Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support

Firefighters Helping Each Other

Newsletter February 2016

Table of Contents

Article 1: My Introduction to the Fire Service
Matt Olson pg. 1

A Letter from the Editor
Jada Hudson pg. 3

ILFFPS Directors Messages pg. 4

Big News! A Joint Endorsement pg. 6

Article 2: What's Your Definition of Productive?
Josh Jessup pg. 7

Article 3: How Does That Make You Feel?
Dr. Cody Todd pg. 8

Article 4: That Ah-Ha! Moment
Tripp Wilson pg.9

Article 5: Physical Wellness: Managing Stress
Kyle Matousek pg. 10

Article 6: A Firefighter's Mayday
Jada Hudson pg. 11

Article 7: Find Your Balance: Reflections on Tom Howard's "The Art of Listening"
Craig Krsek pg. 13

Article 8: The Importance of RIT Training
Jada Hudson pg. 14

Article 9: Cancer. Now What?
Chuck Wehrli pg. 14

Article 10: How Did I Get Here?
Paul Gardner Jr. pg. 16

Article 11: Leftovers
Colleen Murphy pg. 18

Article 12: Florian Chosen Well
Father Jim Swarthout pg. 19

Article 13: Giving Back
Michael Schnaper pg. 20

My Introduction to the Fire Service

By: Matt Olson

I spent a lot of time with my grandfather as a child. He was very much a mentor to me as a boy, and later as a firefighter. When I was young, I saw him as a person that I wanted to be like. He could build anything, and when he wasn't being a Captain on E-73 in the city, he was part-owner of a cabinet-building company.

He and my grandmother built their own home together, literally -- framed it, roofed it, and finished the interior. She would hold the drywall to the ceiling while he would nail it in. Everything in that house was by their own hands. I wasn't like that and always thought it was amazing that someone could do that. I felt like that about everything that he did. He was impressive in every way.

They lived about a mile from us, and I would walk to his house when my friends weren't able to play. There was nothing that I wanted to learn that he wouldn't teach me. Most times, I'd ask him about something like electricity, and he'd show me how he wired the lights in the garage. I'd ask him about how he and Grandma finished the ceilings. I liked that story because I tried to picture it. I was impressed by them both and felt like they were just strong people, who did things strong people do.

(Continued on page 2)

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.

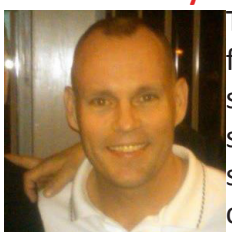
VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.ilffps.org

VISIT OUR FACEBOOK

https://www.facebook.com/ILFFPS

Continued: My Introduction to the Fire Service



The real reason I went to my grandpa's house was for the feeling that it gave me. When I was there, I felt really safe. I felt like I was in the presence of a really impressive, strong person. I felt like that really impressive, strong person cared about me and because this impressive person cared about me, I was ok. I recognized that I mattered there and really just felt like "Because he says I'm good, I'm good." Coming from him, it meant everything. I don't know if he ever knew he gave me that. I never told him.

I know that he was a very impressive fire officer in a busy company in Gresham. He lived there, and it meant much to him to be assigned to engine 73. I think today, as an adult and as a firefighter who followed him into the fire service, about what he would have been able to teach me.

When I went to him to learn how to wire a fixture, he couldn't wait to tell me. When I went to him to ask him to talk about building a cabinet for his company, he was happy to show me what he knew. He had these life experiences, and he wanted me to be able to learn from them.

I never had a conversation with my grandfather about his career and the toll that it took on him. He was on busy companies for 28 years and saw enough for any one person. He came home and raised 5 kids. One of whom, my Uncle Roger, died as a very young man.

Certainly there was an impact. Certainly there were things that he learned that could benefit me to know. Certainly there were things that, with another opportunity, he would do differently. We never talked about these things. My grandpa died when I had 23 years complete as a professional firefighter. There were 23 years that I had him with me, that I could have and should have had these conversations. Why didn't I?

"We were both taught to be tough, to weather the storm, and we didn't feel proud of our struggles."

I think it is probably for the same reasons that he didn't approach me to have them. We were both taught to be tough, to weather the storm, and we didn't feel proud of our struggles. We didn't feel comfortable sharing that part of us. We were proud of our successes. We were proud of the times that we felt brave and strong. Sure the other parts of us existed throughout our careers and lives. Sure we failed at times. I considered those times as "the past". Those times where I was sad, was hurt, or didn't feel proud existed, but I would tell myself they existed in the past.

I never told myself my successes existed in the past, I carried those proudly like a banner. It took me a while to realize that I am not my successes and I am not my failures. I am just a human being who at times was strong and at times was weak. I am a human being who at times was able to be ok and at other times was hurt. I am just a human being. I am seeing today that I don't have to be ashamed of any of the parts of my life and my career where I didn't feel proud of me.

(Continued on page 3)

Continued: My Introduction to the Fire Service

They are points in time where, for one reason or another, I was hurt. I have learned that I don't have to choose between strong or weak, capable or hurt. I am just a human being and that's ok.

My grandpa existed in an old school fire service where these conversations didn't take place. I don't fault him for that. For the first 23 years of my career, I existed in that same fire service. Today with the help of many people, in particular Laura Farrar my counselor, I see that there is power in a conversation.

It was ok for my grandpa to teach me everything he knew outside of the way that the fire service impacted himself and his family. It was safe to teach me about electrical and building. It wasn't safe for him to teach me about the pain, the hurt, the struggles that we all encounter. That is the part of the fire service that I want to change.

Make it safe is critically important to me. Make it safe to struggle, to be hurt, to at times not feel proud. We all celebrate our successes and we should. We shouldn't, though, overvalue the tougher times. They are moments that come and go and with the right support and understanding that we are human, and it's ok. Every great thing ever done by a firefighter was done by a human being. Let's just be that and all that it means.

> **"...We are human, and it's ok. Every great thing ever done by a firefighter was done by a human being."**

I miss him every day, and I would give anything to be able to go back and have that conversation with him. I can't do that.

What I can do is realize that I am here and you are here, and I can talk with you. I can share all of the parts of me that make me who I am. I can be strong, and I can be hurt. I will be human.

Even though I never had that conversation with Grandpa, I know how valuable it could have been. I know there is value in a conversation. I know words are powerful. Today, even the absence of that powerful, healing conversation with him, I am reminded just how powerful and important talking to others is. Knowing that, I will be sure going forward that I have many conversations with others. And, know that if you want to, I'll be there for you to have one, too.

A Letter from the Editor

Hello everyone! My name is Jada B. Hudson, M.S., LCPC, and I am honored to be one of the clinical consultants for the ILFFPS and the new editor of the ILFFPS Newsletter!

As I reflect upon how grateful I am to be an integral part of ILFFPS, I realize I have many people to thank for the privilege and opportunity. First, I would like to thank Lt. Matt Olson, the Executive Director of ILFFPS, for entrusting me with this responsibility and for all his encouragement throughout my development as a firefighter therapist. I would also like to thank Clinical Director Dr. Cody Todd who has devoted countless hours over the past year to provide a curriculum for the peer support team and offer her unwavering support. I would also like to thank Josh Jessup, ILFFPS's Program Director, who is a patient organizer of so many ILFFPS meetings and events. Special thanks to Battalion Chief Dan DeGryse for opening my eyes to issues of substance abuse within the fire service, and for mentoring me as I seek to help others overcome these issues. Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge Dan Schiradelly, Battalion Chief of the Oswego Fire Department, who first introduced me to the need for emotional support in the fire service and inspired me to pursue training.

