

ILLINOIS FIREFIGHTER PEER SUPPORT

Firefighters Helping Each Other

National Newsletter | Summer 2017



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TURNING A NEW PAGE

A Letter from the Executive Director

By: Matt Olson

Hi All!

This past six months have been busy as always, and I am pleased to announce that ILFFPS will be turning a new page with Tom Howard as the new Executive Director. I am incredibly thankful for Tom.

Tom understands the personal sacrifice that comes with being the director and selflessly has chosen to give of himself. I cannot thank him enough! I know that he has your support and, with all of you, ILFFPS will continue to do great things for firefighters not just in Illinois but nationwide.

ILFFPS will continue to provide our peer support vision and tools to anyone who asks. We have, with Jada Hudson been able to bring peer support to many places. We will be leaving this July 13 to bring our vision to Virginia. We also taught at FDIC and are forever grateful for the support of you and others. Jada has generously volunteered her time and energy to support the growth of peer support in Illinois and other states. She has been able to bring the clinical components that we as firefighters need to all of the departments, charities, and firefighters who ask for our assistance. THANK YOU both Tom and Jada:)

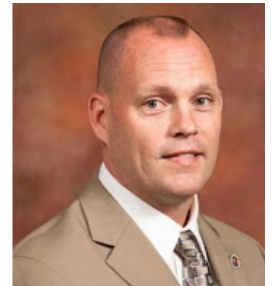
Dr. Kristy McKiness has also continued to share herself personally and professionally with ILFFPS, the firefighters who request assistance and the peer supporters looking for advice. It brings a smile to my face seeing how our volunteers, and especially our clinical professionals, are changing the fire service and removing the stigma previously associated with emotional wellness.

I also want to recognize Andy Perry who has been a rock of stability ever since the very first ILFFPS training. He and I were recently honored to present at the Illinois Association of Fire Protection District in Peoria. Andy has always been a place that I could go for advice, for assistance and for ideas. He won't ever tell you this but he is one of the reasons that ILFFPS exists in the successful form that it is today.

You guys are and have always been a blessing in my life.

Yesterday I found myself at the beach club swimming with my 12 year old. I smiled because the only reason that is possible is because all of you are willing to pay it forward for the fire service with the work that you do. Volunteering isn't easy but you all do it. You are amazing people. I am going to enjoy a few more years doing exactly that and then head down to Florida to find some sun in retirement.

Thanks all of you for being who you are! -Matt



ILFFPS Leaders

Executive Director

Tom Howard

Director of Program Development

Matt Olson

Public Relations Director

Kelli Krupa

Clinical Director

Dr. Kristy McKiness

Clinical Director of

Program Development

Jada Hudson

Lead Peer Coordinator

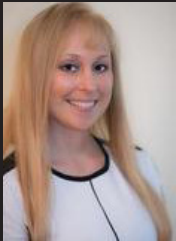
Andy Perry

Significant Others/Family Coordinator

Colleen Murphy

A Letter from the Clinical Director

By: Dr. Kristy McKiness



Greetings everyone!

I continually feel privileged to be a part of the ILFFPS team, and want to thank all of you for your investment into ILFFPS. As of April 2017, we have over 230 peer supporters that are a part of our agency! This number is a reflection of our growing influence and support within the fire

service, and also a reminder that we need to remain vigilant about ways we can extend our mission. Although we receive consistent peer support requests via our website and hot-line, we have more peer supporters than peer support requests. Therefore, your ideas and contributions to extend our mission have been integral part of our growth. These contributions have included Outreach, ideas for CE's, writing articles for our newsletters, participating in events such as Road To Help, distributing flyers/challenge coins within your departments, responding to peer support requests, and personally referring peers to our distinct programs within ILFFPS. As we continue to grow, these venues will allow for different opportunities to remain active as a peer supporter, and also to promote our support for the fire service. A genuine 'thank you' is order to all of you. Please feel invited to contact myself or Executive Director Tom Howard with any additional ideas and/or ways you would like to actively participate as a peer supporter; we welcome your thoughts! Enjoy the summer. Stay safe and be well.

Dr. Kristy McKiness

A Letter from the Editor

Hello Everyone!

I am pleased to announce that we have shifted roles, a bit, within Illinois Firefighter Peer Support, and I am now taking on the position of Clinical Director of Program Development. I now have the honor of helping ILFFPS launch new programs to help our firefighters and their spouses!

Within my new role, I have had the opportunity to assist Matt in training other states to create their own peer support programs: Minneapolis, Huntington, IN, Florida, North Carolina, and we are scheduled to go to Virginia in the coming weeks. We have also participated in outreach and training with the Batavia Fire Academy and South Side FOOLS.

My new focus is on helping ILFFPS develop new programs, so if you have ideas of programs that would benefit the fire service, please reach out to me at (630) 815-3735! I am really excited about getting new programs off the ground. (If you would like to learn more about my Substance Abuse Recovery Training, turn to page 4!)

I am so thankful for Matt's support and the freedom he has given me to start new programs. And, I know Tom Howard is the perfect man as the new Executive Director!

