amy, need me to be present - not just there, but PRESENT! Sitting in a parking lot of a Panda Express in Champaign Jack laid it all on the line for me - very emotional and yet very mature communication. I could do nothing but say, "you're right buddy" and then decide what I was going to do about it.

It was very clear what I must do - I needed to find a balance in my life so I could do all things that I found to be important, helpful and necessary and I needed to re-prioritize my life back to faith, family, friends and then firehouse/department. If this means giving some things up or putting some tasks aside momentarily then I will face that reality and make that choice. You see, when I am focused, balanced and have my priorities in order all is well in my world and I'm hitting on all cylinders, but when one part of this balance is off (even just a little) it has a profound effect on other areas of life.



said, "The Florian program is like a "reset" button. It is a place to begin again.

Just as eagles retreat to the mountaintop, firefighters enter the inpatient program at Rosecrance to find support beyond what the Peer team can provide. There, only after shedding the weakest part of themselves, can they find the tools they need to renew their body and spirit and emerge stronger than ever. In the midst of their brothers on the force, they can engage in self-care and spend several weeks developing the tools they need to help them with their addictions so they can continue all the good work of a firefighter.

So while they may not have wings, firefighters have much in common with our brave



friend, the eagle. They show us the greatest example not only of bravery and selflessness, but also of self-care and resiliency.

According to Webster's online, Balance is defined as..."a state in which different things occur in equal or proper amounts or have an equal or proper amount of importance"

And, interestingly, balance is also defined and explained within the IAFF Wellness Manual...

Maintaining balance minimizes physical & behavioral risks for fire fighters.

Balance is also a key factor for behavioral health. When behaviors, moods, thoughts and emotions are not in balance, a high-risk situation for the firefighter and his or her job can occur. Unhealthy or aggressive behaviors, negative moods, thoughts and emotions can disrupt the balance of effective functioning both in life and on the job. Fire fighters would never consider walking off balance on the ladder during a rescue. Maintaining balance in behavioral health is also critical to fire fighting. The mind and body are not separate entities but thoroughly interwoven, connected. Mind and body combine together to produce the whole person just as hydrogen and oxygen combine together to produce the fire fighter's most effective tool - water.

Being in balance - physically, emotionally, spiritually, occupationally, psychologically - is quite a feat/goal but I can say from my limited experience that joy and happiness are present and abundant when I'm leading a balanced life. One very important part of my balance is to get away and unwind and "get off the grid". Every fall (over Columbus Day weekend) we travel with family and close friends to Destin, Florida for 5 or 6 days. I spend each day trying to decide if I should play and lay around the pool or on the beach and doing nothing more than that! The warm, salty air and the powdered sugar sand do something for me - it's a happy place! I mostly disconnect while we are there and we enjoy watching the sun move across the sky from sunrise to sunset and watching the waves roll in and out - we just enjoy the beauty that's been created for us with few distractions.



As I reflect on the importance of balance and how the warm, tropical, salty air help me unwind and reset, I can't help but think of one of my favorite birds, the flamingo. Flamingos remind me of the beach,

Changes in ILFFPS

Dr. Cody Todd, ILFFPS Clinical Consultant

There have been a few recent changes and additions to mention about the structure of our team.

First, we now have four Regional Coordinators to cover NE & NW- Jason Dexter, SW Suburbs & Cook- Tim Grutzius, EC & WC- Jimmy Zindars and S & SC- Andrew Perry. Please welcome them to their new positions within the Team's Structure. Each Regional Coordinator has selected or kept previous Coordinators. Please welcome and acknowledge Jason Boyles, John Sardina, Josh Way, Chris Humer, Chuck Wehrli, Jack Berry, Tom Howard, Mike Kilburg, Brad Carter and Kurt Litteken!

Another addition is FF/PM Tom Howard has taken on the Coordinator role for our Faith Supporters. As of now this group is created from all over the state and includes any of our Chaplains or Peer Supporters that has expressed interest in this part of our team! Please thank Tom for taking on this essential role in further supporting and developing Faith for those that reach out to

the tropics and happiness. Flamingos can often be found in a group just relaxing and enjoying life and looking beautiful and many times, standing on 1 foot - but completely balanced! So, my personal challenge is to find and maintain balance and to pursue joy and happiness in the places that matter understanding that my wife and kids will be by my side through this career and into retirement and in my opinion should be the top of priority list! Are you balanced? What areas of life could use some attention or less attention to bring the scale back to neutral? What brings you joy and happiness? Are you actively pursuing that?