My journey to becoming a trained firefighter counselor is the result of the many departments, who graciously let me into their worlds. Thank you to Matt Acuff and Jason Demas of the Aurora Fire Department, who recently invited me to observe their RIT training, where I gained valuable perspective for my article submission this month (see page 14)! And, thank you to Lt. John Kessler and the St. Charles Fire Department and Deputy Chief Hugh Stott from the West Chicago Fire Department, as well as to the Geneva Fire Department and the Oswego Fire Department, for taking me on ride-alongs, where I had the privilege of getting "up close and personal" with the daily life of a firefighter. These fire departments have afforded me the time to observe in order to better serve the men and women of Illinois' fire departments. My respect for what you do as leaders and in your departments grows daily.

To all firefighters, thank you sincerely for all that you do for us. I hope you find this month's issue filled with information that will help you to heal, grow, and live life to the fullest. No one deserves it more than you!

Be kind to yourself,

Jada B. Hudson, M.S,.LCPC
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
ILFFPS-Clinical Consultant

ILFFPS Directors' Messages

From: Matt Olson, Executive Director

Hello everyone! I am excited to share with you some of the things that we were able to do in 2015 and are preparing for in 2016 here at ILFFPS.

Our Clinical Director, Dr. Cody Todd and Program Director Josh Jessup have both worked very hard on updating our policy manual and building a structure for us that we feel will be able to sustain our needs in the future. They have both created something here that I know we all can and will be proud of. I want to sincerely thank all of our regional coordinators, coordinators, and peer supporters who are out there where the rubber meets the road for us and for the firefighters who need us. You are the reason why this works.

We have an updated curriculum that was created by Dr. Todd with the firefighter in mind. This curriculum will be taught by us, with a smaller but equally important component taught by a professional clinician. We were able to use this curriculum to teach in Collinsville, Downers Grove and Palm Beach County Florida. This is exciting for me because it gives us as firefighters the ability to share our own personal experiences with our future peer supporters. We can share the experiences in our professional and personal lives that have made an impact on us and do this in a way that other firefighters are able to relate.

Tom Howard has developed our faith-based peer support program. It makes me feel good to know that for those firefighters with whom a strong faith is a guiding force in their lives, that we have Tom and his group to be able to connect with and understand these peers who reach out.

Chuck Wehrli is currently working with Jada Hudson to develop a retiree outreach group. Chuck, like all of us, has an experience with his career and retirement that is unique to him. He has offered to share this experience in a way that I believe will be beneficial to a retired firefighter or a firefighter who wants to better prepare for his/her separation form the fire service. I love that, as we all come together to make up ILFFPS, you all are comfortable sharing yourselves in ways that will, without question, help someone else.

Dr. Todd and I will be presenting with a group of speakers including Dan DeGryse, Dr. Ray Garcia, and Chief Pat Kenny twice this February. Once on the 19th and again on the 25th.

Dr. Todd, Josh, and myself will be traveling to Anchorage Alaska to share what we have here in Illinois. Alaska has created Alaska Firefighter Peer Support with much assistance from Josh Jessup. When we present and share our curriculum it will be in an effort to create their first group of peer supporters. This is what I am most proud of about ILFFPS, our ability to carry the message of emotional wellness and the importance of recognizing our human nature in our careers.

Dr. Todd is also working with Josh and myself to create a four-hour workshop that will be presented this April 18th in Indianapolis at FDIC .

When we are able to catch our breath after these things, we will be organizing another training for peers in Chicago Ridge. I have asked that this training be led by Kelli Krupa, Tom Howard and John Sardina.

We are receiving many requests for our program to be brought to fire departments outside of Illinois. We have shared with Florida, Virginia Beach, North Carolina, Alaska, Hartford Connecticut, Philadelphia and recently I was asked to present in Boston. We are very much excited for 2016!

Thank you all for being here and making ILFFPS a success. Each time I think about all of you who have chosen to not just be a part of ILFFPS, but actually "be" ILFFPS I am humbled an honored.

From: Colleen Murphy, Family Coordinator

Matt and I have received positive feedback about our class and continue to work on how we can improve the program to make home life easier for the firefighters and their loved ones.

We will be in Bolingbrook this Febuary and Springfield in early March. Firefighters and their spouses are always welcome, and we look forward to seeing you there.

From: Josh Jessup, Program Director

Aloha from balmy Champaign, Illinois!

It's been a busy and very rewarding few months since the last ILFFPS Newsletter. I thought I'd do my best to update you on our outreach efforts and growth:

- We have created 4 Regions within the State of Illinois - each w/ its own ILFFPS Regional Coordinator.
- We have Program Coordinators in each of the 4 regions.
- We have created and implemented a Faith Program and a Retiree Program.
- We have continued to support and utilize the Family & Significant Other Program.
- We have solidified and promoted the Rosecrance Partnership to continue to support their Florian Program.
- We have created, implemented & revised our curriculum for ILFFPS from a 24-hour, 3-day course to a 16-hour, 2-day course.
- We have worked w/ Operation Shattered Stars to help create a curriculum and program for Police Peer Support in the State of Illinois.
- We have traveled to Palm Beach Florida to provide training and help them begin their peer support team and journey.
- We have provided outreach in 36 departments across the State of Illinois.
- We have been endorsed by the Illinois Fire Chief's Association and the Associated Firefighters of Illinois.
- We have obtained Illinois Department of Public Health site codes for our outreach and team courses to provide EMS CE.
- We are building a relationship with an Equine Therapy Group.
- We have submitted an article for Fire Engineering Magazine.
- We have created a list of "Firefighter Friendly/Approved" therapists in the State of Illinois.
- We have presented outreach in Peoria, Edwardsville, MABAS 12, Seymour, IFSI, Barrington, Rockford Fire Academy & Cambridge Fire Department to name a few.
- We are working on our FDIC Pre-Conference workshop materials.
- We will plan another ILFFPS Team Training for late spring/summer in Chicago Ridge.
- We have developed a packet of information to share with departments looking for information on Peer Support and interested in starting their own teams

I'm confident I have forgotten many things that could have been on this list, but this gives you an idea of the amount of work that's been done in the last few months. It's an incredible honor and privilege to be a part of such a passionate group of people, and I am looking forward to this year and what the update might look like a few months from now. Continue to be fantastic people sharing this message and with each day and each conversation we will all help to "MAKE IT SAFE"!

From: Dr. Cody Todd, Clinical Director

Welcome from Clinical Psychology Land! (Or where your therapists are!)

There has been so much exciting going on this quarter! I cannot properly emphasize enough through words the power and excitement behind what ILFFPS has been doing for the Illinois Fire Service! At our recent Quarterly Coordinators Meeting, we had the opportunity to all sit together and reflect about how humbling it is that we have the chance to work together towards this common goal. Each time we collaborate, we find ourselves overcome with ideas that we can put into practice. I think this is the very thing that will keep our team alive and well; that this group does not just rest on one, two or a few shoulders- it is all of us together. Like Peer Supporter Kelli Krupa said in our video- "together our shoulders are broader;" when we stand together we cannot fail.

What each of our supporters do by being a part of the team, what each person does that reaches out to us for support, what each entity does by backing us are the real and concrete ways we show that each firefighter and EMT in Illinois MATTERS!

We may not be perfect, but I promise you that we will always push and continue to stand up for what matters in the lives and well being of the men and women that serve our communities.

