

# RESPONDERSTRONG™

## ResponderStrong March 2018 Update

### ResponderStrong™ Mission:

To combine our strengths so that all emergency responders and their families in Colorado have the resources and systems they need to be healthy and resilient.

### ResponderStrong™ Vision:

To cultivate an emergency responder culture in which people find strength in talking openly about mental wellness.

The ResponderStrong initiative is a collaboration of emergency responders and their advocates across the state working with the National Mental Health Innovation Center (NMHIC) at CU Anschutz. We meet quarterly (February, May, August and November) on the third Friday of the month from 0900-1200 at 9195 E. Mineral Ave, Centennial CO 80112. All are welcome. Between these quarterly meetings we host multiple workgroup meetings at various times and locations. For more information regarding any specific group, please see the Facebook page or contact the facilitator.

### General Update:

More than 55% of emergency response leaders responded to our mental health survey last summer and validated many of our projects currently in process. The report: **“Taking Care of Our Own: Mental Health Among Colorado Emergency Responders”** is being published this month. Watch for it on the website and Facebook.

We subdivide our projects into 3 categories: **Leadership, Systems, and Supports**. Below please find a summary of our current projects. For more information or to participate, please contact the facilitator.

### Leadership Update:

**Advisory Board:** In February, we solicited nominations for the ResponderStrong Advisory Board. The overwhelming response and tremendous qualifications of the nominees were exciting. The board selected consists of 20 members from various backgrounds who have demonstrated a passion for our purpose and who bring extensive expertise. Initially we had planned on a board of 11 members and discussed the constitution of the board at our February quarterly meeting. At first, members leaned toward a smaller board; however, over the next few days, many members voiced the opinion that a larger board might better help us to establish ourselves and grow more efficiently. Upon review, the breadth of expertise and the credentials of the nominees were so impressive, we opted to expand the

board to 20 members. In this early phase of our formation, there appears to be value in a larger board, especially one that is well equipped to guide us on the diverse array of projects we are currently pursuing. The first meeting is slated for April. Please see the attached announcement for more information regarding the members. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly [Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

**Internships:** Internship positions for graduate students interested in working with emergency responders are being developed within ResponderStrong. Master's students from the Center for Performance Excellence are in process of outlining the position with a planned start date of Fall 2018. We are expecting to incorporate these students in the development of both curriculum and resiliency projects and to facilitate their placement within field agencies to enhance responders' workplace performance based on proven methods already utilized in military and athletic realms. Other schools exploring internship opportunities include the CU Anschutz School of Social Work and Metropolitan State University of Denver. Facilitator: Anna Joseph [Anna.joseph@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Anna.joseph@ucdenver.edu)

**Funding:** A new workgroup is focusing on brainstorming funding options for ResponderStrong. Members who have experience or interest in identifying potential funding sources or pursuing grants are invited to participate. Facilitator: Aaron Kirby. [info@ResponderStrong.org](mailto:info@ResponderStrong.org)

## **Systems Update:**

**Curriculum:** ResponderStrong members have been working with community college discipline heads to create customized mental health and suicide awareness education for the police, fire, and emergency medical services programs. The community college system provides training for more than half of the emergency responders in Colorado. Incorporation of this material in initial training is one of the approaches being utilized to change the responder culture and to decrease the ingrained stigma around mental health. The initial trial was completed in January 2018 at the Community College of Aurora Paramedic Academy and Fire Academy. Pre- and post-test results showed significant improvement in knowledge and reviews from the students were positive. Facilitator: Anna Joseph [Anna.joseph@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Anna.joseph@ucdenver.edu)

**Undergraduate education:** Metro State University of Denver has incorporated a ResponderStrong two-hour mental health awareness supplement to its Personnel Development course within the Fire and Emergency Response Administration Bachelor's Degree Program. The first trial, offered in October 2017, was applauded by both students and faculty. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly [Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

**Occupational PTSD:** In July 2018, recently passed Occupational PTSD legislation for emergency responders will be enacted. ResponderStrong members familiar with the Worker's Compensation system are working with the State Division of Worker's Compensation to better prepare the system to manage this care. Dr. Kathryn Mueller, the medical director for the State Division, has identified ResponderStrong as the ideal partner to house the pieces that will facilitate flow through the system and ensure that the mandated treatment is far more effective for responders. Producing educational modules for work comp providers that highlight some of the concerns and sensitivities regarding responder care and directing to a list of culturally competent mental health providers when referral is necessary are in the works. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly [Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

**Crisis Facility:** The Crisis Facility group is exploring the development of safe refuges for responders in mental health or substance misuse crisis. Many mental health providers have reported frequent encounters with responders in crisis who do not have a safe place to “ride out the storm” or to stage while being ported to higher level care. In order to create a system that is replicable across the state, serving all responders, emergency department-based options are being explored. One facet of this exploration involves the creation of a 24/7 on-call mental health provider consultant position. This consultant would serve as a connection point to culturally competent care and appropriate resource location to improve responder care, facilitating appropriate destinations rather than blanket admissions. This is a complex project involving many different players. For more information or to participate, please contact Rhonda. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly [Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

**Counselor Certification:** ResponderStrong is working with local public safety psychologists, counselors, and other clinicians to create a comprehensive certification program to enhance cultural competency of providers who wish to work with responders and to provide a vetted list of providers for responders in distress. This expanding list of culturally competent clinicians would also be available to EAP programs who wish to provide specialized referrals for responder clients. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly [Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