Special thanks to Chief Dan DeGryse of Chicago FD for allowing me to come on a ride-along (see pictures on page 11). It was such a cool experience getting to ride on the Chicago Fire Boat, The Wheatley.

In this transition, I will be turning over the creation of this newsletter to Tom Howard, our new Executive Director. I look forward to seeing all the insightful content our peer supporters and directors will put out in future editions.

So, I guess this is, "Good bye," and "I'm still here." I am available by phone if you need my assistance. I am also available to listen to your ideas and requests and to see how we can work together to continue to make ILFFPS and all of our fire service safe.

Feel free to call me to share your ideas (630) 815-3735 any time.



Be kind to yourself,

Jada B. Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
Certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor
or
ILFFPS Clinical Consultant
Jadahudson.lcpc@att.net

The Handoff

By: Tom Howard, Executive Director



This past spring, I had the opportunity to visit New Orleans. While there, I spent an afternoon sitting on a levee of the Mississippi River, watching barges make their way to the Gulf of Mexico. It was an incredible sight, especially for a

northerner that imagines the Mississippi as a mostly straight river running north to south. amazed at Matt's excitement about giving the program away. If I remember correctly, part of what he asked was whether I was okay with giving away the parts of the program I'd written, which I was. But I was taken aback by the idea of donating everything we'd developed. Matt's view, however, was simple: "I can't sell something that needs to be out there to help others."

Having been through seminary and involved with ministry for many years, I quickly recognized ILFFPS as a ministry without a Cross. I knew from that moment that I wanted to be part of this organization, helping my fellow first responders. Shortly after that meeting, I was asked to form a group that would respond to faith issues and be available for those who had questions about how their faith and careers can come together.

Calmer Waters

So, I met with Matt for coffee again early this year, and he discussed his idea to transition out of the leadership role within Illinois. He then shared his desire to have me assume the Executive Director role. Although not anticipated, I cannot begin to express how grateful I am for the opportunity to lead the group into new, open waters. As Matt got us through the hidden dangers and unseen undercurrent, I now have the task of directing ILFFPS further down our own river. With the help of a great leadership team and a couple hundred volunteers, we can go in whichever direction we need.

Above all else, I want everyone to know I am committed to continuing the core values Matt put in place — primarily the idea that everyone needs to know we're out here. Through simple conversation, we can normalize the craziness of what we do. And this isn't anyone's retirement plan. When I'm done, I intend to hand it off to the next person. Let's continue to make it safe to say, "I'm not okay right now."

If you have any questions about where ILFFPS is headed or how you can help, don't hesitate to let me know.

- Tom



ILFFPS Mission Statement

To aid and serve fire service and emergency response members and their families by providing trained Peer Supporters, who can deliver confidential and supportive assistance whenever and wherever needed.

ILFFPS Vision Statement

Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support seeks to contribute and provide ongoing emotional wellness resources that are readily needed in the fire service and emergency responders.

Value Statements

Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support values the concepts of Making it Safe and Making it Matter. These values are upheld by an understanding that we have a calling to care for all firefighters and emergency responders equally, and that we are all deserving of genuine support by our peers in a time of need, no matter the need.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.ilffps.org

VISIT OUR FACEBOOK
<https://www.facebook.com/ILFFPS>

northerner that imagines the Mississippi as a mostly straight river running north to south.

While watching, it was explained to me that the southern portion of the river — especially near New Orleans — is some of the most treacherous water to navigate, and requires a captain, specifically trained in those waters, to come aboard and steer. Once the vessel has cleared the dangerous area, control is handed off to another captain, who then continues the journey in the open waters of the Gulf. The captain that takes over is no less capable. He just possesses a different set of skills.

As I listened, I couldn't help but think about our current transition with ILFFPS — a necessary, overdue idea that started with Matt Olson's desire to create a network of firefighters responding to peers struggling with the effects of their jobs. Matt was the right person, at the right time, to make it work.

Give It Away

Just like the barge captain navigating through New Orleans, Matt had a lot of rough water to get through. For those of us involved since early on, we witnessed many of the changes needed to get our organization off the ground as well as to keep the organization functioning. As ILFFPS has developed, the time has come for us to begin thinking about the long haul.

When Matt called and asked if I would like to meet for coffee, my first reaction was, "Of course, I love coffee!" Then, I wondered why he wanted to get together. I'd met with him a few times previously, but mostly at teaching sites.

Matt and I had a meeting like this once before, in the early stages of ILFFPS. I'll never forget the conversation and how I walked away

The 5 C's of Successful Aging

By: Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC



According to author Mitch Anthony, author of *The New Retirementality*, successful aging means living with vitality, continuing to challenge oneself mentally and physically, continuing to move forward, keep going, and try new things, and treating oneself as if he has many more years to live.

"The 5 C's of Successful Aging" according to Mitch Anthony are:

- **Curiosity:** Learning new things and growing your awareness.
- **Challenge:** Keeping your mind sharp by trying something new.
- **Connectivity:** Living and working in close proximity to friends and family.
- **Creativity:** Finding ways to solve problems, make something new, or fix things.
- **Charity:** Giving ourselves or our resources to help others.

