2024
2ND ANNUAL NYS FIRST RESPONDER WELLNESS SYMPOSIUM

Speakers from the 2023 Symposium

August 1-2, 2024
7:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.
8:00A.M. to 12:00 P.M.

SUNY Cortland
Corey Union Function Room
103 Prospect Terrace
Cortland, NY 13045

Recognitions

Special Thanks to the following Without their Support the Symposium Would not Have Been Made Possible

Garra Lloyd-Lester Coordinator, Community and Coalition Initiatives,
Suicide Prevention Center of New York
Office of Mental Health

Lieutenant Erik Merlin
Master Instructor w/ Firearms
New York State University Police at SUNY Cortland

All of the Presenters and Vendors who have donated their time and expertise to supporting first repsponders all across New York State

Special recognition to Ardent Solutions Inc., The Allegany County Sheriff's Office, and T-Mobile for their financial support in making this symposium possible.

Ardent Solutions
Network for Community Health

ALLEGANY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE N.Y.

T-MOBILE FOR GOVERNMENT

AGENDA: Day 1

7:30 a.m. Sign-in and Wellness Scavenger Hunt

9:00 a.m. Welcome & Introductions

9:30 a.m. Officer Wellness Program

Law Enforcement is a stressful and demanding profession. Law Enforcement Officers are at increased risk for a myriad of physical, emotional, and relational challenges. The Officer Wellness Program is designed to bring awareness of the risk factors associated with a career in Law Enforcement. Through the program Law Enforcement Professionals learn about common mental health risk factors, divorce rates, suicide rates, and shortened life expectancy. To model the importance of talking about the struggles and challenges in this profession, both Law Enforcement professionals and clinicians share personal stories, intertwined with evidenced-based research. This allows officers to hear and see presenters being vulnerable, giving a name and a story to their experiences; it's real talk about the pressures of the job.

Just as important as understanding the risk factors, Law Enforcement professionals are provided with the tools they need to mitigate these risk factors. The Officer Wellness Program uses the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSAs) 8 Dimensions of Wellness to help officers create and implement their own wellness plans with a focus on achieving optimal work-life balance.

10:50 a.m. From Roll Call to the Dinner Table

First responders experience a copious amount of stress both in their work and personal lives. As part of various systems (e.g., the community, the agency, and their families), first responders receive messages continuously that contribute to their perceptions of mental health, stigma, and support seeking. The way agencies and families talk (or fail to) about mental health has an immense impact on the well-being of first responders.

AGENDA: Day 1

his presentation will discuss the layers of stress first responders are forced to navigate and how communication can both contribute to and alleviate related challenges. In combining research with first responders and lived experience as the daughter of a police officer, Craw will unpack the contributing factors to cumulative stress-related challenges and strategies for enhancing communication to address such issues from an organizational, peer, and family perspective.

12:25 Lunch- Provided by: T-Mobile, Ardent Solutions, and The Allegany County Sheriff's Office

1:30 p.m. Breakout Sessions (Choose 1)

Sleep Well Live Well: The Importance of Sleep Hygiene & Stress Reduction

In our fast-paced lives, quality sleep and effective stress management are essential for maintaining overall health and wellness. This presentation explores practical strategies to enhance sleep hygiene and reduce stress levels. We will delve into evidence-based practices, including: Creating a sleep conducive environment, establishing consistent sleep patterns, mindful stress reduction techniques, diet & hydration, and managing stressors.

NYS Probation Peer Support & Officer Wellness Programs

While we acknowledge the field of probation can be immensely rewarding, we cannot ignore that is also comes with its challenges. The nature of the profession, along with managing work-life balance, routinely invites stress into the lives of probation and community correction professionals. In 2020, NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services – Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives (OPCA) in consultation with the NYS Council of Probation Administrators and NYS Probation Officers Association provided training for probation professionals interested in becoming trained peer specialists and implementation of peer support team programs.

AGENDA: DAY 1

Mental Health Matters: Self-Care Strategies to Sustain the work

This workshop is intended for those working in mental health, social work, and human service fields as well as supervisors and administrators in these systems. There is a cost to the work you do. Hearing, reading, and witnessing traumatic events can put you at risk of experiencing various repercussions of such exposure.

In the first part of this workshop, we will discuss the barriers that can inhibit first responders from seeking support for mental health-related challenges. We will also unpack how these barriers and perspectives can impact all populations in human services. The second part of the workshop will focus on recognizing your vulnerability as a helping professional. Together, we will examine how genuine and authentic caring comes with the risk of secondary traumatic stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma. Attendees will gain both a deeper understanding of these topics and critical strategies for mitigating the cumulative build-up of such stress to further build resiliency.

