

Today's weather



HIGH: 52
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Sunset: 8:17

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Organizations partner to offer several first responder wellness initiatives

Sara Crawford
The Gazette

MEDINA TWP. — In collaboration with Cleveland Clinic Emergency Services Institute, Alternative Paths has worked on creating several initiatives focusing on first responder wellness throughout Medina County.

Gail Houk, Alternative Paths' director of forensic services, said that she has worked with Cleveland Clinic EMS coordinators Michael Savetski and Brad Turner, along with local police departments, to secure grants to have several wellness initiatives.

She said that the focus is not just on police officers, but also on firefighters, corrections staff, dispatchers and EMS workers.

In the past, if there was a need for mental health assistance, Alternative Paths would get a call regarding a specific officer or staff member.

"We would work on a one-to-one basis to get people connected to what they needed," Houk said. "This is helping us make resources more aware to everyone."

On Friday, Alternative Paths held a presentation at Heartland Community Church in Medina Township with

speaker Kevin Gilmartin, who is a behavioral sciences consultant specializing in law enforcement and the author of the book "Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement."

The goal of the presentation was to have first responders review the potential impact their career has on their personal life, including their family members, and to develop strategies for emotional survival.

"We wanted to try to bring him in locally and that would be just another initiative to try to give officers exposure to thinking about how their careers are impacting them,"

Houk said.

Houk said more than 210 people registered to attend, with most first responders coming from the Medina County area. In addition, she said they were expecting first responders to travel into the area from Dayton, Columbus, Parma, Westlake and more.

At the beginning of his presentation, Gilmartin talked about how every first responder sees the world differently than a normal person would, whether that be a police officer, firefighter, EMS worker, dispatcher or mental health professional.

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WELLNESS

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"You see the world (from) a very different perspective as a firefighter, as a dispatcher, as a cop," he said. "It's that perspective of how you see the world, (that) is your first injury."

In addition to hosting Gilmartin to speak, Alternative Paths has worked with Cleveland Clinic Emergency Services Institute with several local initiatives.

Within the past year, the Medina County First Responder Support Team was created, training 52 local first responders to do incident debriefing and peer support, in addition to a clinician from Alternative Paths.

Houk said that since the MCFRST's creation, they have responded to about 13 calls to hold a debriefing with the first responders involved.

The MCFRST would typically respond to calls like a child fatality or a fatal motor vehicle crash within the first

24 to 48 hours to talk with the first responders.

"Situations that are a little outside of the norm of what the first responders are typically responding to that may create a potential for them to have vicarious trauma," Houk said.

Houk said research shows that if debriefings are held, it can help decrease the impact of experiencing vicarious trauma from witnessing the call.

In addition, the MCFRST provides peer support, match-

ing those who may be struggling with a trained peer who can recognize warning signs of someone struggling.

If in need of more help, Houk said that the trained peer will then be able to provide support and education, along with helping connect them to a clinician for more assistance.

In addition, several local law enforcement agencies secured additional funding through the Ohio First Responder Recruitment, Retention and Resilience Program to provide wellness visits for their officers.

"Each officer once a year will have a wellness visit with a clinician to give them essentially a time that they can talk about whatever it is they may need help with," Houk said.

She said that the Medina County Sheriff's Office began holding wellness visits in March and the hope is to begin starting at other departments shortly.



SARA CRAWFORD / GAZETTE

On Friday, Alternative Paths hosted speaker Kevin Gilmartin, who is a behavioral science consultant specializing in law enforcement and the author of the book "Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement."

Houk said that while the departments used to provide help for its staff one-on-one, she thinks it's important to raise awareness of the different resources offered within Medina County.

"We want them to be ready and willing to assist us at any

point in time," Houk said. "We need to look at what we can do to provide resources and assistance and education for them to be there when they need support too."

Contact reporter Sara Crawford at (330) 721-4063 or scrawford@medina-gazette.com.

As we enter our 10th year in Medina County, we'd like to thank the more than 1,000 families who have entrusted us with the care of their loved ones and / or their future funeral plans. In doing so, over 2 million dollars have been saved by these families, collectively, when compared to other available funeral services.



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