BIG NEWS: A Joint Endorsement from the AFFI & IFCA

Join us in celebrating this wonderful public announcement put out just a few weeks ago!

Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support (ILFFPS), a 501(c)3, is proud to announce the joint endorsement of the Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois (AFFI) and the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association (IFCA).

ILFFPS was created in 2013 to assist firefighters and paramedics to cope with the many challenges they face each day - both on and off the job. The organization has created a trained network of peer supporters who are available to listen and assist - 24 hours a day, seven days a week. ILFFPS is led by Co-Founder and Executive Director Matt Olson, a Lieutenant with the Bolingbrook Fire Department, Program Director Joshua Jessup with the Champaign Fire Department and Clinical Director Dr. Cody Todd, Psy.D. L.C.P.C. N.C.C.

Bryan Doyle, IFCA President, says ILFFPS has provided Illinois firefighters and paramedics a valuable resource to deal with the stresses of the job in a productive manner. “In the past there was a stigma in our profession that prevent first responders from acknowledging that the trauma associated with helping others can have a profound effect on them and their families. Thanks to ILFFPS, firefighters and paramedics now have a positive outlet available to address issues as they arise.”

Over the past three years, hundreds of firefighters and paramedics have utilized ILFFPS, some as trained peer supporters and others as peers in need. At times it’s to decompress about the impact of an emergency response involving serious injuries or the death of a child. At other times it is simply to validate the unique impact our careers or volunteer efforts have on themselves and their families. The ability to discuss the emotional effects of these experiences with someone who has coped with similar experiences is invaluable and in many cases prevents the individual from using alternative coping mechanisms that can lead to destructive behavior.

“We’ve quickly learned that encouraging our brothers and sisters to discuss the issues they’re facing with a peer can prevent significant emotional wellness issues down the road,” said Matt Olson. “We know that a first responder who is physically and emotionally fit is better able to serve the citizens in communities across Illinois. I want to share with all firefighters, in Illinois and beyond, the power of a conversation.”

ILFFPS is available to assist all firefighters, paramedics and EMTs who believe they would benefit from talking to a peer supporter. For more information please watch our video, visit our website, find us on Facebook or call our hotline at (855) 90-SUPPORT.

Upcoming ILFFPS Events

February 5 & 6
Jeff Dill will be in Champaign/Urbana for FREE training - 6:00 pm Friday and 9:00 am Saturday - contact CFDPeerSupport@ci.champaign.il.us for more information.

February 19 & 25
Rosecrance presents - Reading Smoke - more information at http://www.rosecrance.org/substance-abuse/florian-firefighter-treatment-center/.

March 2016
ILFFPS has been invited to provide outreach/education in ALL Carle Regional EMS fire departments throughout the month - 20+ departments around Champaign County.

March 2016
Matt, Josh & Cody will be in Anchorage, AK teaching Peer Support Team training for Alaska's newly formed peer support team (www.AKFFPS.org).

April 2016
ILFFPS @ FDIC

What's Your Definition of Productive?

By: Josh Jessup

According to Webster, productive is defined as " doing or achieving a lot : working hard and getting good results."

As I imagine most of those reading this can relate, we all have many hats we wear. As an example - husband, father, firefighter, brother, friend, uncle, coordinator, son, grandson...and the list goes on and on...hats/roles we all must wear. With each one of those hats or roles comes a different set of expectations and responsibilities. I have found it's very easy to fall into the trap of the World and define "productive" in my life just like Webster does; however, I believe it's time for us to re-define productive in the fire service and society in general.

Why can't just "being" be considered productive? I feel like I need to be more intentional about the relationships that really matter - my wife, Amy and my three fantastic children, Jack, Liam & Emma -- because they deserve my best! Working hard on those relationships and the communication we have as a family will provide results - isn't THAT productive? "Doing or achieving a lot" as Webster says, doesn't have to mean anything about your occupation, and I contend it should be about relationships and serving those that matter most. The stark reality I have noticed from my nearly 20 years in the fire service is that when you walk out the door of the firehouse and into retirement, there aren't too many people chasing after you. But guess what? If you really build and cultivate a healthy relationship with your spouse and family, they will be there with you through it all and right there with you as you ride off into the sunset!

Over the last couple months I have done and said hurtful and hateful things that I have regretted and had to apologize for and have had to ask for forgiveness from my very graceful wife. But through that experience, I have learned that I need to be more intentional about being introspective and thoughtful.

I am learning that in order to be rational and have a healthy and rational conversation, I need to identify my true feelings and emotions and work from the ground up. So, I have spent a lot of time thinking and doing and being the last few months and I am working to become a better communicator, husband, father and friend. And, that my friends, is productive. The results of this hard work and achievement to follow will undoubtedly be evident in my children and in generations to come in our family. What's more productive than that? I challenge you to take stock in your life and relationships right now. What's productive mean to you? Are you investing your time, talents, energy and passion in places that are healthy? Are you fostering and building long-lasting relationships with the people that are the most important to you? I hope you have already figured this out and you're being "productive" in the areas that matter most.

How Does That Make You Feel?

By: Dr. Cody Todd

I often find myself sitting across from a Fire Service Member trying to help them articulate their feelings; shocking I know, since I am after all, a therapist. I may say something cliché like "how does that make you feel," with the intonations of the question at the most annoying points. But, the conversation I am seeking to engage in is far more complex than this simple and often comically minimized question can account for. What I really hope for, is that this question can lead to an engagement with me in a more than a one word answer conversation; although that is often where we start. What I am really asking is where does that sensation you are experiencing 'live' and what does it mean?" Let me explain myself further.

A human being is made up in ways that make us sensory creatures first, logical creatures second. Think about it, everything on the outside of us (i.e., skin, eyes, ears, tongue, etc.) exist to give us information; those are our senses. Additionally, when we enter this world we are equipped with all the components of our brain to help us experience our world through those very senses but it is not till later in development that we are able to solve complex problems and sort through things in a logical fashion. This emotional or what is called the 'reptilian brain' in scientific literature is made up of the brain stem, hypothalamus (think automatic and basic functions like breathing and heart rate) and the limbic system that's main function is to keep us alive through the use of the senses (fight, flight, freeze or faint). This reptilian or emotive brain is our main gauge we use to navigate the world around us until our frontal lobe or what is called the 'logical brain' becomes fully functional. The process of 'activating' your logical brain generally doesn't start until our late teens and may not 'complete' until our twenties and even into your thirties for some (especially males).

So then, why would you want to have to discuss your feelings now, if you have this great new 'logical' part of your brain available?

"...By separating logic and emotion out, a person is not able to use his brain to its full capacity."

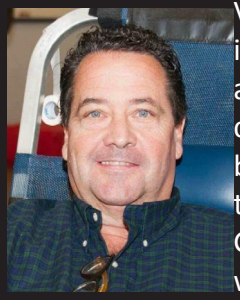
The answer lies in as these brain components (i.e., emotion and logic) may not function together, but rather separate and parallel. On first thought, many of you may be fine with that, and even in your training and time on shift this probably works very well and is encouraged. It is also not a bad thing if you are able to do this.

But what then when you have anxiety during drill, are lying awake at night anticipating the next call, blanking out in stressful situations or having physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach cramps or changes in eating or sleeping behaviors? Do you think that could have something to do with how separate your logic and emotion have become?