2:45 p.m. **First Responder Mental Health Needs Assessment**

The NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) partnered with the Institute for Disaster Mental Health (IDMH) and the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz on the first ever first responder mental health needs assessment in New York State. This presentation will include information on the assessment, to include the initial findings from a survey completed by more than 6,000 responders in New York State as part of the assessment. The survey findings include insights regarding the stressors of first responder work, the types of services and programming that could support first responder mental health, and the barriers to seeking care.

3:40 p.m. **Closing Activity & Wrap up**

AGENDA: Day 2

7:30 a.m. **Sign-in**

8:00 a.m. **Moral Injury & Leadership**

Moral Injury is defined as the social, psychological, and spiritual harm resulting from “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” (Litz et al., 2009, p.700). It is a main reason why law enforcement careers are so stressful. years of compounded moral injury take a significant toll on the overall wellbeing and psyche of those professionals who dedicate a career to those law enforcement professions.

9:50 a.m. **Navigating Trauma through Mental & Physical Wellness for First Responders & Veterans**

This session is designed to explore the overlap between veterans and first responders, particularly focusing on risk factors, resilience, and strategies for navigating trauma. The training aims to equip first responders, veterans, and behavioral health (BH) providers with the knowledge and tools to enhance their mental and physical wellness. This session not only aims to foster a greater understanding of trauma and its impacts but also to provide practical approaches for enhancing overall well-being through integrated mental and physical health strategies.

11:40 a.m. **Leadership Panel Discussion**

By structuring the conversation around the key points of: Addressing Stigma and Wellness, Promoting Open Dialogue, Enhancing the Workplace Environment, Collaborations, and Funding Opportunities, the leadership panel can foster meaningful progress and develop actionable strategies to promote mental health and wellness within law enforcement and first responder communities.

12:45 p.m. **Closing Remarks**

SPEAKERS

Brent Schlafer, Wellness Coordinator

Brent Schlafer, a dedicated member of the Allegany County Sheriff's Office for 23 years, serves as a Court Security Officer and Wellness Coordinator.

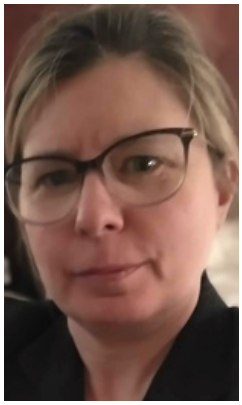
In addition to his role in court security, Officer Schlafer brings valuable expertise as a RAD Instructor for Self Defense for Women. He is proficient in instructing various programs, including ICISF Group Crisis Intervention, the Resistance Resilience Recovery Continuum Critical Incident Stress Management System (CISM), and Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention. Officer Schlafer holds certification as a Field Training Officer and is actively involved as a co-founder and instructor for the Officer Wellness Program, and Self-Care initiatives within the department.

Belinda Schlafer, LMHC, CCTP, EMDR-C

Belinda is Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC). She has been licensed since 2014. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from Houghton College with a minor in Sociology and a master's degree in Community Mental Health Counseling from St. Bonaventure University. Belinda is a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional and is certified in EMDR.

Belinda works as a Mental Health Counselor for a local school district in Allegany County providing counseling and supportive services to staff. Prior to her work at Cuba-Rushford Central School, Belinda worked for the Allegany County Department of Social Services in Adult Protective Services, PINS Reform, and Adoption and Home finding. Belinda is the co-founder and developer of the Officer Wellness Program. She is the founder and developer, and instructor of the Educator Wellness Program, the Attorney Wellness Program, and Re-charging your Battery: Self-Care and Wellness in Child Welfare, and Self-Care and Everyday Wellness in the Health Care Profession.

SPEAKERS



Carrie Wong, LMSW

Carrie Ann Wong is the Director for the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) Division of Forensic Services, Mental Health / Criminal Justice Collaboration Unit.

Ms. Wong's primary role is to foster the progress of community justice initiatives and develop training programs for law enforcement and corrections staff. She has been teaching the Police Mental Health Recruit Curriculum since 2002, Crisis Intervention Teams Training since 2012, and Suicide Prevention since 2014. Carrie has 30 years of experience working with individuals diagnosed with mental illness and developmental disabilities. As a 15-year member of the Albany County Department of Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, Ms. Wong provided emergency mental health assessments for those individuals identified "emotionally disturbed' with 16 different police agencies within Albany County. She has also worked in peer-run consumer services including a peer run support line, consumer run drop-in center and hospital diversion program.

Dr. Erin Craw, Ph.D.

Dr. Craw, earned her doctorate in Health Communication from Chapman University in Southern California. Her research interests are at the intersection of health, interpersonal, and organizational communication as it relates to support seeking, social support, stigma, and resilience.

