

# Akron Fire Local 330

Peer Support Program

Captain Matt Askea

December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# Akron Fire Local 330 Peer Support

- Started in 2018
- Before Peer Support, Akron used the county's CISM team and the city's EAP for all behavioral health needs
- Created a custom training that involved police and fire
- Class was 24 hours long, and included multiple speakers
- Class also included dispatchers and police officers
- AFD Peer Support is a joint program between Local 330 and Fire Administration.



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

## Akron Peer Support Training Agenda

### Day 1

Wednesday, July 18th 2018

8am-10:15am – Matt Askea, Akron Fire Department

- Welcome
- Mental Health 101 (DSM-V)
- IAFF Peer Support Overview
- Confidentiality and Ethics

10:15am-10:30am – Break

10:30-12:00 – Bob Gribble, Summit County Safety Forces Center

- Stigma in the Fire Service
- Anger/Emotional Management

12:00-1:00 – Lunch

1:00pm-5pm – Dr. Faii Sangganjanavanich, University of Akron School of Counseling

- Empathy
- Therapeutic responses
- Basic counseling skills
- Conducting an effective interview

### Day 2

Thursday, July 19th 2018

8am-9am – Kent State University School of Psychology

- Psychological Resilience

9am-11am – Dr Nicole Labor

- First Responders Substance Abuse
- Addiction
- Recovery

11:15am-12:15pm- Stress First Aid for First Responders – Matt Askea

12:15pm-1:15pm – Lunch

1:15pm-2:00pm – Stress First Aid cont – Matt Askea

2:00pm – 5:00pm – Barbara Medlock, Summit County ADM Crisis Center

- Mental Health Crisis Assessment and Management
- First Responder Suicide Prevention and Postvention

### Day 3

Friday, July 20<sup>th</sup> 2018

8am-10am – Dana Zedak – Victims Assistance

- Responding to Greif and Trauma
- Empathy/Compassion Fatigue and Burnout
- Firefighter Spouse issues

10:00am-10:15am – Break

10:15am-11:00am – Morgan Wellman (Norwich Fire) and Meredith Hill (Toledo Fire)

- Peer Support in Ohio
- Addiction and Recovery

11:00am-11:45am – Pat Gaul – Ease@Work

- EAP Services for Akron Fire Department

11:45am-12:45pm – Lunch

12:45pm-2:00 – Mental Health Resources Information

- Signature Psychiatry – 12:45-1:00
- Akron Family Institute – 1:00-1:15
- Greenleaf – 1:15-1:30
- Emerge Ministries – 1:30-1:45
- Summa Health Traumatic Stress Center– 1:45-2:00
- Summit County Safety Forces Center – 2:10-2:20 (Included in Bob Gribble's presentation)

2:00pm-2:10pm – Break

2:10pm-4:10pm – Bob Gribble

- Self Care and Personal Growth
- Skills Practice and Role Playing

4:10pm-5:00pm – Matt Askea

- Online tools, mobile apps, assessments, and binder review
- Akron Fire Peer Support Protocol



# Peer Support Services

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# Barriers

- Law Department – Concerned about liabilities, especially with the police
- Lack of Clinical Oversight
- No guidelines for ongoing education
- No policies or procedures.



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# Plans

- Clinical oversight: Reached out to University of Akron, who partnered with AFD to help
- Law Department and Privileged Communication:
- Worked with Fire Chiefs and OAPFF to begin with legislation. Eventually, legislation was passed to give first responder “Peer Support Team Members” the legal protection of privileged communication.
- Recruit members via needs and department wide survey



## Peer Support Services

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# Team makeup

Team should be about 10% of your department

- Diversity including
  - All ranks
  - Years of experience
  - Race
  - Gender
  - Equal members per shift (including 40 hours)



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# How We Selected Our Team

- Survey sent out to all 380+ members asking for interest in being part of the team
- 70+ members volunteered
- Then, Local 330 sent a survey out which included these 70 members and asked if each person would be a trusted member to talk to if they had a personal problem
- Ranked those members and tried to evenly distribute across all three shifts.



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# Clinical oversight

- Dr. Varunee Faii Sangganjanavanich, professor and director, School of Counseling
- Oversees peer support onboarding, training, and provides consultation on deployments.