The answer is yes! When these aspects of a human become too differentiated by separating logic and emotion out, a person is not able to use his brain to its full capacity. Full capacity is when you can think logically and feel all at the same time in a cohesive manner. When these aspects are separate a person has to be able to either transition (which takes time and/or energy) or be used in a way that they are not meant to be. A human is meant to be able to use all parts of them; the idea behind a term called 'flow.' You may know 'flow' as water pressure and how quickly and continuously water comes out of a hose, but I am using it to discuss that sweet spot of engaging in and working with all parts of yourself. It first feels like you are present and engaged and second that you are thinking in a smooth and uninterrupted way. **(Continued on page 5)**

That Ah-Ha! Moment

By: Tripp Wilson



Volunteering to visit fellow firefighters at Rosecrance is incredibly rewarding, both for me and for the clients we visit. Giving back what was so freely given to us is the true basis of spirituality and of life: happy, joyous, and free. I know I have been given a gift, the gift of sobriety, acceptance, love, and understanding. No more sleepless nights waking hourly with night terrors. I maintain my gift by working with others. Volunteering to meet with my brothers and sisters who are suffering keeps me living my gift. Sharing my experience, strength, and hope with others so they may recover brings strength to my recovery.

I was a client at Rosecrance when the Florian program began. I know firsthand how important these visits are to the recovery of these firefighters. Seeing and communicating with a brother firefighter who has been sitting in the very same chairs I was sitting in is priceless and was pivotal in my recovery. I believe that being able to answer their questions honestly from my heart and share that I, too, walked their road of grief gives them the opportunity to vent and share their problems, as well as giving them hope for their recovery.

I commonly see in their eyes an "Ah-Ha! Moment" as they listen to my story and we begin the process of healing through sharing. Healing is a team sport.

Continued: How Does That Make You Feel?

The next question I will often get after I lay all this brain science out will be (can you guess?) "…so how do I fix it Cody?!" I wish I had someone to bet with on when I will get that question, because I'd be rich! In my experience, the types of people generally drawn to this career and even into therapy are those that seek to understand and 'fix.' They are the ones that are brave enough to say, "I don't get it, this doesn't make sense to me- what now?"" What now" can be a question sought with family and friends and the answer made available through this. But if not, can you imagine the amount of strength it would take for you to say, "I'm not sure" and then have to go meet a stranger (therapist) who you knew was going to make you uncomfortable and then let them help you?! No so easy is it…

To 'fix' the problem with help takes a few things. Regardless of if this process is sought with family, friends or a therapist, a willing human being is necessary. Be sure to know that talking is a vessel of communication- you have to do it- no one can read your mind. The people around you whether that be family, friends or a therapist care what you have to say; let them hear you! The process of figuring out feelings is an uncomfortable one and often you will have to knowingly walk into the 'unknown' and learn to become comfortable with that. If this is sought with a therapist, a good match between you and your therapist is necessary. If in therapy you do not believe that you are able to ask and have your questions answered in a way that feels productive, move on; no hard feelings. Be aware that therapy can at times be elusive when working with feelings that you have held down for so long but you need to feel like you have a 'teammate' in the process. Understand this is a process, not a light switch; you will not 'fix it' overnight. Ain't happening; and if there was a therapist who could, you could never get an appointment.

So stick in it and if you are not committed be curious about why. Be curious in general about your experiences, why you do what you do or feel like you feel. The more you know, the more you know; and what a greater thing to know than yourself. Whatever has been a part of your life until this point matters- including YOU and your feelings.

> **"Whatever has been a part of your life until this point matters -- including YOU and your feelings."**

Thus, logic and emotion both have value and serve a purpose in your ability to engage and be present in your work and in your life. Feelings as I hope you have come to appreciate really are just sensations meant to tell you something and major components of the human beings we are. It is part of your wiring and how you function. Do not be afraid or feel weak if you have them- they are built in to alert you that something is going on good, bad or indifferent. So, how does that make you feel?

PHYSICAL WELLNESS: Managing Stress

By: Kyle Matousek

It is no surprise that the job of a firefighter/paramedic is a stressful profession. The daily grind while on shift brings about absolutely no predictions of what you will do during that time. This is why managing stress and being mindful of stress causing circumstances is important to a firefighter. The ILFFPS is an organization that helps fire and EMS service individuals talk about things that may be bothering them. For example, a tough call, family issues, or just about anything they can not get off their mind. The ILFFPS is there when tough times are upon us, which is great and well needed today. In conjunction with that, there are ways to exercise our mind and body to become as prepared as possible for the stresses firefighters face everyday essentially learning to become proactive in the emotional wellness of firefighters.

As I attended the training to become a peer supporter we learn to listen, relate, and validate when talking with individuals on issues they may be dealing with. I realized this is something that does not need to just happen during rough times but also good times. The idea of "making it safe" and establishing an environment that people are willing to talk about anything whether good or bad is essential to managing stress. Simply knowing that there is always a shoulder to lean on is important for any human being. That is one way to help manage stress, develop that atmosphere for everyone to feel comfortable and great things can come. There is also learning to take care of yourself and your own mind and body.

Exercise is one of those things that I really enjoy talking about. I see many benefits to a program the helps people improve their physical well being. One major thing to note though, is that any physical fitness also has a major impact on the mind. As we know, stress can lead to many chronic illness's like depression, anxiety, IBS, and even lead to cardiac events. Becoming physically active can help eliminate those threats that stress can cause.

One thing I see very often is the grind that many face day in and day out. The twenty-four hour shift followed by part time work or family. I all too often see many firefighters forget or not have time to take care of themselves. An exercise program is perfect for many in that scenario. Here an hour a day can be established to really take that time to care for you and only you. We all know that a healthy you makes for a great firefighter, a great spouse and mother or father. It also allows for time in the day to forget about that daily grind, forget about the stress at home or anything else. It is a time to relax, take care of yourself and become healthier. In the end taking this one hour a day can have a major impact on your emotional wellness just as much as your physical wellness.

We will never be able to eliminate the stresses we face in the fire service, it is our job to face them and work through them. What we can do is work to learn what those stresses are and how to deal with them. There are simply things we just can not prepare for and that is when help is needed. However, there is a lot we can prepare for and learning to manage the stress we face on a daily basis is very important. A physical activity program is a great way to become proactive in your mental and physical wellness. Any physical activity is great, from walking for thirty minutes, yoga, weightlifting, and biking just to name a few. Get out there, get active and take care of yourself because it will help you to deal with the stresses we face. Together, we can become proactive in taking care of the most valuable asset on any department.....YOU.

"A physical activity program is a great way to become proactive in your mental and physical wellness"

The Firefighter's MAYDAY: Before, During and After

By: Jada Hudson

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."
–Theodore Roosevelt

The word "MAYDAY" is one of the scariest words a firefighter can hear and the hardest for a firefighter to transmit. It typically means one or more firefighters are down and in need of a rescue. How do you deal with a MAYDAY? Knowing how to cope before, during and after the call is important for all firefighters.

Before the MAYDAY

In training, firefighters are taught to prepare for any emergency mentally and physically, and that includes a MAYDAY. Physically, you must be able to handle the demanding tasks of the rescue. Even more challenging, however, is remaining disciplined, focused on the task at hand and working within the team when your first response may be to rush in to help the person on your own. Rarely is this what you should do. To implement your training in such a crisis situation, you are called to disconnect from your emotional response and impulses so you can do what is best for the victim.

When I had the opportunity to attend a recent RIT training session which included a simulated MAYDAY situation, I was proud of the way I could disconnect from my emotions as I moved through the rescue scenario with the firefighters.