### **Supports Update:**

**Family Documentary:** Lifelines, a documentary series regarding the ways in which responders inadvertently bring the trauma of the job home and impact their families, is being produced by Status Code 4, Inc with assistance from ResponderStrong. The filming is nearing completion with the trailer and first vignette, Suicide Awareness, garnering significant attention and initiating much needed dialogue around this topic. <https://www.sc4i.org/lifelines> Producer: Ann Rush [lifelines@sc4i.org](mailto:lifelines@sc4i.org)

**Web Portal:** ResponderStrong is in the planning process of creating an online portal to “vetted” resources for responders to easily access confidentially. This portal will include links to programs providing payment assistance, self-assessments, links to experienced mental health providers, and access to training materials in addition to a wealth of other resources. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly [Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

**Trauma Retreat:** ResponderStrong members are working to establish a Colorado based trauma retreat for responders. Options explored include the West Coast Post-trauma Retreat, Elements Behavioral Health, and Project Sanctuary. Facilitator: Rebecca Allanson [RebeccaAllanson@badge2badge.com](mailto:RebeccaAllanson@badge2badge.com)

**Crisis Text Line:** In November, to very positive and widespread response, ResponderStrong introduced a crisis line for emergency responders (including career and volunteer, corrections personnel, and non-sworn members of agencies). Through partnership with the national Crisis Text Line, emergency responders in Colorado can now text “BADGE” to 741741 to be connected completely confidentially with a trained crisis counselor 24/7. Not only is this appealing due to the need for more effective crisis supports but also due to the familiarity and comfort of this communication mode among responders. An additional benefit includes anonymous data collected within this system. This anonymous data is expected to reveal an upstream view into the stressors that impact responders prior to suicidal ideation. This insight will further inform the development of the ResponderStrong movement, ensuring that our

efforts are in alignment with the needs of the community. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly  
[Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

**Virtual Reality:** In collaboration with USC, Weill Cornell, and Stanford, the NMHC and ResponderStrong are developing an innovative Virtual Reality-based mental health spectrum of services for emergency responders. On the preventive end, a VR Stress Inoculation program will mimic the in-situ training methods used by emergency response agencies to train their personnel in the key skills required to save lives. Currently, emotional regulation and resiliency skills, if taught, are taught in a classroom setting. This limits the ability of responders to deploy these tactics in real-world occupational settings. By incorporating active learning in a realistic scenario environment, responders more likely to utilize these skills when needed, improving their performance and decreasing the negative psychological impact of critical calls. Additionally, the incorporation of this training will reduce the stigma around the mental and emotional impact of occupational exposures. On the treatment end of the spectrum, VR-based therapy for PTSD has proven effective within the military realm. Developing familiarity with VR as a training environment will also create greater acceptance of this modality among responders as a treatment tool and decreased barriers to seeking care. Facilitator: Rhonda Kelly  
[Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu](mailto:Rhonda.kelly@ucdenver.edu)

**Resiliency:** The Resiliency workgroup has been focusing on the development of responder-specific, tiered resiliency materials, presentable through customizable means ranging from didactic classes, to short video-based modules, to lengthier workshops, depending on the needs of the responders. Work is being done to develop standardized resiliency skills that can be incorporated into annual proficiency testing as a measure of progress and assimilation of the information and development of the skills. Facilitator: Ben O'Brien [info@ResponderStrong.org](mailto:info@ResponderStrong.org)

## 2018 Goals:

To expand the inclusion of the community college mental health content within the emergency response programs across the state community college system, reaching more students enrolled across the state. Through doing so, we are creating a new generation of responders who automatically deploy ingrained skills necessary to preventatively manage the emotional intensity of calls and the consequences of chronic stress and trauma exposure, decreasing the incidence of depression, substance abuse, stress injury, and suicide.

To create a training section within ResponderStrong to house the affiliated products of the educational programs including:

- A Train the Trainer program for the community college curriculum and resiliency training
- The Worker's Compensation-related best practices and educational materials for stakeholders in the occupational PTSD treatment arena (Human Resources, Risk Management, unions, agency liaisons, Work Comp providers, referred specialists, and attorneys)
- The mental health provider cultural competency certification
- Any internship opportunities that are created

- The production and dissemination of mental health training material (video, manual, and live) for use by agencies across the state
- Expanding the supplemental mental health curriculum content for use by colleges and agencies

To produce a minimally testable product for VR-based Stress Inoculation by the end of 2018 and have it tested by at least a dozen emergency response agencies for feedback.

Establishment of internship programs for undergraduate and graduate students to facilitate their experience working within the emergency responder realm. Currently, CU, DU, and MSCD are exploring options with ResponderStrong.

Collaborating with Kaiser, currently one of the largest healthcare providers for municipalities in Colorado, to improve their mental healthcare offerings for emergency responders.

Collaborating with UCH and Denver Health to create confidential, culturally competent crisis facilities for emergency responders in mental health or substance abuse crisis.

Through partnership with clinicians and a free-standing mental health facility, to explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated unit for the emergent crisis care of responders in Colorado who for confidentiality reasons are resistant to seeking care from the facilities to which they transport patients. Initially, this unit might only operate upon demand. Once the extent of the need and usage is better estimated, the unit may evolve from an as needed to full-time basis.

Expanding app-based tools for resiliency and defusing for use by emergency responders (particularly volunteer and rural) to better manage both the acute and chronic stresses of the job.

Hosting a TEDx ResponderStrong (1 Day Event) focused on emergency response challenges and innovative tools.

Establish sources of funding to advance the projects currently in process.