

RESPONDERSTRONG™

2018

Accomplishments in Review



Projects

Curriculum

ResponderStrong members created a 4-hour curriculum enhancement for incorporation into POST, fire and EMS academy instruction within the Colorado community college system.

• • → *Community colleges train over half the emergency responders in Colorado and are therefore uniquely positioned to assist us in creating culture change by shaping the way the candidate and recruit pool understand mental wellness.*

- This content focuses on the stressors of the jobs, the statistics regarding stress injuries and tools to protect oneself from what is arguably the most significant hazard of our work.
- Each presentation is taught by a member of the specific branch, lending further insight and credibility to the presentation.
- Pre- and post-assessments provide metrics around change in knowledge and have shown significant improvement.

The program started at Community College of Aurora with tremendous support from their discipline heads. The colleges currently hosting the program include: CCA, CMC, AIMS and Red Rocks. Relationships with several other campuses are currently in development.

Resiliency

After 18 months of work, the Resiliency workgroup completed the structure and content for 13 resiliency standards. Each standard outlines a specific skill we believe is key in developing and maintaining resiliency as an emergency responder.

The standards are formatted similarly to job performance requirements and other annual proficiency standards. They can be used individually in a free-standing capacity or as part of the entire program. The next step is to translate the content into easily accessible and deployable video segments of varying lengths to be made available to organizations or individuals for use.

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Clinician Certification and Endorsement Program (CCEP)

ResponderStrong has been developing a means to allow responders and their families to quickly recognize whether a mental health provider is knowledgeable regarding the job, its impacts, and the underlayment of trauma-exposure inherent in the job. We hear the demand for a system like this from personnel across the country.

ResponderStrong has been working with local clinicians, clinicians in other regions who are working on or have developed similar programs, and health care organizations to inform the development of such a system for Colorado with potential to expand nationally. An informal system is currently in place and accessible through responderstrong.org under Resources. This system is under development with a more robust model to be implemented in 2019.

Colorado Responder Trauma Retreat

This workgroup has been diligently developing a 5-day intensive trauma retreat for emergency responders in Colorado. During 2018, they invested a lot of time exploring models that are working across the country and drafting up a plan for this retreat. Heather Ehle, founder of Project Sanctuary (projectsanctuary.us/) generously contributed time and wisdom to the program's evolution. The group is on track to provide its first retreat in early summer 2019.

ResponderStrong is grateful for a generous private donation of \$15,000 to support the event. The donor wishes to remain anonymous.

- • ➔ **Corrections:** FCI Englewood and the chaplain for the Colorado Department of Corrections have been working with ResponderStrong to expand our offerings to our brothers and sisters in the corrections community. Initial meetings revolved around peer support and sharing of resources. This relationship is slated to expand in 2019 with the addition of workshops dedicated to corrections personnel.
- • ➔ **State Division of Workers' Compensation:** ResponderStrong members worked in conjunction with the medical directors of the Division to facilitate access to appropriate mental health care for responders being treated for post-traumatic stress. This project is ongoing.
- • ➔ **Legislation:** RS and the Fraternal Order of Police have been collaborating to assist in the development of legislation and utilization of state funds to improve mental health supports for emergency responders.
- • ➔ **Advisory Council:** To more effectively guide and develop ResponderStrong, an Advisory Panel of 20 experts in their fields was created in March 2018. The Council has been meeting quarterly since to evaluate efforts, advise and support the organization. Their input continues to be invaluable.
- • ➔ **Internships:** In 2018, ResponderStrong created formal internship placements for students from the University of Denver Center for Performance Excellence and the Colorado School of Public Health. The interns have expanded our capacity to deliver performance-related training, to identify responder-informed treatment facilities, and to develop a social media policy and improved communications among membership. We are very grateful for their interest in our population and their dedication to our cause.



Partnerships

Lifelines

Status Code 4, Inc and Stories Without Borders have expanded upon their Lifelines series of documentaries regarding the impact of the jobs on responders and their families.

ResponderStrong is proud to have continued to support the project through networking and financial contribution.