Then later that week when a firefighter friend shared his "Employee Emergency Information" form with me, it was a different story. There, on a piece of paper, was everything needed in preparation for my friend if he fell victim to a fire. It gave all pertinent information on who to call if he was lost in action, how to make final arrangements, what was to be done with his body…even what songs he might want played at his funeral. When I saw my name on the paper as someone to be contacted in this event, all the emotion hit me with the realization on paper, that my friend goes off to work every day with the possibility of not returning. Any day, my friend, or anyone in his department, may need to call a "MAYDAY", or even worse, be the reason that the "MAYDAY" is called.

In some ways, you just can't prepare for a MAYDAY. However, I'm impressed with how the department does what they can both in training and administration to help firefighters before, during and after an incident.

During a MAYDAY

I've only been in a simulated "MAYDAY" fire experience but perhaps you have experienced the real thing yourself.

I recently read a heartbreaking, dramatic story of a firefighter lost in a 1987 fire in Columbus, OH. His name was John Nance, a 51-year-old who had been in the department for 27 years. Attempting to subdue an arson fire, he fell through the first floor to the basement. The story recounted the tireless efforts of the team, first to first locate him within the complex, then to attempt multiple rescue techniques. They tried to hoist him up manually, lower a ladder, open the floor, etc. Unfortunately, Nance was overcome by smoke and fire as his firefighter brothers struggled with depleted air tanks and ineffective measures that failed to save him.

I can only imagine how hard it was for those firefighters to call MAYDAY. Struggling, doing their best with all their training and abilities, Nance was lost.

"It's mentally tough to train on the need to call a MAYDAY," writes Dan Schiradelly, Battalion Chief of the Oswego Fire Department, "because firefighters have a hard time admitting when they are in trouble themselves. They believe they can overcome the situation on their own. Firefighters need to realize when they need help and call for it immediately."

Firefighters all train to prepare for a "MAYDAY" on the job, but they should also be aware when they need to call "MAYDAY" in their personal life as well. As a therapist, I see a direct correlation between the "MAYDAY" on the job, when a physical rescue is needed and a personal "MAYDAY" when a firefighter is in need of emotional support. While the "MAYDAY" call on the job is to the RIT team, the personal "MAYDAY" for emotional support should be to a therapist or a peer supporter.

Also, just as it is difficult for firefighters to call for backup, it's hard to call a therapist but doing so could save a firefighter's health, relationships and even their life, if they are experiencing depression.

(Continued on page 8)

What's New in ILFFPS?

Equine Therapy
Dr. Todd has been meeting with an Equine Therapy group to see how ILFFPS might partner with them in the future.

Fire Engineering Article
Matt Olson submitted an article about ILFFPS for Fire Engineering that we hope will be published in the future.

Book
We are considering a book from ILFFPS Team Members - stories of recovery and success because of Peer Support . If you have an interest in writing and might consider this, please contact Dr. Todd.

FDIC
Matt & Dr. Todd will be presenting a 4-hour workshop at the FDIC Pre-Conference and will also have space in the Exhibition Hall for FDIC the last week of April. If you have time and are interested in helping with this, please contact Dr. Todd.

Chicago Ridge
We have been invited to host our next ILFFPS Team training at Chicago Ridge, which will likely be in June 2016.
Kelli Krupa has agreed to help organize and teach this course - THANKS Kelli!

Retiree Program
Clinical Consultant Jada Hudson and Program Coordinator Chuck Wehrli have been working to develop a Retiree Program within ILFFPS. If you are or are soon to be a retiree, please contact Jada to learn more.

EMS
We are working with Carle Regional EMS to identify objectives, etc. for all our courses and to obtain IDPH Site Codes so we will be able to offer CE for all our courses including your outreach/education you're doing at individual departments across the state.

Continued: A Firefighter's MAYDAY

Making that call may be the hardest thing to do, but one of the most important things you can do to protect yourself.

The MAYDAY Aftermath

In the best case scenario, a MAYDAY call does not end with complete loss, but rather with rehabilitation of the body, mind and spirit. In the aftermath of John Nance's death, I read that 70-80 of his fellow firefighters and friends quietly pitched in to complete a renovation project at a farmhouse that John had purchased. They replaced windows and doors, installed siding, poured a concrete floor, added AC, plumbing, drywall, etc., much to the gratitude of Linda, his widow. It was their way of coping with the loss in a healthy manner.

> **"Making that call may be...one of the most important things you can do to protect yourself."**

According to Dan, the unfortunate death of John Nance also led to improvements in procedures and rescue techniques within the firefighting world. When the incident was investigated, they found that some mistakes were made during the rescue. For example, there was an attempted rescue by a solo fireman that should not have happened, and different measures could have been tried to extract Nance from his position.

In the aftermath of MAYDAY, the loss or even injury of a firefighter is never an easy thing to accept. Doctors and rehabilitative specialists can bring healing and hope to a victim's physical well-being, but for emotional support, firefighters may need to talk to someone with a shared perspective.

So while MAYDAYS are a necessary part of a firefighter's life and are always unexpected, training for them beforehand, reacting appropriately in the moment, and engaging in self-care afterwards can help immensely. If you ever feel like you are experiencing an emotional MAYDAY, please get help from a qualified therapist or peer supporter. It can make all the difference for you, both on and off the job.

ILFFPS Leaders

ILFFPS Leadership Team
Executive Director - Matt Olson
Program Director - Josh Jessup
Clinical Director - Dr. Cody Todd
Clinical Consultant - Jada Hudson

Regional Coordinators
Northeast/Northwest - John Sardina
SW Suburbs/Cook County - Tim Grutzius
East/West Central - Jimmy Zindars
South - Andy Perry

Program Coordinators
Northeast/Northwest - Josh Way & Chuck Wehrli and 1 current vacancy
SW Suburbs/Cook County - Jack Berry, Jason Boyles, Paula Tomczyk & Mike Kilburg
East/West Central - Chris Humer
South - Kurt Litteken
Significant Others/Family Coordinator - Colleen Murphy
Faith Group Coordinator - Tom Howard
Retiree Group Coordinator - Chuck Wehrli
Rosecrance Florian Coordinator - Paul Gardner

ILFFPS Team Meeting Schedule

Program Coordinators will be scheduling meetings during these assigned months. ILFFPS Team members may attend any/all meetings they choose.

John (vacant) - January/July
Mike - February/August
Kurt - March/September
Chuck - April/October
Jason - May/November
Jack - June/December
Chris - July/January
Tom - August/February
Josh - September/March
Paula - October/April

Find Your Balance: Reflections on Tom Howard's "The Art of Listening"

By: Craig Krsek

ILFFPS's Faith Coordinator, Tom Howard wrote a Power Point presentation available on the ILFFPS website called, "The Art of Listening." It highlights skills that are an integral part of peer support, but those that are not easily mastered or regularly employed in our task-oriented work environment. This article is meant to take a closer look at how this "Art" is needed to facilitate the balance between being a Firefighter and an effective Peer Supporter.

By nature, Firefighters are problem solvers. Functioning effectively in the role of Firefighter requires one to quickly assess the situation at hand, form a plan of action, and implement the steps needed to mitigate whatever situation we are faced with, all in a matter of seconds. From the most mundane to the most dynamic call, this is a repeated process that almost becomes automatic in our work. Working within an assigned company, Firefighters often complete this cumulative task with very little conversation, as each member of the company has a pre-assigned role.

Reminding oneself to slow down and take a deep breath, affords the mind an opportunity to process the information it is taking in, and in some cases, that act can prove to be lifesaving.