Erin is particularly interested in translational research that improves access to needed support for underserved populations and those who face extensive barriers to gaining assistance. Her dissertation explored police officers' preferences for support and factors influencing mental health-related disclosure decisions. She has also conducted several studies with first responders and their families.

SPEAKERS

As the daughter of a police officer (36 years) and elementary school teacher (40 years), she has a true passion for research that informs mental health-related interventions, enhances communication surrounding mental health, and improves access to support for those working in the public sector. Erin's research has been published in Health Communication, the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, Western Journal of Communication, Communication Education, and the Journal of Applied Communication Research. In 2021 and 2022, Craw was awarded the Michelle Miller Day Outstanding Research Award and has earned several top paper awards through the Eastern Communication Association. She has also been an invited guest on several podcasts to discuss how her research can help enhance new approaches to improving mental health support and communication. At Youturn Health, Erin manages public sector accounts, overseeing partnerships with various counties and ensuring participants successfully access the support they need. Erin is also a part-time Adjunct Professor teaching various communication related courses at multiple universities in Connecticut. She has also volunteered teaching ESL in underserved communities. In addition, she is a Certified Mental Health First Aid Instructor passionate about helping others, especially employees, feel more competent and confident navigating difficult conversations with peers. Craw is a blogger for Psychology Today and has written several articles for Crackyl Magazine, a firefighter lifestyle publication. Erin volunteers with the American Red Cross, where she has previously worked with veteran families and currently supports the Communications Team.

Terry Hastings
Terry Hastings is currently the Senior Policy Advisor for the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES).

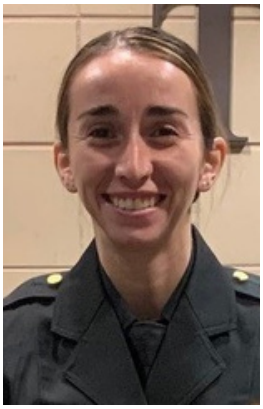
In this capacity, Terry is responsible for coordinating and managing cross-cutting projects and policy initiatives for DHSES, to include several statewide programs and strategic planning efforts. Prior to joining DHSES, Terry worked as special advisor to the Governor's Deputy Secretary for Public Safety and as a Senior Policy Analyst for the NYS Senate's Homeland Security Committee.

SPEAKERS

Terry has led several strategic planning initiatives, including the development of the New York State Homeland Security Strategy and New York State's first ever Targeted Violence Prevention Strategy. He also led the development and implementation of the County Emergency Preparedness Assessment (CEPA), a statewide risk and capability assessment initiative. Terry is currently coordinating a variety of initiatives related to first responder mental health, including New York State's first ever first-responder mental health needs assessment. He has a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Marist College and Certificate in Executive Leadership from the US Naval Post Graduate School, Center for Homeland Defense and Security. He has also completed FEMA's Emergency Management Executive Academy. In addition to his work at DHSES, Terry serves as an Adjunct Professor for the College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity, at the State University of New York at Albany

Justin Francis

Aspiring to join the Wellness Unit, my motivation stems from a genuine desire to uplift morale and serve as a positive influence. I am committed to supporting fellow officers during challenging times, both professionally and personally. Recognizing the importance of holistic well-being, I advocate for mental, physical, and emotional self-care. Drawing from my own experiences as an officer, I believe in fostering a sense of camaraderie where we prioritize each other's well-being.



Mackenzie Burns

Aspiring to contribute significantly to our department, I am dedicated to prioritizing the well-being of Deputy Sheriffs and Correction Officers. Recognizing that health and wellness are critical components of our profession, I am committed to ensuring that this unit's implementation fosters mental, physical, and emotional strength. Ultimately, when we thrive individually, we create a positive ripple effect that benefits everyone around us.

SPEAKERS

Ashley West

As a dedicated professional, I firmly believe in our duty to provide unwavering care and support to every member, regardless of the scale of their crisis. No one should ever feel isolated. Prioritizing officer wellness is essential in our line of work, and I am committed to extending a helping hand by facilitating connections to vital resources for those in need.

Danielle Brendese
Community Correction Representative 2
Office of Probation and
Correctional Alternatives

Danielle began working at OPCA in 2019 in the Adult Operations Unit, conducting Critical Incident Reviews, providing technical assistance, and implemented the probation Peer Support Team & Officer Wellness initiative. Danielle previously worked for 10 years for the Rensselaer County Probation Department, holding positions in both the adult and juvenile supervision units, as well as the juvenile Intake and diversion unit. Prior to probation, Danielle was employed with Rensselaer County Child Protective Services for 9 years. Danielle is NYS Municipal Police Training Council General Topics instructor and is a trainer in the Collaborative Case Works (CCW) model, COMPAS/COMPASR, and a SAMHSA GAINS Center's Trauma Informed Trainer. Danielle holds a Bachelor Degree in Criminal Justice from the State University of New York College at Brockport.