Ask yourself:

What is something you are curious about that you could learn more about? What is something new or challenging you could begin to pursue? Who do you want to connect with in the coming months and years? What is one problem or project you want to fix or finish? What is one cause that matters to you that you could become more involved with in the coming months and years?

One of the ways retirees can begin to envision a successful aging into their future is to picture someone who has aged well. Anthony refers to these individuals as "**retirementors.**" They set the example for how to approach this new, final season of life. They go and do something with their retirements. They use their time and energy for their good and the good of others.

Who is someone you could look to as a "retirementor"?

FIRST RESPONDER

SUBSTANCE ABUSE RECOVERY

Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC

Join **Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC**, the ILFFPS Clinical Director of Program Development, for an educational presentation covering...

- Why people become addicted
- Breaking an addiction
- Overcoming withdrawal
- Ways peer supporters can help
- Relapse
- Effective recovery strategies

It's not too late to sign up, and CE's are available!

When: August 30 & 31 | 9:00am - 12:00pm
(Choose which day you'd like to come!)

Location: Oswego Fire Department, Station 1
3511 Wooley Road | Oswego, IL 60510

RSVP to:

Jada Hudson | HUDSON.ILFFPS@ATT.NET



From Tom Howard

We are working hard to open our range of addiction treatment options. While we have enjoyed our prior relationship with Rosecrance, and we expect to continue that relationship, we also want to provide other options. Addiction treatment, like so many things in life is not a one-size-fits-all. I would recommend making yourself familiar with options as addiction issues come up frequently in peer support.

Suck it Up?

By: Tom Howard



There used to be a paradigm in the fire service that though this job is hard, we should just “Suck it up, buttercup.” Okay, maybe that’s not an exact quote, but for sake of time,

that’s what I meant. Sadly, some people are still holding on to that ideology and forgetting that we are humans.

I recently helped present about ILFFPS and emotional wellness with a couple other peer supporters at a conference breakout session. We were there to introduce ILFFPS and to give a little history of why we do what we do. Our audience was made up of retired firefighters and others who were connected the fire service, but have never been on the front line.

At the end of our presentation, we each shared a bit of our background and why we are involved in ILFFPS. My peers made a point to state that at ILFFPS, we don’t see ourselves as a replacement to many of the other wellness options out there for first responders. Rather, we see ourselves more as another option. When I talk about what we offer at ILFFPS, I like to say that we are one of many tools in the toolbox of self-help. (I won’t beat around the bush though; I do think we are the best option!) After the formal presentation, we all hung around to field the typical questions that come up afterward. As expected, a few people came up and asked individual questions that each of us were happy to answer, nothing too technical. That’s when it happened.

One gentleman came up and wanted to know what was wrong with

us. He went on to say we just needed thicker skin or maybe we should get a different job, if we can’t handle it. Well, that’s an interesting comment: “that we can’t handle it.” The three fire fighters that were there happen to have over 75 years combined experience. I would have to say that without a doubt, the three of us certainly can do this job.

I wanted to be mad, but really it made me sad. Not for us, but for him. See, every time I make a presentation or even talk about peer support, I figure there is always that one guy sitting back thinking the same thing, “Oh, here comes the hug team.”

I’ll be blunt. In 2016 there were 131 fire fighter deaths by suicide, while fire-related deaths remained half that number. Is this gentleman saying that we should be telling these families that the person they loved, the person that gave their all, should have had thicker skin?

“I’ll be blunt. In 2016, there were 131 fire fighter deaths by suicide, while fire-related deaths remained half that number. Is this gentleman saying that we should be telling these families that the person they loved, the person that gave their all, should have had thicker skin?”

Let’s not stop there. How about we point out the divorce rate or the number of addictions that we see our brothers and sister fighting? Should we be telling them to just “walk it off”?

Would we tell someone that fell off a roof, “Just rub some mud on it”? The answer is likely, no. We need to get better at making it safe to say when we are struggling. We need to know that there are some people out there who won’t understand what we are doing or why. But, if I could see their hearts and thoughts, I have a feeling that what they really are saying is, “I’m hurting, and I don’t know what to do.”

“There are some people out there who won’t understand what we are doing or why. But, if I could see their hearts and thoughts, I have a feeling that what they really are saying is, ‘I’m hurting, and I don’t know what to do.’”

In the end, he just left. He said his piece and moved on. My hope is that, one day, we will get to meet again over coffee and share our story of staying strong together.

“Friendship ... is born at the moment when one man says to another “What! You too? I thought that no one but myself . . .” — C.S. Lewis



Do You Have His Back?

By: Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC



On Sunday, October 23rd, the Arizona Cardinals played the Seattle Seahawks in a riveting game that ended in a disappointing 6-6 tie. As I read a recap article about this game, the author sparked the idea for this article. This game was officially the lowest-scoring NFL game that ever went



into overtime, and during all this playtime both teams missed what would have been game-winning field goals.

Though Chandler Catanzaro of Arizona had already scored two field goals – one from 40 yards and one from 45 yards – he missed a 24-yard field goal with only 3:26 left in overtime. Then, Stephen Hauschka of Seattle missed a 28-yard field goal. Both teams stood, shocked. Both coaches were obviously disappointed.

During their post-game interviews the teams' coaches had distinctly different responses to their kickers' shortcomings:

Cardinals head coach Bruce Arians shook his head, stating, "Make it. This is professional, this ain't high school, baby. You get paid to make it."

Meanwhile, Seattle head coach Pete Carroll responded, "[Stephen Hauschka] made his kicks to give us a chance and unfortunately he didn't make the last one. He's been making kicks for years around here ... but he's going to hit a lot of winners as we go down the road here. I love him and he's our guy."

It's obvious which team players would rather be a part of. One coach threw his player under the bus. One coach had his player's back.

Brotherhood in the Fire Service

As with sports, the fire service is filled with high-pressure situations. But, in the fire service, a misstep in a high-pressure situation can mean the difference between life and death. And sometimes, the wrong combination of information, equipment, people, and timing can make a mistake inevitable.

Think back to a mistake you made. Remember how you felt and how you wished you could make it right. Your peers can relate. They've been there. Experience puts firefighters in a unique position to help their peers recover from mistakes. That's why they call it the "brotherhood."

"The brotherhood is broader than just one department. It spans the entire fire service. Peer support exists to bring back the brotherhood. Even if your department doesn't have your back, peer supporters do."

Getting back to the brotherhood starts with your word choice. When a peer makes a mistake, how you respond can make the difference between him feeling safe to talk about it and him feeling ashamed enough to bury the feelings. Use words to encourage and build him up rather than tear him down. This is your team! You want him to win.

The brotherhood is broader than just one department. It spans the entire fire service. Peer support exists to bring back the brotherhood. Even if your department doesn't have your back, peer supporters do.

Like Coach Carroll, we should be asking, "Do I have his back?"

Rather than throwing your peer under the bus with a sideways joke or comment, consider how you can encourage him. Try to point out where he did succeed. Share your personal experience with something similar. Remind him that everyone has bad days. Keep him focused on the long-term game. Speak positively about his mistake to others. The job of a firefighter is hard enough without peers tearing you down.

Do you have his back?



A Weekend with TEMA

By: Tim Grutzius



Earlier this year, I had the honor of sharing the ILFFPS mission as well as the collaborative partnership opportunity we have with the Rosecrance Flori-

an program at the Tema Conter Memorial Trust Common Threads educational conference that was held on February 10th in Vaughan, Ontario, Canada.

Taken from their website, the history of the memorial trust is as follows:

"In 1988, former paramedic Vince Savoia attended to the homicide of Ms. Tema Conter. This event not only changed his life, but it also changed the lives of the Conter family.

Dealing with feelings of guilt, anger, and frustration, Savoia began his battle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Flashbacks, nightmares, isolation, and hyper-vigilance were some of the symptoms that he needed to deal with.

In 2000, Savoia requested permission from the Conter family to establish a Trust that would end the silence and ease the suffering of others like him who were dealing with PTSD. The Trust would also serve to honour the memory of the Conter family's beloved Tema.

The Tema Conter Memorial Trust began in 2001 as a modest charity offering scholarships to paramedic students. Today, it has grown to become a hub for research, education and training, as well as a peer and psychological support resource for the men and women serving in Canada's public safety organizations.

In 2011, the Trust welcomed Canadian actor, Enrico Colantoni as its national spokesperson. With Enrico's help, and the simple yet powerful slogan, "Heroes Are Human", this charity has

been able to spread awareness across the country and beyond. In the summer of 2014, volunteers of the Trust and various speakers and celebrities embarked on a cross-Canada PTSD-awareness tour that reached thousands of people in 47 towns and cities from Newfoundland to British Columbia." (Tema.ca, 2017).

The Annual Common Threads educational conference took place on Friday and had over 300 attendees. I was a little nervous prior to my session, but once I started to share our story - I quickly hit my groove. Through feedback, I was told that my presentation was well received. I had several attendees sign a sheet requesting more information about what we do. I also had conversations with several of our brothers and sisters from Canada, and learned that there are no borders between countries concerning first responders with respect to physical and emotional wellbeing. The rest of that day I attended several other breakout sessions with topics that included mindfulness, spousal/significant others "First Eyes" program, and "Essential Characteristics of First Responder Therapists".

That evening, I attended the awards ceremony dinner honoring TEMA volunteers. Additionally, several educational scholarships were given to students who are entering the public service and military professions. These individuals are required to submit and essay covering any of the following topics: PTSD, critical incident stress, signs and symptoms of stress, etc. They must relate this to present day emergency services, and include their own thoughts on researching the topics (TEMA, 2017).

On Saturday evening, I attended the Heroes Tribute Gala along with 500+ other first responders, families, supporters, and Members of Parliament. This annual gala serves as one of several fundraisers that the Tema Trust

holds throughout the year (they are a charitable organization). This event included both silent and open auctions, a preview of their new public service announcement, keynote speeches, and a night of fun and networking.