Community First Foundation generously granted ResponderStrong \$15,000 to support the recent Substance Use Disorder documentary exploring substance misuse as an ineffective coping mechanism in the absence of other tools to manage stress injuries and trauma. www.sc4i.org/lifelines

Center for Relationship Education (CRE)

In March 2018, this non-profit connected with ResponderStrong to expand their evidence-based relationship and communication skills workshops and retreats to emergency responders. CRE offers many grant-funded opportunities to responders. Each event is led by a responder-facilitator who understands the unique challenges of the jobs. In 2018, CRE provided grant-funded 3-day relationship retreats to 65 emergency responder couples and a grant-funded 8 hour Responding to Your Relationships workshop to 51 responders. 2019 is bringing more opportunities for responders across the state.

www.myrelationshipcenter.org/workshops?category=FirstResponders

First Responder Foundation (FRF): Non-profit FRF connected with ResponderStrong to explore mutual interests in early summer 2018. Janell Farr, FRF President, has worked extensively with us to explore areas of overlapping interests and ways to amplify the impact of both organizations. We look forward to more collaboration in the future. FRF is focused on aggregating funds at a corporate level to support overall responder health initiatives at the national level.

Endless Possibilities Initiative (EPIc): EPIc was founded by a firefighter, Joletta Belton, who was forced out on medical disability from a hip injury and resultant life-disrupting chronic pain. She returned to graduate school to study neuroscience and kinesiology. Using what she learned of the science of pain, stress, and trauma, she implemented non-pharmacological strategies to manage her own pain without the complications or risk of dependence associated with pain medications.

The program teaches the science of pain, stress and trauma (all of which are related, involving the same systems - immune, nervous, and endocrine), how it relates to our own unique experiences, and how we can use that information to plot a path forward that reduces the things that increase our pain and suffering while increasing the things that improve our pain and reduce our suffering. It shows not only the science of what's going on with pain and trauma, but how these strategies actually change our physiology. After successfully empowering people living with chronic pain with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively deal with their pain, EPIc is now beginning to host experiential learning workshops and retreats developed specifically for first responders. www.epicolorado.org/

SonderMind: In summer 2018, SonderMind reached out to ResponderStrong to initiate a conversation around how to improve access to qualified mental health professionals and utilization of benefits for emergency responders. SonderMind started roughly 5 years ago as a business solution for mental health providers.

Over time, their focus has expanded to connecting clients with specialty providers and helping clients navigate their benefits to maximize utilization and coverage of care. (For example, identifying providers who accept both a client's EAP and private insurance coverage.) Many insurers already utilize SonderMind as a portal to mental health care for their clientele. SonderMind's current contracts include Aetna, Anthem, Cigna, United and ComPsych EAP. A limited contract with Kaiser is also in place. The network has recently expanded to include trauma-informed prescribers. ResponderStrong is working with SonderMind to populate the list of providers who are experienced with emergency responders. www.sondermind.com/

iRel8: With an innovative approach to peer support, iRel8 connected with us in 2018 to explore the potential for digital expansion of peer support to responders in the U.S. and internationally through its social mental health platform. iRel8 is working with FRF and RS to develop and expand a responder-specific model. irel8.org

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Outreach



Public presence/ media exposure

RS has been drawing increasing attention through local media, podcasts, and conferences. In 2018 these opportunities included:

- **Local news:** FOX31, 9News, Colorado Public Radio, Newsy
- **Podcasts:** Medic2Medic, Fit to Fight Fire, International Academies of Emergency Dispatch, Intermountain Disaster Preparedness Center

Social Media

Our Facebook following grew from 249 to 911 in 2018 and continues to grow rapidly. We also established a presence on Twitter. The website continues to be a basic platform but enhancement is underway to create a more robust portal to information and resources for responders.

Conferences

- Southern Colorado Resiliency and Leadership Conference, Colo. Springs, CO, September 4-5, 2018
- Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council Annual Conference, Breckenridge, CO, October 11-13, 2018
- Fire Leadership Challenge 2018, Keystone, CO, October 23-26, 2018
- EMS World Expo 2018, Nashville, TN, October 30-Nov2, 2018
- Intermountain Disaster Preparedness Center Symposium, Salt Lake City, UT, November 2, 2018

ResponderStrong is built on the volunteerism and passion of its members. The members and contributors are ResponderStrong. We extend heartfelt thanks to:

- • ➔ Those who serve as ambassadors and advocates for us in their workplaces and among their friends
- • ➔ Those who follow and share our social media posts
- • ➔ Those who generously donate their time to our projects and workgroups
- • ➔ Those who attend our meetings and offer valuable input from their unique perspective
- • ➔ Those who donate to us financially
- • ➔ Those who share their stories with us
- • ➔ Those who have retired and now donate their time and expertise to assist us in areas such as business development and technical skills
- • ➔ Those who choose to spend their internship time with us
- • ➔ Those who teach, present and facilitate for us
- • ➔ Those who partner with us to provide valuable services and education
- • ➔ Those who show up every day as peers, leaders and influencers changing our culture to one that embraces mental and emotional health as much as it does physical
- • ➔ The National Mental Health Innovation Center at CU Anschutz for supporting and housing us!