



IAFF Division of Occupational Health, Safety and Medicine

IAFF Peer Support Training Program

Background

There is growing concern about behavioral health issues within the fire service and the significant impact on wellness. The stresses faced by fire service members throughout the course of their careers – multiple casualty events, violence, injury to children and the inherent dangers of firefighting – can have a cumulative impact on mental health and well-being. When not addressed, these stressors can negatively affect job performance, friends and family, and physical health. Peer support programs are an effective method for providing support to occupational groups, including fire fighters, and proactively addressing mental health concerns.

Program Description

Launched by the IAFF in summer 2016, the IAFF Peer Support Training is a two-day interactive course team-taught by fire fighters who are experienced peers. The training focuses on active listening skills, suicide awareness and prevention, crisis intervention, how to identify local resources, and how to build relationships with local behavioral health providers.

After completing the training, members are IAFF Trained Peer Supporters and have the necessary knowledge and skills to (1) provide support to their peers; (2) educate brothers and sisters about behavioral health (e.g., PTSD and resilience); (3) serve as a bridge to behavioral health programs and community resources; and (4) build or enhance their Peer Support programs.

Prior to the IAFF Peer Support training, Locals and departments are asked to complete an online Behavioral Health Program Readiness Self-Assessment. The self-assessment provides departments with a snapshot of the availability and utilization of resources. After the training, Peer Support teams can use the self-assessment results to identify and address behavioral health gaps.

Eligibility

It's encouraged to invite fire service personnel of varying ranks and positions to participate in the training (e.g., fire fighter, paramedic, chaplain, dispatcher, etc.). Personnel who are already providing peer support (e.g., CISM teams) are also encouraged to participate in the IAFF Peer Support Training. In addition, Host Sites may choose to invite other relevant community members (e.g., EAP, Worker's Comp, local behavioral health providers and researchers) as a way to expose these non-fire personnel to fire fighter and EMS culture.

Before attending the two-day training, participants must complete the online IAFF Behavioral Health Awareness course; completion of the self-paced course ensures participants have a common foundation of knowledge and is a prerequisite for being an IAFF Trained Peer Supporter.

Hosting

Any IAFF-affiliated department may serve as a Host Site. The IAFF strives to accommodate the training dates requested by the Host Site dependent upon instructor availability. To assure sufficient lead-time to prepare, dates should be requested at least three months in advance.

Host Sites identify one person to serve as the Training Coordinator and IAFF liaison. This person secures a training space, navigates the contract-signing process, handles registration, communicates with participants and oversees other logistics.

Host Sites are responsible for the Training's fixed fee of \$9,000 for a maximum of 30 participants (i.e., \$300/per person). IAFF covers all instructor fees, including travel and hotel expenses.

To fill the class, Host Sites are encouraged to contact neighboring IAFF affiliates and departments to seek additional participants. In these cases, Host Sites may collect pro-rated registration fees from the additional participants to offset the training cost.

At the discretion of the Host Site, scheduled IAFF Peer Support Trainings may be able to accommodate individuals or small groups who seek the training, but are unable to serve as a Host Site. Find out about available training slots through the online [IAFF Peer Support Information Guide](#) or the IAFF Behavioral Health Specialist.

For additional information, contact the IAFF Behavioral Health Specialist at 202-824-8626 or behavioralhealth@iaff.org.