A major highlight for me was to meet people whom I have followed on Twitter for over a year and vice versa. It truly shows how small this world really is when we came together for the "common thread" of advancing wellness for first responders. Yesterday, I wrote Vince and his team a letter of thanks (I share with you now) of what this weekend really meant to me:

Dear Vince and TEMA Team,

Time has flown by so quickly since I had the honor of sharing my story and what we do here with Illinois Firefighter Peer Support. This past week has been one of great reflection upon all that I had experienced over four days spent in Canada. Everywhere I went, I was greeted by the most kind, heartfelt, and authentic people who welcomed me with open arms. However, last weekend was about a whole lot more.

Since my diagnosis of PTSD in 2014, I have looked for ways to expand my posttraumatic growth- always in a positive way. Often this is accomplished by public presentations of my story and how peer support became a big part of my continuing recovery on this awesome healing journey. Other times it simply happens through observation of human interaction.

(Continued on page 8)

Continued: A Weekend with TEMA

I had the privilege of watching a dedicated group of individuals (led by you Vince), each of whom share their unique individual talents with the sole purpose of advancing the awareness of behavioral health issues that affect first responders. I also find it most wonderful that you provide scholarships to future first responders, and have even inspired the Tema student group who will ensure that the next generation (s) live a more balanced life both during and after their time in public service. So, how did this affect me?

As I write this letter, I realize that after the sharing of stories, tears, and hugs with people whom I just became acquainted with- my posttraumatic growth expanded 1000-fold. This humbling, human experience will be something that I remember for as long as I live and breathe on this planet.

With abiding respect and gratitude,
Tim Grutzius
Illinois Firefighter Peer Support
Team

There were many more experiences and stories to share, but I can only put so much on paper. If you want to know more, reach out to me so we can chat. It truly was a life-changing experience. For more information about TEMA visit their website at tema.ca/home

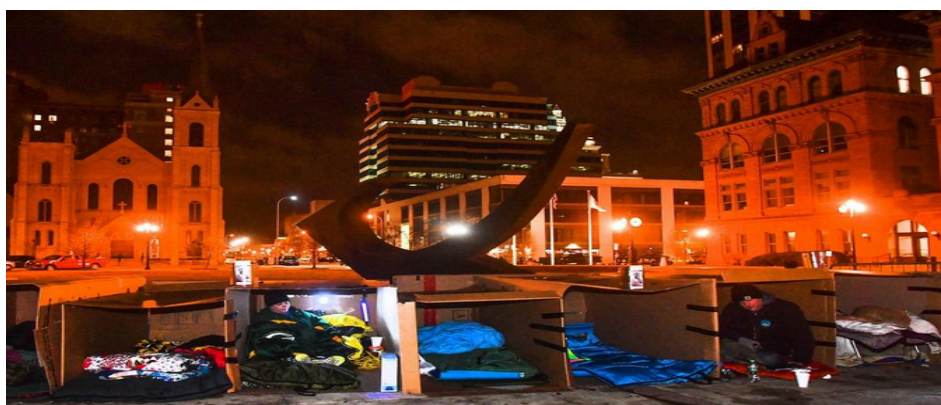
Until next time-
Be well and stay safe,
Tim

Homeless for the Night

By: Andy Perry



On Friday, January 13, 2017, I slept in a cardboard refrigerator box, out on the cold, front entrance to the Peoria Civic Center. From 6:00pm to 6:00am, seventy of us came together to raise awareness and funds to support those without homes in our community. During our night of homelessness, the sponsoring not-for-profit group led a series of educational presentations focused on homelessness and its impact on our community. Everyone who participated was asked to raise \$1,000 for the “privilege” of being there, and altogether we raised \$64,000 toward permanent supportive housing and ending homelessness in Central Illinois. We, first, considered the idea when it came up at a monthly union meeting.



Cardboard Box “Shelters”

Photo Credit: Ron Johnson/ Journal Star

Thereafter, three Peoria Firefighter Local 50 members signed up along with our Assistant Fire Chief. We met up in the lobby of the Peoria Civic Center and signed in a few minutes before the event kicked off. So began our twelve hours of homelessness.

I must admit the 28-degree temperatures felt pretty cushy, as I was bundled up in long johns, sweat pants, snow pants, t-shirt, sweatshirt, down-feather coat, ski gloves, and snowcap. I felt my first pang of guilt.

Next, I chose my house. I picked a 27-cubic foot refrigerator box and positioned it next to my fellow firefighters’ homes, but not before spreading a yoga mat down beneath it for an additional barrier between myself and the cold concrete. I felt my second pang of guilt.

Next came the industrial grade waterproof, gooseneck feather filled, arctic-rated sleeping bag. At this point, ten minutes in to the night, I felt like I was cheating, until I looked around at similarly dressed and prepared participants that looked ready for a trip to the North Pole.

“I must admit the 28-degree temperatures felt pretty cushy, as I was bundled up in long johns, sweat pants, snow pants, t-shirt, sweatshirt, d-feather coat, ski gloves, and snowcap.”

(Continued on page 9)

Continued: Homeless for the Night

An awkward feeling-out period began next as people began to mingle and chat and discuss the night ahead. A man with a bullhorn informed us there would be pizza delivered in a few hours, there were warming stations just inside the foyer door, and armed security

“... naturally, I couldn’t sleep. This was a blessing, though. It allowed me time to think about the experience on many different levels.”

guards staffed the entrance and exit locations to keep out the riff-raff – many of whom I suppose were actually homeless. This time the guilty pang hit me with a bit more sense of irony and hypocrisy. Nevertheless, a few hours passed, and I decided to hit the rack.

