

Volunteers of America Launches First Responder Support Service

Free, Peer-to-Peer Program Addresses Nationwide Crisis Among First Responders

ALEXANDRIA, VA, UNITED STATES, August 22, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- (For Immediate Release) - Volunteers of America (VOA) launches [VOA|ReST 4 First Responders](#), a national campaign and peer support service to help First Responders including fire, police, EMT personnel, and hospital emergency staff process experiences of moral distress and burnout. The program arrives at a time when cities across America are seeing mass resignations, early retirements and low recruiting numbers among First Responders. Its goal: to help them build and maintain resilience and remain committed to their work.

The logo for VOA | ReST 4 First Responders, with "VOA" in blue, a vertical line, "ReST" in black, and "4 First Responders" in black below it.

VOA | ReST
4 First Responders

"The high-stakes work our First Responders face day in and day out has been compounded by the challenges of the pandemic," says Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock, Director of the Volunteers of America Shay Moral Injury Center. "Stigma around mental health support and lack of confidentiality prevent many First Responders from getting the support they need. That's where VOA|ReST comes in - we are providing an opportunity to build connection and resilience through our peer to peer support sessions."

Supported by the HCA Healthcare Foundation through a \$600,000 grant, the initiative offers free, online meetings as a resource for First Responders looking for an alternative type of support. In a survey, 83% of First Responders said if a close colleague, friend or family member spoke up, they would be encouraged to seek help for themselves. Sessions are confidential and facilitated by trained peer specialists.

VOA is a pioneer when it comes to addressing moral distress and injury: a concept initially thought to mostly impact war veterans but now understood to affect a variety of professions like First Responders who engage in high-stress, high-impact work. Fatigue, isolation, sorrow,

frustration, guilt, anxiety, burnout and a sense of inadequacy or failure can be signs of moral dilemma, uncertainty, or distress.

VOA|ReST was developed from VOA's original Resilience Strength Training™, an evidence-based program for military veterans. In 2020, VOA adapted that approach to offer online, confidential, peer-facilitated meetings for frontline healthcare workers. In a post-program survey, 82% of VOA|ReST Participants report feeling significantly calmer and more peaceful after group sessions. That program, VOA|ReST, has since expanded to include an even broader population, and currently has hundreds of participants who attend small meetings multiple times a week.

VOA|ReST 4 First Responders is also collaborating with the following national organizations: ALL IN: WellBeing First for Healthcare, Thrive Global's #FirstRespondersFirst initiative, Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation to illuminate and reinforce national awareness of the support offered by the program.

First Responders can sign up for the program through [this link](#).

Video/Information Opportunity:

For those looking for more information - a free, virtual event will take place on September 13, 2022 at 3pm ET to discuss the need to address moral distress and resiliency in these high-stakes professions. Featured speakers include J. Corey Feist, Co-Founder of the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation; Rev. Ann Kansfield, FDNY Chaplain; Ron Siarnicki, Executive Director of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation; and Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock, Director, Shay Moral Injury Center, Volunteers of America. Panelists will discuss the needs of First Responders, particularly exacerbated by the pandemic, the unique attributes of moral injury and distress, and how a peer support program like VOA|ReST can complement other health and well-being resources.

Available Interviews:

Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock, Director, Shay Moral Injury Center, Volunteers of America Dr. Brock is a leading national expert on moral injury and distress. She developed the Resilience Strength Training (ReST) Program to help U.S. military veterans cope with moral injury. Over the past two years, she has applied the evidence based program to support health care providers, social workers and now First Responders. She can discuss:

- What moral distress is, why it causes an 'internal war' in those who suffer from it, and how it can affect anyone from First Responders to veterans and ordinary Americans
- Her experience developing an evidence-based approach and the group's structure (small virtual confidential groups led by trained peer facilitators)
- Why addressing moral distress in First Responders is critical to building resiliency to help face the emotional challenges of their work

Rev. Madonna Arsenault, former ReST Participant, current Trainer and Facilitator, ReST 4 First Responders.

While serving as a hospital chaplain in Maine during the pandemic, Madonna collapsed from the sheer exhaustion and stress of her work after a particularly intense day in the ICU. She happened to check her email that evening and read an email from VOA announcing ReST. "The word "rest" hooked me. 'I needed a rest', I thought, and I joined my first session that night," she recalls. "I remember the feeling of deep relief, of receiving compassionate listening and restorative presence from the facilitators and participants ... I wasn't alone." Today, Madonna serves as a facilitator helping First Responders through their own experiences, calling the sessions "a chance to face some of that pain, a chance to share struggles with each other and to lighten the load that we're carrying."

Background

[The Volunteers of America Shay Moral Injury Center](#), under the direction of Rita Nakashima Brock, PhD since 2017, builds on Volunteers of America's work, spanning more than a century of helping formerly incarcerated people, military veterans, and others who live with the burden of moral injury. Through research, training, and educational programs, it offers programs, effective strategies and processes that support healing for those who experience moral injury and that enhance moral resilience including peer support programs focused on moral injury for military veterans and frontline healthcare workers.

Volunteers of America is a non-profit organization founded in 1896, is one of the country's most comprehensive human services charities. It serves almost 1.5 million people annually in 46 states including children, families, the disabled, those who are incarcerated, veterans, the elderly, the homeless, those with mental health and addiction needs and so many more.

Laura Evans Manatos

Laura Evans Media

+1 301-379-6028

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