I Saw that Face Again Today

DC Art Zern, Sycamore Fire Department

I saw that face again Tuesday, you know the one... The face, of a fellow human being that had just witnessed an event that would remain etched upon their mind, forever. I have seen the face countless times over the 35 years I have been doing this job.

The first time in my memory of that face was of my Grandfather. We had just dragged the body of my Father out of his car in my Grandparent's garage; it was Thanksgiving Day 1972. My parents had a fight a few days earlier as they often did; however, this one was particularly cruel. Those of you who had alcoholic parents know these days well. On this Thanksgiving Day, he had not returned from wherever he went at these times. In seeking a chance to avoid my Dad's inevitable return and the fireworks that would ensue, I asked my Grandparents if I could go home with them, it was my safe haven. As we pulled into the driveway, I got out of the car to open the garage door. There was my Dad's car; running. It didn't immediately dawn on me what had happened. As long as I live, I will not forget the face of my Grandfather, and I am sure he didn't forget the face of his Grandson, till the day he died.

It is the face of a father kneeling over his daughter in the middle of a busy street. He was crossing with his three kids and with only two hands available his older daughter had gotten a bit ahead. His face was blood stained from a father's futile attempt to save his daughter.

The face at fires, where loved were lost or when the fruits of a lifetime of labor and irreplaceable memories vanished in minutes. The face of a mother, confronted with the lifeless form of her child. Her sudden realization that in an effort to provide comfort and get some sleep, had rolled-over and unknowingly suffocated her baby.

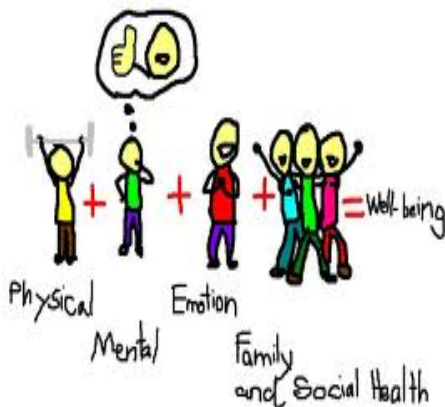
The face of another mother, unable to understand why her baby wasn't

our team looking for help in this area.

Retired DC Paul Gardner has also taken on the role of the Liaison between ILFFPS and Rosecrance's Florian Program. He has graciously stepped in this role and has created and developed guidelines for participation as a Peer Supporter in the Rosecrance Program. Thank you Paul for taking on this imperative role!

Our last big change has been my role. Over the past few months you may have noticed this switch and that our team has gone in a slightly different direction. There may be questions, but I can reassure that everyone at ILFFPS whether past or present, is together united in the belief that Firefighter and Paramedic Wellness is THE priority. We are excited about our direction but we will always honor the past.

We are growing and the message is getting out there! We wish each of you safety, love and wellbeing!



breathing yet knowing instinctively, there was no hope. She knew and I knew, but, the face. I could think of nothing but my daughter, about the same age, the same size. I scooped her up and started mouth to mouth as I ran down the stairs of the apartment building, hoping the ambulance would arrive soon. I knew there was no hope but I had a daughter, I had to try.

Tuesday, the face, of a woman in the course of her daily routine, a witness to the last decision of a desperate man. He stepped in front of an express commuter train. We arrived to a horrific scene, and a lone woman. I immediately recognized the face, the face of a fellow human being that had just witnessed an event she would never forget. She was quickly whisked away by the police and I hope she will be OK. I hope they all will be.

But what about you? What will you carry? What will you allow yourself to put down?

We're In!