I laid down and snuggled into the sleeping bag and found a nice hole in the box near my head. Although it allowed the 18-degree temperatures and 10mph wind from the ENE to infiltrate my bedroom, it served nicely as a hanger for my eye glasses. The festive mood outside slowly died down, and naturally, I couldn’t sleep. This was a blessing, though. It allowed me time to think about the experience on many different levels.

I originally signed up to gain a simple understanding of what it would be like to be homeless. I had envisioned meeting at a predetermined location, hopping in the back of a van and being dropped off on a random street corner left to survive the elements and surroundings of the real “Street Life.”

The guilty pleasures of having warm clothing, a safe environment, and warm food, put a damper on those notions. All was not lost, however. It was still humbling as I lay there without my CPAP machine or my dogs at the foot of the bed. My wife wasn’t there, and

my kids weren’t in the rooms next door. This was enough to help me empathize with the true sick and suffering persons ailing with homelessness every day and night. I thought of the uniformed police officers working overtime to ensure my safety. I

had never seen similar security details in my 23+ years of being a Peoria Firefighter. At the time this was written, Peoria had ten shootings in the previous week. I thought of the times when, as a first responder, I muttered under my breath, feelings of being ‘put out’ by such emergency responses.

I reflected a little deeper into the underlying reasons for some of the homeless individuals to begin with – under-education, addiction, PTSD, assorted mental disorders, feelings of unrecoverable despair, and other contributing factors of life’s unbalanced equity for all. I eventually fell in and out of sleep for the remainder of the

“I reflected a little deeper into the underlying reasons for some of the homeless individuals to begin with - under-education, addiction, PTSD, assorted mental disorders, feelings of unrecoverable despair, and other contributing factors of life’s unbalanced equity for all.”



***The Community Showed up to Support this Cause
Photo Credit: Kristen Berchtold/ South Side Office of Concern***

night. After 6:00am rolled around, I left for home feeling exhausted. My next-door neighbor, a brother firefighter of mine, undoubtedly left tired as well, as he continually pounded on my exterior wall a few dozen times throughout the night at my snoring.

By no means did this experience give me a 100% insight on what it truly means to be homeless, but in addition to the experience itself, I was enlightened and left speechless by two of the donors that helped me raise my monetary goal. One indicated to me that he was happy to give because he had been there in real life. I had no idea. Another was my niece, an elementary school teacher in a deprived Peoria neighborhood, who told me, “I’m so proud of you uncle Andy. This will directly help many of my students!” We probably must walk a mile in another man’s shoes to know the real story, but there is some benefit to walking a half-mile – especially if it gets us out of our comfort zone. I look forward to next January.

Andy Perry
Illinois Firefighter Peer Support
andrewperry100@yahoo.com
@andrewperry100 on Twitter

How to Listen So Your Spouse Feels Heard

By: Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC



Have you experienced conflict with your spouse recently? What if you had the power to diffuse the situation immediately by how you responded?

Your body language and word choice can either build tension or diffuse drama. Try these simple listening skills to improve communication and stop conflict:

- **Be curious.** What does your spouse mean? What is his primary motivation here? This is the person you love! Genuinely try to understand.
- **Mind your body.** Is your body language communicating openness or hardness? If you are crossing your arms, shaking your head, or turning away, you may be perpetuating the tension. Instead, nod your head, lean slightly forward, and try to keep your arms and legs uncrossed.
- **Only listen.** As she speaks, set aside your personal thoughts and feelings. Don't interrupt. Don't plan your response. Just listen to understand.
- **Watch for feelings.** What does his body language say about how he feels? Did he mention any emotions when he was speaking? Try to put yourself in his shoes and feel that feeling with him.

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Never Leave Behind Those Who Lift Us Up

By: Tim Grutzius



In 1994, as a newly commissioned firefighter, I thought I was going to save the world and immediately immersed myself into this new career. Around that same time, I became engaged to (my now wife) Judy, who in her own right, started a career as a 3rd grade teacher. She was supportive in all I did (and I, her) to educate myself in all things firefighting. I took as many classes as I could and was going Mach II (no pun intended) with my hair on fire. We married in October of 1996.

Fast-forward to that period, and I now recall an early anecdotal story from our marriage. Our first "home" was a 2-bedroom apartment in Alsip where Judy had just prepared this wonderful dinner that was about to be set on the table. Suddenly, the phone rang. I picked it up and the conversation went something like this: "Hello. Okay, I will be right there" (now Judy was busy in the kitchen and did not hear the I'll be right there part of my conversation). When I hung up, I told her that the firehouse called for a standby, and I proceeded to put my shoes on. She asked me "Where are you going?" and I said, "the firehouse." Judy was under the impression that a standby meant I would do this from home. I grabbed my coat and headed out the door. I vividly remember the disappointment in her face as I left, only to return 4 hours later.

