

First Responders

A focus on mental health & wellness

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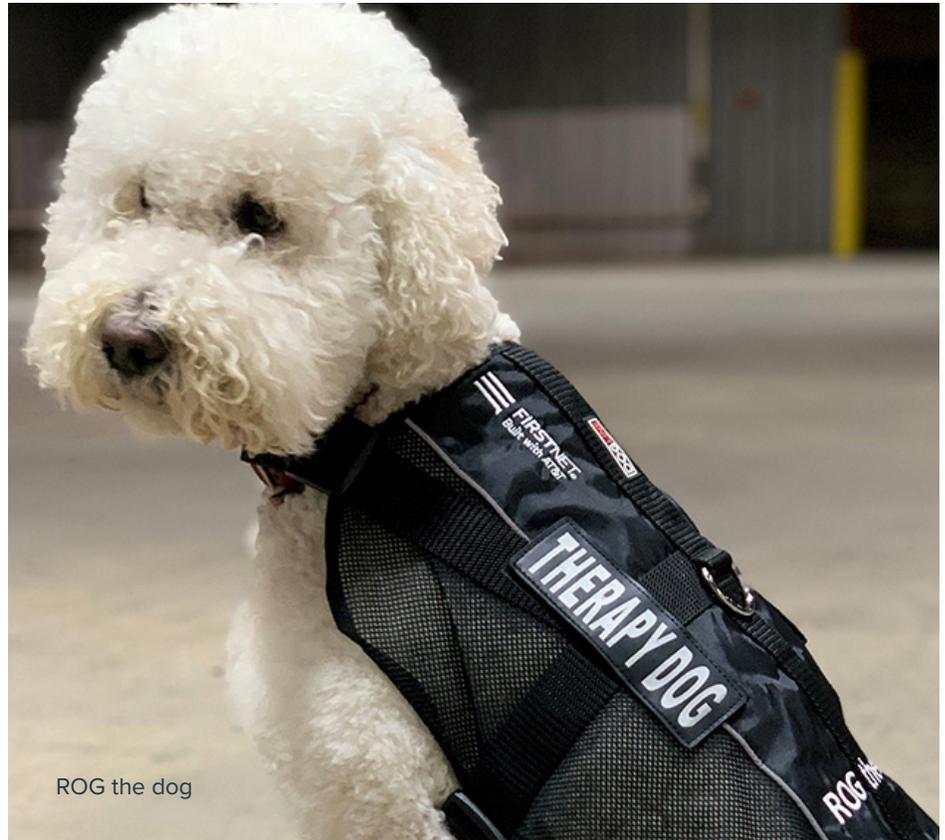
Earlier this year, FirstNet, Built with AT&T, hosted a Mission Critical Seminar at Middlesex County Fire Academy to showcase the many benefits of FirstNet for first responders. The event featured remarks from the New Jersey State Police leadership and FirstNet users from Ocean and Essex Counties. FirstNet deployable assets were on display, along with smartphones, tablets, and other devices that keep first responders connected during emergencies.

And, as part of a focus on health and wellness of first responders, attendees learned more about the FirstNet Health & Wellness Coalition, various training programs, and the FirstNet animal assisted therapy program, affectionally named ROG the Dog after our Response Operations Groups. ROG the Dog deploys to FirstNet customers following critical events in an effort to support their health and wellness needs.

Concerning statistics

Not many people can understand or empathize with the things first responders encounter during an emergency or even daily. People don't call 9-1-1 because they're having a good day. And those experiences, those images that stay rooted in the mind, take a toll. While first responders would never hesitate to tell someone else to call for help when they need it, they often put themselves at the bottom of the priority list when they need help themselves. Trauma can be difficult to discuss with others.

Compared to the general population, first responders experience higher rates of depression, post-traumatic stress, burnout, anxiety and other mental health issues. (Purvis, M., Fullencamp, L. & Docherty, M. (2020). Animal Assisted Therapy on Law



ROG the dog

Enforcement Mental Health: A Therapy Dog Implementation Guide. Bowling Green University.)

In law enforcement, one study found a more than 20-year difference in life expectancy compared to the average American male (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4734369/>).

It's also estimated that 20-25% of all first responders experience post-traumatic stress (<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>). And that statistic was established before the COVID-19 pandemic and the extra challenges it added to the already challenging jobs done by firefighters, EMS, law enforcement, corrections, dispatch, emergency medical personnel and other public safety officials, including emergency managers.

These statistics are just a few of the reasons why public safety agencies are focusing more on first responder health and

wellness. To complement their efforts, FirstNet established the FirstNet® Health & Wellness Coalition. We work closely with the women and men on the front lines and recognize the need for a diverse array of services, tools and resources. Through the collaborative efforts of the coalition, we've put together a portfolio of solutions that seek to address the wellness priorities facing public safety including posttraumatic stress, depression and self-harm, physical fitness, resiliency, stress management, and family member and leadership engagement.

These resources strive to shift the stigma associated with mental health, improve coping and recovery, enhance morale, decrease stress, and reduce emotional distress. For chiefs, administrators, and agency heads, it is never too late to institute departmental initiatives and trainings that support the health and wellness of first responders with organizations such as Boulder Crest Foundation for Posttraumatic Growth, All Clear Foundation, O2X, and First H.E.L.P. to name a few. Additionally, numerous safety and wellness apps (that have been FirstNet verified), including Lighthouse Health & Wellness, ResponderRel8, BJA VALOR Officer Safety, Cordico, The Better App: Mental Health, and others, provide easy and efficient access to information and support services.

Raising awareness and highlighting the challenges are critical steps towards changing the stigma around first responder mental health. Seeking help and creating an open environment that encourages conversation about these topics can increase

resiliency, help build better working environments, safer departments, and healthier individuals.

First responders in more than 240 communities across New Jersey are using FirstNet, Built with AT&T, to stay mission ready. Since launching FirstNet, we've grown our coverage across New Jersey, helping us to cover the entire state. And with Band 14 deployed on more than 1,000 sites statewide, first responders in every county are benefitting from the truly dedicated coverage and capacity it provides when they need it. FirstNet made a commitment to be there for public safety in their network needs. And that commitment extends beyond the network to a commitment to be there for you in your wellness, as well. 📶

@ For more information on FirstNet's Health & Wellness initiative, go to: www.firstnet.com/healthandwellness.

Joseph Divis will speak at the Conference session **Building for the Future: A Private Sector Perspective on Tuesday, Nov. 15 at 10:45 a.m., room 303.**

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