FF/PM Kelli Krupa, Villa Park Fire Department

On October 13, 14, and 15, Lt. Tim Grutzius and Retired Lt. Paul Gardner and I, had the pleasure of presenting Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support (ILFFPS) along with a short mental wellness lecture to MABAS Division 21 hosted at Chicago Ridge FD. This included North Palos F.P.D, Roberts Park F.P.D., Oak Lawn F.D. and Chicago Ridge F.D. This division, along with so many others, has had little to no exposure to the topic of firefighter wellness and ILFFPS. Also, recently there was a tragic loss of one of their own from suicide.

My father-in-law Al Krupa, who will be retiring in early 2016, is a firefighter/paramedic in Chicago Ridge. He, being one of the senior guys at the department is someone I have always been in awe of due to his enthusiasm for our team since I brought it up to him upon applying. As you know, the senior guys mainly drive the fire service culture, the "old boys club" who are still around and mentoring the newer generations. He shared the ILFFPS video at Chicago Ridge proving even our barn bosses, our mature voices in the stations, are ready and willing to make it safe for our family. Things took off from there as Victor Kiman, who coordinates wellness related training and



Rosecrance Visits Ideas

Ret. DC Paul Gardner, ILFFPS Rosecrance Liaison

Below are a few quick tips about participating in ILFFPS's visits to the Florian Program at Rosecrance. If you would like more information or want to go please contact me at paul@fireic.com.

What do I talk about?

Introduce yourself to everyone and how you are there to support them, this is really appreciated.

Convey your personal story and why you are involved in peer support.

This opens the door and lets them know that you too have had something in your life effect you.

You may be asked about how you were able to overcome your situation, where it stands now, and how you continue to cope with it.

Be sure that you only share what is comfortable.

The schedule for the day is listed on a large chalkboard; discuss and ask about what their day involves.

Have they been able to have contact with loved ones? This can be a hard topic. Some family may be at the edge; others are very understanding.

information at Chicago Ridge F.D., reached out to ILFFPS for a presentation of peer support.

Knowing the recent sad news from that area and having many friends and even family working in that division, I knew if they were reaching out to me I had to be a part of it. Tim was awesome enough to ask me to present and I got to work making a short presentation out of tools we received in the Peer Support class in Champaign along with utilizing the ILFFPS PowerPoint.

We found out on Day 1 that this was to be a mandatory drill day for the companies in attendance. Tim, Paul and I all agreed this was less than optimal and would surely be quite the 'tough nut to crack.' As the guys filed in, the apprehension was abundantly clear. Paul and Tim, being brave enough to tell their personal stories from the start got the attention of the room. I presented the mental wellness presentation, which was extremely well received, and when I got around to my history, we all agree there was a noticeable shift in the room. Granted mandatory attendance to these presentations is not exactly optimal, it proved to be worthwhile and quite well received.

Having an inside ear in the division, I have heard through the grapevine nothing but excellent feedback. People are talking. **THE TOUGH GUYS ARE TALKING.** We have had numerous requests for future presentations; some from departments that have been in attendance over the last few days that want more exposure to the topic, some from chiefs looking to implement this concept at fire academy level, and some from departments who are starting to realize they need to get in line and get behind this ball that's rolling. Victor and Chicago Ridge are anxious to hold a Peer Support train-the-trainer class to introduce this even further in an area we do not have many Peer Supporters. My own chiefs at Villa Park along with Mabas Division 12 have requested a presentation in the very near future for those departments. Chiefs are on board. Senior guys are on board. Younger guys are expressing heartfelt interest in becoming part of this movement.

While presenting for Division 21, I missed EMS CE at Villa Park. To my amazement, I received numerous messages congratulating me on our video making it into Region 8's PTSD continuing education. We are in, guys are listening, and it's taken off. I encourage any of you, who have not done so to present regardless of your nervousness as before this I had only presented at my Department. Our devotion and the heart we put into this team shines through and will spread this



If they have family it is very important in their recovery.

Ask how the twelve step program is going. Convey on to them how important the twelve steps are in their recovery as this is a large component in the treatment program at Florian. Ask if they have gone to any narcotics anonymous or alcoholic anonymous meetings? If they have this opens an avenue for conversation.

One of the best things that you can do is listen and allow them to explain how they are progressing. Everyone there is looking for hope and we can give them some.

What should I not say or talk about?