What I realized in that moment was that during the first 2 years of my career, I had educated myself in firefighting, but failed to teach Judy the jargon/lingo. She knew what a general alarm signified each time the pager and community sirens activated, but not the standby. Ugh! She is the one who lifts me up, and I left her behind. As the years passed, Judy became a crafty veteran firefighter's wife.

"What I realized in that moment was that during the first 2 years of my career, I had educated myself in firefighting, but I had failed to teach Judy the jargon/lingo."

However, there was one thing neither of us had anticipated: what this job would do to my psyche. Every first responder knows that he/she is going to see bad things when they raise their right hand and pledge to serve and protect. It is something that comes with the weight of this oath. Everyone will respond differently to the cumulative trauma to which they are exposed, as some are more grounded than others. Me? I suffered for over 16 years with undiagnosed PTSD after bearing witness to the suicide of a colleague. Judy had to deal with the ups and downs of mood swings, road rage, family feuds, etc. I am forever grateful that she is still with me because a less resilient person may have walked away. I know in my heart there had to be times she wished for someone to talk to that could relate (be her peer support). During that time in our lives such support did not exist. Judy is my best friend in the whole, wide world-, and it is because of her selfless love that I am still in the fire service today.

My point here is that not only do we commit to a 20-to-30-year career when we swear an oath, but also our spouses, children, significant others, and even pets. They know that by the very nature of our chosen vocation, we are going to miss many a milestones, along with holidays, barbecues, soccer games, etc. because we cannot always switch days to attend these outings.

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Continued: How to Listen so Your Spouse Feels Heard

- **Reflect back.** After your spouse has finished speaking, repeat, in your own words, what she just said. Focus on her main point, and summarize what she said. Use this reflection to clarify what she really means and to communicate that you heard her.
- **Respond right away.** One of the strongest drama diffusers is immediate action. Maybe your spouse needs help. Help! Maybe your spouse feels hurt by something you have been doing. Stop! And apologize! Maybe your spouse needs more time with you. Clear something off your schedule!

As you work to understand and communicate that understanding to your spouse, it will become more natural. So, keep practicing. Keep reflecting. Keep responding.

Continued: Never Leave Behind Those Who Lift Us Up

This comes with the territory, and our families gain acceptance to that fact. It doesn't make it any easier, but it does happen. Unfortunately, there are many relationships that will not survive this lifestyle commitment. If we work a 24/48-hour schedule, we will spend just less than 1/3 of our lives apart, and this doesn't include overtime, training, public opportunities, and more. Add to that the stress of behavioral health issues that inevitably arise within the relationship, and what can we do to ensure that those we love are not left behind? Education.

Here at ILFFPS, we have the spousal/significant other program that is headed by Colleen Murphy. Colleen is a firefighter's wife who offers that perspective, along with Matt Olson who contributes to the firefighter side of this presentation. I encourage departments who haven't already done so to offer this program to their newly engaged, newly married, and even veteran couples of their membership. All attendees will take some nugget of wisdom home with them.

The one statement that Colleen made that I will always remember went something like this: "You have to be very careful how you deal/speak with one another (as colleagues and as couples because each person brings a history with them to the fire service. It is this history that will determine how an individual may react on a call for service." Here is an example: A firefighter grew up in an abusive, alcoholic home. He/she reacts inappropriately at this scene because it was an all too familiar childhood scenario. In years past, we would give that person "their space" or even gossip about this behavior. Today, we must make a commitment to having an honest conversation by asking questions not only of the first responder, but also those that lift them up.

Looking back at Judy's disappointment about the standby, I now realize that it was my duty to immerse her in the culture/jargon of the fire service way earlier, before she was left to eat this awesome meal that she created out of

the key to ensure a healthy first responder, especially important to talk about the tough issues such as behavioral health. The firehouse gets us for 2-3 days a week, the rest spent with those who are closely invested in our welfare. If you don't feel right, share that with your best friend(s). The Zac Brown Band penned a song titled Last But Not Least which tells the story about someone who re-commits to a relationship after realizing he/she left a significant other behind. Listen and follow along with the lyrics in the sidebar on page 12. If this resonates with you, challenge yourself to take a step back and reflect on what is most important in this world to you. If you need further assistance, don't hesitate to contact Colleen. Most assuredly she can give you a nudge in the right direction. Until next time, be well. - Tim

Chicago Ride-Along Pictures



Continued: Never Leave Behind Those Who Lift Us Up

"Last But Not Least"

There ain't enough of me to go around
Got all kinds of reasons
To be all over town
Spread thin and broken down
Everybody wants a piece
Oh darlin I'm afraid

You've been last but not least
Everyone I love the most
Has to take what's left of me
I put it all together
But I left out one big piece
I put you last
But you're not least

Nothing ever takes the place of you
Sometimes things that may not matter
Jump in front of things that do
And your fine to stand in line
While history repeats
But oh darlin not this time

Last but not least
Everyone I love the most
They deserve the best from me
I put it all together
When I found that missing piece
You were the last
But you're not least

I go left when I should go right
I chase the dark when I see light
I trip and fall down every time I try
To walk that line

The sun comes up I look for rain
I search for joy and I find the pain
I swear I will not forget again
Last but not least