To be an effective Firefighter, one must be an efficient problem solver, who safely negotiates the delicate balance between the desire to act and the inherent safety risks we face. In our role as peer supporters, the ability to listen and allow ourselves to be present is a key component of the peer support interaction. If that effort is absent, the end result may be counterintuitive and potentially harmful to the process and individuals involved.

Instead of developing a plan of action, we as peer supporters need to be mindful that our role is to be available by listening and affording our brother or sister the opportunity to talk through the issue that brought about our interaction through peer support. As Tom Howard presented, using non-verbal gestures such as head-nodding and direct eye contact, in addition to positive, responsive body language, we as peer supporters can convey that we are engaged in the discussion. Re-framing what is said and asking open-ended and clarifying questions, as appropriate, will also support the development of a positive rapport during the healing conversation. To be an effective Peer Supporter, one must be able to listen and allow oneself to be in the conversation without controlling it, being mindful of our role as a facilitator within the peer support process and not necessarily just a problem solver.

The Importance of RIT Training

By: Jada Hudson

Recently, I was invited by Matt Acuff and Jason Demas to participate in RIT (Rapid Intervention Team) training with the Aurora Fire Department. I attended alongside fire academy students who were to be on shift in three weeks.

According to Battalion Chief Dan Schiradelly of the Oswego Fire Department, the RIT's main task on the fireground is improving command's ability in providing firefighter safety and survival. The RIT team is usually assigned to a later arriving truck company but can be assigned to any crew if the incident commander (IC) deems it necessary.

I learned that it typically takes about a dozen firefighters to safely seek, find and rescue a firefighter from a scene, and most firefighters would rather arrive on the first or second trucks so they can be in the thick of the action.

Dan says the RIT assignment may not be the most popular; however, they perform functions that are incredibly important. Proactive RITs will be surveying the structure and continually advising command and chief officers of fire conditions and potential collapse. They will make sure there are multiple egress points and they ladder windows and roofs where necessary.

"RIT is one of the most demanding functions on the fireground, especially if deployed for a lost or trapped firefighter," Dan writes. "RIT demands the best of the best when it comes to making a successful rescue."

To be mentally capable and physically able to respond to a MAYDAY rescue situation, all RIT members must be properly trained and equipped. At the Aurora department, RIT training is a three-day event where participants are exposed to five different fire scenarios. Day one is classroom instruction and on day two and three the class moves to the structure where different scenarios are realistically simulated. I attended on day three.

When I say realistic, I mean REALISTIC! With smoke pouring from the structure and the firefighters mobilized for action, I was overwhelmed by the chaos and emotion around me. **(Continued on page 11)**

Cancer. Now What?

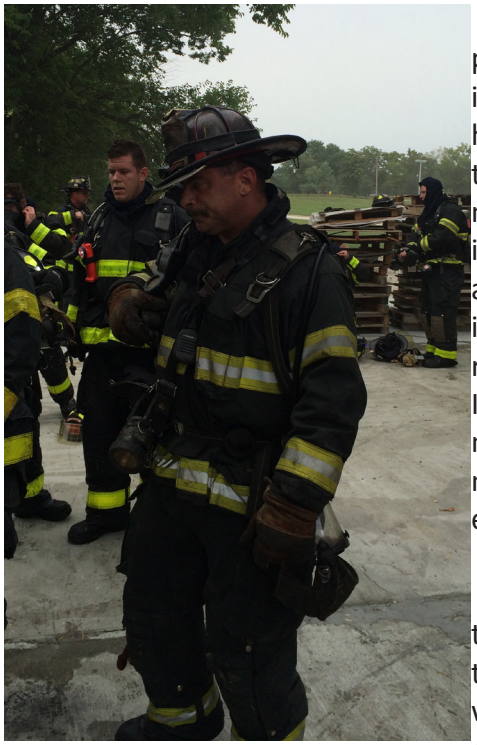
By: Chuck Wehrli

Reports are that one in three firefighters will develop with some type of cancer. Though the odds look like they're stacked against us, we can change this. Today's homes and vehicles are being constructed with an enormous number of carcinogenic materials, and this smoke can be cancerous for firefighters who breathe it. For our own safety, firefighters need a cultural shift to take place. Aggressive Officers need to make sure all PPE is worn after cleaned after every fire. And, the old crappy-looking gear needs to be disregarded as a badge of "machismo" and seen as a badge of laziness and ego. Clean, up-to-date gear can save your life and keep you from getting cancer.

With these fires burning hotter and faster then ever before, we need to set an example for our peers and the next generation of firefighters by taking care of our gear and protecting our lungs. We also need to promote better health practices and advocate against smoking and **chewing tobacco.** These should be banned from the firehouses. I know some of you will say, "Bullshit!" I expect that. But, take it from someone that has had cancer: cancer changes you. Protect yourself now, while you can.

Here is my cancer story: I spent 34 years in the fire service, where I was raised to get in, breathe smoke, maybe throw up, and go out and have a cigarette. That's the way it was – very little use of an air pack. My leaders, some of whom were former military, said, "Tough it out kid, that's the job." >>

Continued: The Importance of RIT Training



It was loud. People were screaming and I could hear the walkie talkies but couldn't make out anything intelligible. My adrenaline was rising, my heart was racing, and I knew I was feeling what must be second nature to firefighters on a call.

It also struck me that this familiar training venue was now a frightening place to be. I couldn't imagine how much more intense and challenging it would be to do this in an unfamiliar place!

The scenarios felt more real than I ever would have imagined. Many real tears were shed in this artificial situation as the firefighters realized how quickly and easily this event could happen in real life. The leaders stressed the importance of training to prevent unnecessary loss of life. All morning I thought about the similarities in the way firefighters and counselors are trained to respond in a crisis situation. We are both taught to detach, emotionally, in order to be effective. In the moment of the simulated rescue scenario, I instinctively detached from my emotions and tried to assess who needed what at that moment. I began scanning faces, eyes and body language to determine where to begin. Whenever emotion entered my mind, I automatically pushed it aside so I could focus on the possible needs of others. The firefighters in the RIT training, I was sure, were doing the same thing. I can only imagine how this frequent, sometimes daily, detachment from emotion can affect firefighters in their other relationships. When it was happening to me, I was aware of it. However, I wonder if firefighters detach so much (as their norm) that they don't even realize when it is happening.

Firefighters deserve and need every bit of time off that they get to be able to connect with emotions and feelings again. It's essential to their mental health, just as exercise is to their physical health.

As I listened to the students debriefing afterwards, I overheard them say how the exercise helped them realize the importance of staying fit so they could perform well in RIT calls. They felt prepared, but also realized how critical it was to be able to handle the situation in the moment. Again, my eyes were opened to the mental challenges that arise for firefighters when they are called to duty and I am proud to be able to assist them, when needed, after they leave the fire.

Continued: Cancer. Now What?

Six years after retirement, I was diagnosed with Stage 4 tongue cancer. I started off by a lump on the side of my neck, went to the doctor who took a blood draw for testing. The doctor's office said it was highly suspicious malignancy and to follow up immediately. Damn. Another doctor asked to look down my throat, and he concluded, "You have stage four tongue cancer." I looked at my wife with disbelief.

On the list that causes this type of cancer in chewing tobacco, which I have never done. Down the list is smoking, breathing smoke, HPV virus, heavy Bourbon drinking, which I don't drink. I really didn't care what caused it. I just wanted it gone. So after 30 radiations, 6 chemos, 40 staples putting my neck back together and the use of the Di Vinci Knife to remove the tumor off my tongue I started my healing. I lost 50 pounds and my saliva glands, and still to this day, I cant eat the things I use to enjoy. I was cancer free until the day before Thanksgiving of this year when I was diagnosed with skin cancer - from sun exposure - but it's easily treated.