Do not discount the twelve steps as that would deviate from the program. Do not talk about how you consume alcohol and or any drugs which includes legal or illegal.

Watch if you say “I can relate to that or to you” this can open Pandora’s Box which you may not want open. Although being empathetic is a powerful part of listening and sharing.

Just remember that if our Brothers and Sisters are in treatment, that they are struggling with sobriety and we do not want to not minimize the negative relation they have with alcohol and/or substances.

much-needed change like wildfire. I look forward to presenting to other divisions, changing more people’s minds and, with the help of my peers, inspiring conversation that can and will save my Brothers and Sisters.

Delivering the Message of the ILFFPS

Lt. Tim Grutzius, ILFFPS Regional Coordinator

On September 25th I had the privilege of giving the ILFFPS presentation to the Moraine Valley Fire Academy in Palos Hills, IL. Fellow team member Paul Gardner attended this event both in support, and to observe how I delivered the message. There were 14 firefighter candidates who attentively listened to my story, the history of the ILFFPS, and the resources available to them. As they watched our new video, I could immediately sense the connection they made with those on the screen who told their individual stories.



I asked these young aspiring firefighters if they could remember one thing I said it would be this: We all have a personal story that we bring with us to the fire service, and it is this history that can profoundly affect how we react to calls for service, especially if (it/they) are very similar to our own life experience(s). Therefore, we must look out for each other on the street, in the firehouse, and after the shift has ended.

On October 13th through the 15th, a team consisting of Kelli Krupa, Paul Gardner, and myself had the opportunity to deliver this same message to some members of the Chicago Ridge, Oak Lawn, and North Palos fire departments which was hosted at Chicago Ridge. Kelli created her own version of the ILFFPS presentation and took the lead on all three days. I felt it was fitting to do so since her father-in-law Al, works for the Chicago Ridge fire department. This event was also attended by battalion chiefs, assistant chiefs, and the chief of Oak Lawn/Chicago Ridge.

ILFFPS Leadership Team



**Matt Olson,
ILFFPS Program
Director**



**Joshua Jessup,
ILFFPS Lead
Peer
Coordinator**



**Jason Dexter,
ILFFPS Regional
Coordinator for
NE/NW Regions**



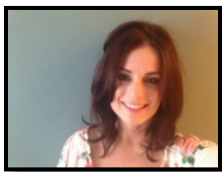
**Tim Grutzius,
ILFFPS
Regional
Coordinator for
SW/Cook
Regions**



**Andrew Perry,
ILFFPS Peer Coordinator
for S & SC Regions**



**Jimmy Zindars,
ILFFPS Peer
Coordinator for
EC & WC Regions**



**Colleen Murphy,
ILFFPS Family
and S.O.
Coordinator**

ILFFPS Clinical Consultants



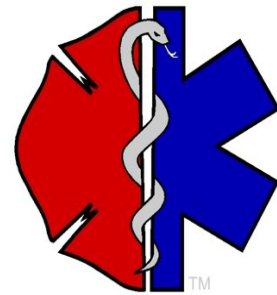
**Cody C. Todd Psy.D.,
L.C.P.C., ILFFPS
Clinical Consultant**



**Jada B. Hudson
M.S., L.C.P.C.,
ILFFPS Clinical
Consultant**

Before each presentation, Kelli said she was nervous at the start but then settled in and owned the day. On the days he attended, Paul used his years of teaching experience to break the ice with the attendees that was much appreciated by Kelli and myself. Many times it would seem as if the attendees sat there stone-faced, and the message was not being received. However, as Kelli related the story of her mom's suicide, the energy in the room changed immediately and the true connection was made (all three presenters felt this). Chief Sheets remarked that although it seemed as if the message was not received, his firefighters were talking about it after they returned to their respective firehouses.

All in attendance were appreciative of our time and efforts. In fact, both North Palos and Oak Lawn showed interest in hosting us at their departments to ensure all members receive the same experience. Chicago Ridge is also considering sponsoring a peer support training for MABAS 21. Future outreach events will include presenting to the South Cook paramedic, and Moraine Valley EMT programs.



Thanks to all that contributed to this edition of ILFFPS's Newsletter! Could not do it without the TEAM!!

-November Edition 2015