



## IAFF Center of Excellence: Path to Recovery

More than one year after opening its doors, the IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery has helped more than 260 members on their road to recovery from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, addiction, depression, anxiety and other behavioral health issues.

“We are tremendously proud of what we have built for our members and the quality care we can provide to our members who need help so they can go back to the job they love and continue to keep our communities safe,” says General President Harold Schaitberger. “The Center of Excellence represents this union’s long history and commitment to putting our members’ health and safety — including behavioral health and overall wellness — at the forefront.”



*“I was met with a handshake or a hug and a “you’re in the right place, brother.” It was amazing how relatable everyone’s story was. I wasn’t the only one struggling.”* — Steve Hernden, Cape Coral, FL Local 2424

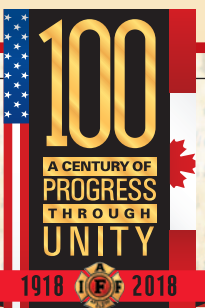
Developed in partnership with Advanced Recovery Systems (ARS), a leader in behavioral healthcare management, the IAFF Center of Excellence is the first treatment and recovery facility exclusively for IAFF members.

Unlike other treatment centers for substance abuse and other mental health disorders, the Center of Excellence includes features not found anywhere else. The 64-bed facility, located on a 15-acre campus in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, is the first specialized treatment center dedicated to PTSD and co-occurring addictions offered in an environment that is both functional and therapeutic for IAFF members to aid in their recovery.

Designed by fire fighters for fire fighters, the Center features many amenities, including a well-equipped gym and firehouse-style kitchen. IAFF members at the Center are treated like family, just as they are at the firehouse, and undergo treatment with other IAFF members who share similar experiences.

Department of Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta visited the Center of Excellence to see first-hand how the IAFF is providing specialized treatment to members. From left: Assistant to the General President Pat Morrison, President Schaitberger, Secretary Acosta, Assistant to the General President Dave Lang and Director of Health and Safety Jim Brinkley.

*“The fact that the Center of Excellence is exclusively for [IAFF members] was the only reason I went for treatment. I wouldn’t have wanted to spend hours explaining my job to civilians who just wouldn’t get it anyway. I knew wholeheartedly that I was coming from the same place as the other fire fighters, although we came from different departments. We are all doing the same job. [My] brothers and sisters at the Center with me not only changed my life, they saved it.”* — Eric R. Fessenden, Montgomery County, MD Local 1664



1922

**Prohibition** | IAFF breaks silence on prohibition. President Baer says that with asylums and hospitals crowded with victims of the “millions of gallons of poisoned concoctions sold under the guise of whiskey,” members can draw their own conclusions regarding the success of the enforcement of the National Prohibition Act.

1923

**IAFF Charters**  
At the Trades Congress of Canada, held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, members voted to not issue any charters to fire fighters’ organizations not affiliated with the IAFF.

1923

**First Aid** | Canadian Director General Colonel Charles A. Hodgetts recommended that all fire fighters become competent in first aid to provide emergency relief to injured persons, offering to pay for course instruction and textbooks.

1924

**Child Labor**  
The IAFF supported passage of the Child Labor Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to limit, regulate and prohibit labor of persons under the age of 18.



*“The Center of Excellence took care of me from day one. It saved my life.”* — Luis Jimenez, Bethlehem, PA Local 735

Licensed to treat numerous addiction or dependence disorders involving medication, alcohol or illicit drugs, treatment at the Center is available for other addictions, as well. The IAFF Center of Excellence is a dually licensed facility, which means members can be treated for these conditions separately or simultaneously. So, if you're struggling with PTSD or any other mental health disorder, but you're not addicted to any substances, the Center can help you. If you have an addiction, but don't have any major mental health concerns, the Center can treat you. If you're dealing with a substance use disorder and a mental health disorder, the Center is there for you.

With a multifaceted team of primary care doctors, psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, masters-level therapists, behavioral health technicians and nurses, every treatment provider understands the unique pressures of the job and is equipped to meet the needs of members. In addition to understanding the unique culture of the fire service, each staff member is required to go through FIRE OPS 101, as well as at least one ride along.

What also makes the Center special is the graduation ceremony for each member before leaving to return home and to work. Together with all IAFF members at the Center, a celebratory ceremony is held at the Renewal Plaza — an outdoor circular courtyard — to mark the end of treatment and the start of a new life in recovery.

But support for members doesn't end with discharge from the Center. Aftercare is also an important phase. The goal is to follow up with every IAFF member after treatment on a regular basis for more than one year

*“I'm not proud that I had to get help, but I'm not embarrassed, either, because I took care of me. If you're like me, the Center is where you need to go.”*

— Ray Glover, Memphis, TN Local 1784

beyond graduation for additional support in recovery.

Initially, one of biggest obstacles for members seeking treatment at the Center was that many insurance companies did not offer in-network benefits without accreditation from the Joint Commission, which is not granted until a facility is open and treating patients for at least six months. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is recognized nationwide as a symbol of quality that reflects an organization's commitment to meeting certain performance standards.

However, since receiving accreditation from the Joint Commission in August 2017, ARS has negotiated in-network contracts with Humana and Cigna, is in the process of negotiating with Aetna, and is continuing targeted outreach to Blue Cross/Blue Shield, United Healthcare and Kaiser.

“Nothing matters more than our members' health, and the Center of Excellence is a safe haven for members to talk with their brothers and sisters who have faced or overcome similar challenges and get the help they need,” says Schaitberger.

For more information about the Center, visit [IAFFRecoveryCenter.com](http://IAFFRecoveryCenter.com). ■

*“Calling the Center of Excellence was the toughest — and best — call I ever made. The care is second to none. It saved my life, my job and my marriage. The Center is going to save a lot of lives.”* — Joe Kovalsky, Danbury, CT Local 801

## Survey Sheds Light on Post-Traumatic Stress in the Fire Service

**95%** have experienced critical stress on the job

**77%** said stressful experiences as a fire fighter caused lingering or unresolved emotional issues

**71%** have trouble sleeping

**65%** have recurring/unwanted memories

**27%** said the stress has led to substance abuse

**19%** have had thoughts of suicide

**78%** said their department did not educate them about behavioral health

**63%** said their existing EAP services were not helpful

**77%** found peer support helpful

▶ More than 7,000 IAFF members responded to an IAFF/WNBC survey about the stresses of the job and the impact on their mental health. To watch, visit [www.iaff.org/WNBC](http://www.iaff.org/WNBC).




**IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery**

For more information, visit [www.iaffrecoverycenter.com](http://www.iaffrecoverycenter.com) or call (855) 900-8437.

### IAFF on Immigration

The IAFF supports a new immigration bill to allow 2 percent of the population of any foreign nationality that was in the United States in 1890 to come in, and permission is also given for wives or husbands of citizens to enter their children under 18 and their parents.

### Foes in Congress

The IAFF published a list of 50 congressmen classified as bitterly hostile or “hard boiled” where labor is concerned.

### Supreme Court Disappoints

Two Supreme Court decisions boded poorly for labor. The Court decided that compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes is unconstitutional and gave material dealers the right to refuse to sell materials to contractors who employ union workers.

### Pension Improvement

The IAFF lauded progress made towards adoption of state-wide “old age” pensions to replace the poor house system.

1925