The good news is I'm alive and can share this story to make it better for those in the fire service and those some day joining the fire service. We need good, aggressive leaders that will always fight to protect their personnel either by keeping their mask on, or by wearing seat belts and sending them home at the end of their shift. Cancer is an ugly disease; so, let's stay safe!

How Did I Get Here?

By: Paul Gardner Jr.

On September 7th last year, at the rank of Deputy Chief with the Berwyn Fire Department, I retired after thirty-four and a half years in the fire service. Just before I retired, I participated in a training centered on psychological support for firefighters. Little did I know, this training would cover so much more than just psychological support, including firehouse behavior, how incidents can/do affect us, family issues, and personal issues. As the presentation progressed, I looked around. More and more of the group was becoming attentive, including me.

We sat enthralled at the ways people are affected, and what might cause attitudes when things don't go according to how we want. I thought, "Yep that is that guy over there," or, "Oh and that's him over there." Then, I was hit with my "Oh, my" moment. The presenter asked, "How many of you have heard, 'When is dad going to work?'" This one hit home. My wife, Maureen, has told me a number of times the kids would ask this. I thought it was no big deal, that they were just looking to do things by themselves, but I began to realize that this phrase was linked to them feeling disconnected from me. Until this point, I hadn't been able to see that some of what I was doing was messing up my family. I was guilty of trying the run home like the firehouse, being short with my family, and, most importantly, not being attentive to my wife. Why was this happening?

"I was guilty of trying to run my home like the firehouse."

I would leave work, but I never left work at the firehouse. Over the last eight years I was on call 24/7, answering emails, doing reports, trying to fix things that went awry at the firehouse because I felt it needed attention right then.

I made some changes, and the tension began to ease. I remember my wife telling me, "Quit trying to fix everything!" In didn't realize she wanted to me to listen and not try to figure it out for her. I think a lot of this "trying to fix everything" comes from our line of work. People call us, needing something done or fixed right away. A vast majority of the time we go on incidents, we are there to take care of the situation where something has gone wrong. So, I guess it is second nature to try to fix things, but home needed to be treated differently than work.

As I began to reflect on who I was as a firefighter and what that meant for me on and off the job, I began to see that my firehouse needed more honesty. My family life suffered for over six years, but I never told my co-workers. One of our immediate family members had an addiction along with mental health issues. This put a lot of stress on the household. And, how I handled this in the beginning was not the way I should have. I have learned a lot since then, and continue to. But, I didn't let my co-workers know because, in my mind, I thought, "How could they accept me if I couldn't run my own home?"

I had heard individuals come back from calls saying, "Yeah, it was another drug addict, another one with mental issues. Man this is ridiculous! If they want to die, then die." But, probably due to my situation, I felt compassion for that person: "Do you know what's going on in their lives and why this is happening?" Sometimes I'd hear, "No, I don't care about them," or, "It's just another call, and I'm tired of these." I never said it out loud, but these comments always made me wonder: "How could anyone in the firehouse that was having a problem come out and seek help when this type of talk was going on?

"How could anyone in the firehouse that was having a problem come out and seek help when this type of talk was going on?"

Thankfully, these comments were not the majority, but I would venture each department has some of this, and sadly it can damage the safety needed for peer support. On the other end of the spectrum, were firefighters on the ambulance and apparatus that showed compassion when handling patients and people needing us. It should be the norm that we put ourselves in the other person's shoes when we are helping them. What a difference that makes in your perspective!

(Continued on page 17)

Continued: How Did I Get Here?

The more I thought about these negative reactions, the more I wondered if this attitude was due to having to go on an average of ten calls a day? Add to that shopping, cooking, and training, and I wonder if burnout, stress reaction, or injury is far away from any of us. How do we avoid burnout, then? I really feel that peer support is the absolutely necessary when it feels that there is no relief in sight. The life of a firefighter can be absolutely exhausting, if day in and day out we are running calls over and over, some of which are very bad.

So, with the encouragement of Matt Olson, Chief Pat Kenny, and my wife, I decided to attend the peer support class.

If you have seen the peer support video, Andy Perry stated he thought he had ultimate story, and so did I. But, when the introductions were to be made at the class, I saw that I was just another person in the class with incidents or occurrences that have happened in each of our lives. I realized as the introductions were be done that others had way more instances of grief, bad incidents, personal situations that made mine not look as big.

At the end of the class Matt said to us, "Well, you all are now Peer Supporters, and we know you are ready to help those who need it." I was like, "What? What can I do to help?" Looking back a number of times at the training we were given and how that helped me, I realized that, yes, I can offer to help others.

"Matt said, 'Well, you all are now Peer Supporters, and we know you are ready to help those who need it.' I was like, 'What?'"

The three main realizations I took away from the class were: First, that I could be open with my co-workers; second, that I should listen and not fix everything at home; and third, that I could be there for my peers when they need someone to talk to.

In September, I assumed to role of scheduling visits to Rosecrance. This was very important for me, since I had previously had my family member at Rosecrance. I knew how important it was for people to feel accepted in the midst of their struggle, for people to have a place to open up, and for families to come visit their loved ones. Seeing this and being personally involved showed me I could be involved in helping our peers and how much this could mean to them.

Immediately after I started scheduling visits to Rosecrance, I discovered so many peer supporters that wanted to come visit multiple days throughout the month. Wow! Everyone was so flexible and willing to share their stories, and more and more peers that had not gone before, signed up. I know that Dan DeGryse and Rosecrance greatly appreciate us being able to visit with our peers that are there. If you have not yet gone to Rosecrance you will see that we are greatly appreciated there!

In my quest to become a stronger Peer Supporter, I enrolled in the November Peer Support class in Downers Grove. It was one of the best things I have done lately!

It was terrific to see Chief Kenny there, get to talk to him, and know that he is involved in Peer Support. Along with see Chief Kenny, I learned more about myself and got to meet some more great people within our group. I have always felt you never stop learning and this was true at this class.

Tom Howard's presentation "The Art of Listening" was fabulous, and showed me more ways to be able to interact with people and to listen better. I recommend this Power Point for peer supporters to review as it will help you within the fire service, peer support, and life in general. Take time to go through the Power Point and you will gain additional knowledge of how to listen, ask questions, and interact. I feel too that this would be a great presentation/class for officers and chiefs to take.

"Listening, asking questions, and interacting with our peers can be invaluable in helping them remain strong."

Having overcome so many of my family's tough situations, I love watching and helping other people overcome theirs. Listening, asking questions, and interacting with our peers can be invaluable in helping them remain strong men/women, who are ready to serve Illinois. Together, if we keep the faith, we can overcome even the worst things that come to us.

Leftovers

By: Colleen Murphy

Ever feel like your spouse is giving you leftovers? Since I work in an industry that is predominantly female and my husbands job is predominantly male, I never saw the harm in this leftover-giving until recently. Now that I have experienced first hand what it's like to give and receive "leftovers" in my marriage, I realize how common this probably is in the fire service.

Here's what I mean by "leftovers": when your personal or character needs are being met by your co-workers instead of your spouse. You share a common bond with your co-workers, and you thrive on the camaraderie of the job (something your spouse can't provide unless you work at the same place). You come home a little empty, maybe a little quiet, or even withdrawn. In doing this, we make our spouse feel short changed.