Last but not least
Everyone I love the most
Is gonna see the best of me
I put it all together
When I found the missing piece
You were the last
You were the last
But you're not least

Intuition vs. Communication:

Reflections from a West Suburban Fire/Rescue Alliance Training

By: Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC



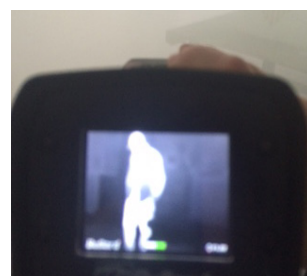
Firefighters from Carol Stream, Wheaton, Winfield, West Chicago, Bloomingdale, and Roselle gather regularly for trainings and simulations, as a part of the West Suburban Fire/Rescue Alliance. Since its inception in 2012, the Alliance has remained committed to the idea of partnering neighboring fire departments for faster, safer emergency responses. About a year ago, I had the honor of attending one of the Alliance's cooperative training sessions in which they, together, tackled a commercial fire.

Battalion Chief Hugh Stott of the West Chicago Fire Department invited me to step inside the building and see, firsthand, what a firefighter experiences in a standard commercial fire. Since commercial fires are more dangerous than residential fires, training sessions like this are invaluable for sharpening a firefighters' ability to navigate large spaces, use the most effective tools and tactics, and communicate, especially with members of other departments.

Upon entering the building, the crew first checked the cameras. Cameras weren't part of the fire service until about 10 years ago, but their use has revolutionized the fire service, just as the widespread adoption of radios improved the fire service in the 1980s. Cameras can help the crew discover the origin of the fire, and watching the heat flow can reveal the safest ways to navigate the fire. Most importantly, cameras can show if there civilians in the building, who are in need of help.

As I watched these firefighters make their way through the building, I noticed that they used a variety of techniques to orient themselves to their surroundings since visibility was limited. Because it is easy to become disoriented in a large commercial building, the team members were careful to stay together to avoid losing anyone. They carried a rope with evenly-spaced knots, indicating how far into the building they were. As they moved forward, these firefighters tapped the floor to make sure the floor wasn't hollow. As a standard safety measure, they kept the hose to the right of every room, close to the wall, so they could easily find the exit route. Meanwhile, the RIT team stood by, prepared to rescue if an emergency arose.

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Continued: Intuition vs. Communication

After the team cleared the building, they debriefed the training and pinpointed errors in order to eliminate potentially life-threatening mistakes in future fires. Surprisingly, firefighters felt like it took forever to get around the building, but the “Plans Chief,” who was in charge of timing the mission, pointed out that it took the crew only eight seconds! They were precise and methodical, moving slowly to move smoothly, which ended up being quicker than they expected.

This precision is exactly why the West Suburban Fire/Rescue Alliance performs these joint trainings. When fighting a fire, there is no room for error. One wrong move can cost a life, so these firefighters must use their tools, instincts, and familiarity with firefighters within the Alliance to navigate as safely as possible.



Senses and Equipment

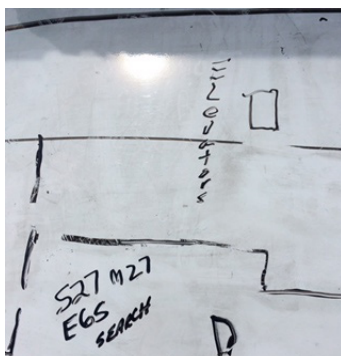
As I observed the firefighters at work within the building, Wheaton Fire Chief, William Schultz, explained what was happening and made sure I didn't fall. I noticed how stressful it was being inside. Completely unable to see, firefighters had to rely entirely on other senses and equipment.

Throughout this exercise, I watched and saw that each firefighter's senses collaborated with his equipment.

For example, firefighters could tell how big a room was by spraying water and counting how many seconds it took to hit the opposite wall. The seamless integration of senses and equipment made firefighting look like art. Battalion Chief Hugh Stott explained, “I look at our job like a trade. I think there is science and cognitive skills, but there is also a sense and a feeling for what's

going on based on experience and prior mistakes.”

Firefighters have to have practice, strength, cognitive thought, ability, and innovation during every fire. There is no room for a bad day! Firefighters have to be entirely present, putting aside any personal stress for the sake of the mission. Always bringing their “A-game,” they behave like professionals – intuitive, intelligent, resilient, and determined. In the fire service, intuition reigns and communication is short, direct, and effective.



Communication in Fires and Communication at Home

But, fighting fires is not like normal life. Transitioning from fighting fires back to home life can be abrupt because of how different the two worlds are. In a fire, stress, adrenaline, setting aside of personal feelings, and command communication drive every movement. In normal life, life and death are not at stake. Normal life is less about intuition and senses. Normal life involves feelings and communication with words, especially at home.

Skills like intuition, which are used and valued in the fire service, may not necessarily be an asset in a marriage. Two people coming from two perspectives grow closer by talking. So, assuming your spouses is on the same page as you may simply create conflict. The intuition of the fire service is admirable and strong, but the communication and openness of healthy relationships is equally admirable and strong. Cultivating both is the goal.