SPEAKERS

Melinda Vick
Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives (OPCA) within the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS)

In 2019 as a Community Correction Representative 2 in the Vocation/Education, Employment and Re-Entry (VER) Unit. The VER Unit provides program support and technical assistance to Employment Focused Services Programs and County Re-Entry Task Forces throughout NYS. The VER Unit also supports training and technical assistance to local probation departments. Melinda is a trainer and facilitator in Thinking for Change (T4C) curriculum, NYS DCJS MunicipalPolice Training Council Instructor Development Course (General Topics Instructor Certified),and a SAMHSA GAINS Center's How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses Certified Trainer. Prior to joining OPCA, Melinda was a Supervising Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator and Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator with NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) from May 2010 until November 2019. During that time, she was trained in Thinking for Change, Motivational Interviewing and as an Offender Workforce Development Specialist (OWDS) certified by the National Institute of Corrections. Melinda holds a master's degree in Forensic Psychology from the City University of New York at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from the State University of New York Institute of Technology Utica/Rome.

Dr. Richard Martin, Ph.D.
Dr. Martin holds a M.S. in Criminal Justice from Boston University and a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Regent University. He currently serves as the Chief of Police with the Newark, NY Police Department.

Dr. Richard Martin has a wide array of professional experience. He is a retired supervisor from the Rochester, NY Police Department and former college professor of leadership and criminal justice. He has served with both small rural and larger urban police departments and has had a wide variety of assignments including undercover narcotics officer, crash reconstructionist, crime scene technician, field training officer, firearms instructor, and police SCUBA diver.

SPEAKERS

He has authored several articles in national publications and presented at regional, national, and international conferences on a variety of police and leadership topics. Additionally, he has a decade of military experience having served with the U.S. Army, Army Reserves and Army National Guard. Chief of Police with the Newark, NY Police Department. Prior to that being Chief Of police, he was a Field Representative for NY State's Gun Involved Violence Elimination Program as part of the Division of Criminal Justice Services Law Enforcement Strategic Assistance Unit. Rich lives in the Town of Arcadia, NY with his wife. He has a daughter who was recently married and is studying to be a Nurse Practitioner. He is a self-proclaimed geek that enjoys reading and learning but mostly enjoys spending time with family and most things that get him outside.

Jason Palamara
Director of Veteran & First Responder Engagement for Forge Health.

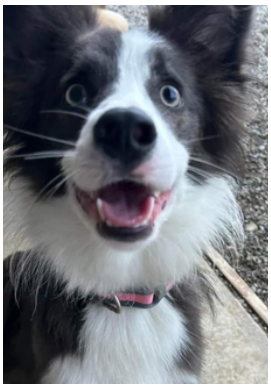
I am a keynote speaker and trainer, and my programs are for professionals in the Veteran and First Responder space, behavioral health, and all who have an interest in supporting these populations on topics such as wellness and resilience, law enforcement stress, burnout, moral injury, and suicide in law enforcement, I motivate trauma-informed audiences to boost their understanding of these subjects and find hope and peace in their lives. I co-authored a book on police wellness and resilience with Barbara Rubel entitled, Living Blue: Helping Law Enforcement Officers and Their Families Survive and Thrive from Recruitment to Retirement. I am a U.S. Navy Veteran having served in US "Operation Noble Anvil" NATO "Operation Allied Force"] aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt. I am a retired New York City Police Department Cold Case Homicide Detective. I have served as a peer support counselor with the NYPD and currently serve as a volunteer crisis intervention counselor with the Long Island Crisis Center. I am also a John C. Maxwell certified life coach, teacher, speaker, and trainer. I provide consulting services as The Cold Case Consultant specializing in complex investigations and strategic planning. I assist clients in navigating unfamiliar environments and help them achieve both professional growth and that of their business.

SPEAKERS

Sheena Bice, Chief Clinical Officer of VFR, LCMHC, MALDC, CCTP
Holds a Doctorate of Medical Science from the Bouvé college of health sciences from Northeastern University in Boston, Mass as well as a master's degree in mental health counseling from New England College.

Sheena has worked in community mental health, private practice and within the corrections system providing mental health and addiction treatment to female offenders She currently works as the Chief Clinical Officer for Forge Health VFR. Her focus is on providing trauma-informed care to our First Responders, Veterans, Service Members, and their families. She served in the United States Marine Corps and is a Military Spouse.

THERAPY DOG



Annabelle is a certified therapy dog. She joins Belinda at work each day attending therapy sessions or sitting in the doorway to eagerly greet staff and students as they pass by.
Annabelle travels to the Officer Wellness presentations.