For example, I am someone who needs humor on a daily basis! I'll hold interest in just about anything that makes me laugh. But, in the past, I was having that need met while I was at work, so by the time I got home that had already been fulfilled. My home life started to feel a little boring in comparison to work.

Fast forward 10 years, and I learned to reverse this trend. I began looking to fill my need for personal relationship and humor at home, before work, and interacting with others started before the workday. The result was nothing but positive for the both my husband and I. And, over time, home life became a lot more fun and interesting than work life. I found myself looking forward to coming home more instead of lingering after work with my co-workers. In the past, I never really gave my spouse the opportunity to be funny or try to make me laugh because I was receiving that elsewhere. Thus, I gave him my "leftovers". I can remember thinking, back then, "Why does it seem as if my friends at work make life so much easier and enjoyable?" In truth, it's because I allowed my biggest need to be filled with them, instead of finding a place for it to live at home. I was unintentionally robbing my husband and I of the opportunity to be better friends to each other in our marriage.

> **"I allowed my biggest need to be filled with them, instead of finding a place for it to live at home."**

Maybe for some of you, your need is adventure, or cooking, or debate, or even just intellectual conversation.

(Continued on page 19)

Reminders & Expectations

INACTIVE MEMBERS/CE REMINDER

Clinical Director, Dr. Todd completed an audit of our Continuing Education and we had several members who had not completed their 10 hours of required CE. Those members were notified of that and have been placed on an inactive peer supporter list. Those members will not receive any of these communications or support request notifications but can, at any time, complete their 10 hours of CE and when approved by Dr. Todd be added back to the active supporter list. Please remember to take a look at the CE requirements and opportunities in the Policy/Procedure manual. If you have any questions, direct them first to your coordinators who will gladly help you with your CE and work with Dr. Todd if necessary.

COMMUNICATION EXPECTATIONS

The ILFFPS continues to grow quickly, and because of that, it's imperative that we communicate often and effectively and the primary means is through email. So, please be sure you are checking your email regularly (every day or so?) and respond to your Peer Coordinators and/or ILFFPS Leadership when there is a response requested. We will make an attempt to reach out and provide updates and feedback on a regular basis and share anything that's happening with everyone to keep you informed and engaged. I hope as you learn of CE opportunities, etc. that you might share those too. We have established clear lines of communication in order to help streamline processes and make things easier. Here's a quick reminder of the who's who... If you ever need any help or have any questions regarding ILFFPS, please feel free to contact your (1) Program Coordinator, (2) Regional Coordinator and/or (3) Lead Program Coordinator or Program Director and if there is ever anything that requires Clinical Consultation, please contact Dr. Todd and/or Jada Hudson.

(Continued on page 20)

Continued: Leftovers

When you come home after a 24 hour shift, you may have already had these needs of yours filled. So, what's left? The remainder might be what your looking for when you walk through the door and maybe it's the few things your co-workers can't provide? I hear wives complain about this a lot, and this can make your spouse feel like they don't mean much to you or that they don't measure up to the attention you pour into the job. You may see it as not asking for much when you are home, but, your spouse may feel as if you put in the bare minimum at home -- like you're only serving up the "leftovers".

How do we fix this trend? Try being more aware of what your personal needs really are and understand why they are so important to you at work. Then extend to your spouse first the same opportunity you give your co-workers and friends to fill that need and see where it take your relationship.

Continued: Reminders & Expectations

GOOGLE GROUP EMAILS

We have established the Google Group Email addresses to make it easy for the ILFFPS Leadership/Coordinators to communicate with their groups. When you hit "reply all" to those messages, that reply goes to over 100 inboxes, so please consider if you need all 100 to have your message or just the original sender.

Florian Chosen Well

By: Father Jim Swarthout

I just left sitting around a table with firemen – no bell rang – but much laughter caused others from around the area come in and ask what's going on here! We were sharing what is a "critical conversation" engaging the heart. The table were sitting around is our Florian group here at Rosecrance Health Network. The men and woman who sit around it surrender – just as when responding to the bell in the firehouse. We move without question – arrive at the scene and assess it and respond.

One of guys is just leaving after a few weeks of looking inside himself and what makes him tick. His discussing trauma he has experienced – like when arriving on a scene and carrying it, much like the heavy hose he hates to hull around. He intentionally uses the word "journey" now as opposed to "battle" because from the very beginning my friend demonstrated amazing grace and courage in his acceptance of the diagnosis of addiction and the trauma that he shared and the ability to continue to live out a fullness of life in the midst of the disease. He now regularly described it as a journey and in fact talked openly the last few weeks about his dying to this disease as simply another stage of the journey and now shares a new word "Chosen."

Our work on our Florian Unit focuses on helping people to live well. We share weekly with what "Living Well with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind," and over time we, along with have discerned several principles that we think are foundational for living well.

I offer here, in honor of my new friends whom have come through our unit, a few core principles for both living well and acknowledging we are chosen:

- Make peace today with anyone whom you have hurt or has hurt you. Life is too short to hold grudges. Forgive freely.
- Forgive yourself. Let go of mistakes and regrets. Be at peace with yourself.
- Never try to do the journey of living or dying alone. Surround yourself with the love of friends and family, and be sure to be a friend to others on their journeys through life, and death.
- Keep your sense of humor and resist the urge to ever take yourself too seriously.
- In the words of Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God." Tend your spiritual life so that it is there as a foundation for peace and strength for you when you need it most.
- From the Prayer of St. Francis, "It is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is dying that we are born to eternal life."

We are all students and teachers in this journey we call life. We are all truly CHOSEN WELL!

Kendall's Quote

Giving Back

By: Michael Schnaper

I recently was able to be a guest speaker for the Rosecrance Florian Firefighter and Paramedic Substance Abuse Treatment Program at the Rockford, Illinois campus. I have a deep admiration for the program, as I have become more familiar with the work they do through my work as an Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Supporter. Recently, I have been presenting the benefits of such a program as we introduce Peer Support to my organization, the Rockford Fire Department. For some time, I have wanted to contribute directly to the Florian Program, as opposed to just extolling its virtues to fire service members who may one day encounter a situation in which they or someone they know may find use of the services they provide.

I pride myself on being difficult to unnerve, but I must admit that I had some apprehension after signing up for one of these group sessions. I had never participated in anything like this and imagined worst-case scenarios in which I did or said the wrong thing and caused some kind of detriment to one of the resident's recovery. All I had to rely on was my perspective and personal experience, and I went in to the experience with good intentions, hoping that my take on their stories would help them in some way through the difficult work that lay before them.

When I arrived, I was not entirely sure what was expected of me. I relied on the concept of honesty as the best policy, telling the individuals that I was lucky enough to have met that I was new to this and asked them for direction. They were patient with me and respectful, sharing their challenges and struggles with someone who was a complete stranger, with the exception that I had answered the call of the fire service as they did. I patiently listened to them as they expressed their hopes and worries, and when they had finished, I offered what I could in terms of reflection and words of encouragement. I cannot say for certain that I made a positive impact on their situations, but if I have contributed to them in any meaningful way, my time was infinitely well-spent.

In our chosen profession, we are all too often faced with the insecurity that we may be putting forth all of the effort we can muster with no tangible positive outcome. My experience with visiting the Florian program at Rosecrance was the rare opportunity that those of us in the fire service have to see a direct result from the work we do. The gratitude shown by the participants in this invaluable program combined with the grace demonstrated by their willingness to share their most personal experiences and the challenges they face left me wondering if what had occurred was more for their benefit or my own.

> **"[This] was the rare opportunity that those of us in the fire service have to see a direct result from the work we do."**