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS



# Printed Materials and Promotion of Program

## Mental Health Resources for Akron Fire Department Members

- [Ease@Work](mailto:Ease@Work) 1-800-521-3273
- [Summit County Safety Forces Support Center](#): 501 W Market St, Akron 330-376-0091
- [Summa Traumatic Stress Center](#): 444 North Main Street Suite 420, Akron. 330-379-5094
- [Akron Family Institute](#): 3469 Fortuna Dr, Akron, 330-644-3469
- [Clinic for Individual and Family Counseling](#): The University of Akron. 27 S. Forge Street, 330-972-6822
- [Paramount Behavioral Health](#): 1235 E. Waterloo Rd. (234) 208-6838
- [Avenues of Counseling and Mediation, LLC \(Akron Office\)](#): 843 N Cleveland Massillon Rd · (330) 723-7977
- [Akron Area Intergroup Council of Alcoholics Anonymous](#): 775 N. Main Street, 330-253-8181

## 24 Hour Hotline Numbers:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 988

Fire/EMS Helpline: 1-888-731-FIRE

IAFF PTSD & Mental Health Hotline 866-965-3074

## Additional Resources

Ohio Association of Professional Firefighters:  
www.firefightermentalhealth.org

IAFF Center for Excellence:  
www.iaffrecoverycenter.com  
(301) 358-0192



## Akron Fire Behavioral Health Support



AKRON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Akron Fire Department  
71 W. Thornton Street  
Akron, OH 44311

## Akron Fire Department Peer Support

Peer support is based on the concept that no one understands better what struggles and stress you may be facing better than someone who has been in a similar position themselves. This peer support practice has been shown through research to be readily utilized, accepted as well as wanted by fire and EMS personnel. It formalizes the "coffee table talk" that already takes place. Peer to peer talk reduces stigma and may decrease anxiety. It may also act as a bridge to professional help. Peer supporters are Akron Firefighters that have been trained in communication skills, stress first aid, and resource identification. Peer Support is totally confidential, except in cases where the safety of the individual or others is at risk.

## Behavioral Health

*Firefighters, EMTs and emergency personnel face increased risks for many types of behavioral health issues, such as PTSD, stress, anxiety and depression. If left unaddressed, these can have devastating impacts on the individual, their family and their department. Rates of addiction and divorce are high among the emergency services. Suicides outnumber line of duty deaths approximately 3-1.*

## Recognizing the Signs

Some of the signs that stress may be affecting you or your coworker are the following:

- Physical: headaches, diarrhea, indigestion, upset stomach, fatigue
- Emotional: anxiety, irritability, sadness, inability to make decisions.
- Behavioral: lack of interest, sleep problems, clumsiness, overeating or other changes in eating habits, increased use of drugs or alcohol, increased short temper, impulsive behaviors and changes in personality.
- Job Related: Change of performance, being argumentative, isolation, tardiness, excessive use of "sick time".

If you have questions about Peer Support or would like to talk to someone about a work issue, personal problem, or a bad call, please reach out to a Peer Support Team member. Communication with team members is confidential.

## Akron Fire Department Peer Support Team Members:

### A Shift

Cameron Mack, Dustin Willoughby, James Horak, Erica Sewell, Scott Mazellis, Domonica Pierce, Brad Ager, Aaron Gurley, Justin Ward, Ken Johnson, Scott Pasco, Nick Fleming, Ashley Cutter, Stephanie Fetsko

### B Shift

Justin Tony, Luke Burns, Nate Michel, Deanne Josey, Cory Hinderliter, Ryan Fairfax, Janai Tony, Nate Michel

### C Shift

Dennis Shumaker, Rich Radonich, Kevin Gostkowski, Mike Brooks, Greg Gearhart, Steve Arce

### D Shift

Steve Dort, Rob Keener, Brian Weaver

Team Chaplain: Duane Crabbs

Clinical Advisor: Varunee Fall Sangganivananich

\*\*\*Peer Support members are NOT mental health professionals. DO NOT diagnose or treat mental health issues and are NOT a substitute for professional services\*\*



## Peer Support Services

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# Measuring Utilization

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
Type of Contact	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5	Total	
1:1	6	14	4		56	80	
Group Response	3	2	1		1	7	
Education/Outreach	3	2	3		5	13	
Referrals	2	3	1		18	24	
<b>Total</b>	14	21	9	0	80	<b>124</b>	



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS

# Questions?



**Peer Support Services**

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS