

# VoyageDenver

LOCAL STORIES MARCH 26, 2024

## Exploring Life & Business with First Responder Trauma Counselors



Today, we'd like to introduce you to First Responder Trauma Counselors.

**First Responder Trauma Counselors, we appreciate you taking the time to share your story with us today. Where does your story begin?**

First Responder Trauma Counselors was founded in 2005. At that time we were a small business but dedicated to doing the right thing. Being a counseling group of just 2 people (both first responders in our past lives), we made ourselves available to our first responders and frontline workers, 24/7-365.

First responders and frontline workers typically encounter thousands of civilians a year at the most traumatic moments of their lives. First responders have their own traumas – personal or family-related – and experience difficulties in life just like everyone else.

Add the compounding job-related trauma they experience daily as emergency service providers and, at times, it becomes really difficult to be 100% focused on the care of others. We know how difficult it is for first responders and frontline workers to pick up the phone to ask for support. That phone feels like it weighs 10,000 lbs. If and when they do make the call, someone who truly cares and is culturally competent should be there to answer it.

To reduce the barriers to reaching out, we train first responders and frontline workers to be peer supporters for their brothers and sisters in every agency FRTC serves. These individuals attend our 40-Hour National Peer Support Academy to learn and practice effective peer support skills. Peer support can be helpful for anything ranging from having a “bad day” to having responded to a critical call.

We have over 150 trained peer support individuals on our Regional Member Agency Peer Support Team, operating under the supervision of our Directing Clinical Supervisor. They are incredible people who are willing to be available to help their brothers and sisters, both while they are at work and on their days off. We couldn't do what we do if it weren't for our Regional Member Agency Peer Support Team members.

Our vision and mission have always been to provide an innovative service beyond traditional counseling to these courageous individuals. To earn their trust and respect, show them how much we genuinely care, and follow through on what we say we are going to do. Trust, Transparency, Accountability, and Integrity – these are the values we strive to uphold.

We do not innovate to compete; we innovate to change the breadth of behavioral health care for our population groups. We know that the emergency service and frontline worker culture runs on a treadmill of trauma – it never stops and nor do we. We are the 911 for the 911.

FRTC has grown rapidly over the years. We now have nearly two dozen licensed counselors and more than 100 trained peer supporters. We recently developed a non-profit organization in 2022 – First Responder Trauma Services – to further expand our program and innovative resources for this incredible Tribe, and provide them at no direct cost to the employees of the agencies we serve.

### **We all face challenges, but would you describe it as a relatively smooth road?**

First Responder Trauma Counselors are dedicated to their Mission. Caring for the few, who care for many. Being available 24/7, every day of the year to support the first responders and frontline workers. Initially as a small business of two people and dedicated to being available to over 400 first responders and their legal partners the pace and road map was clear.

As we began to grow, the challenges were our ability to add the infrastructure to our company while agreeing to serve additional northern Colorado agencies. We now serve nearly 3000 employees and

their legal partners. There were struggles whereby we wanted to do more and be more for this vital group, but there were only two of us.

Finding the right individuals who understand our mission and are focused on the purpose and vision of our organization sounds easy on the surface. However, in practicality, it proved more difficult than we first thought. We learned valuable lessons: wait to bring on the right person, don't hire just to fill a gap. And that's what we have done.

We have a small but mighty group of 7 employees and over 20 independent contractors who have lived the first responder/frontline life (culturally competent), or are keenly aware of what it entails. They are our team and we depend upon them to carry our mission, vision, and values forward. We are so appreciative of them for wanting to walk with us on this journey.

**We've been impressed with First Responder Trauma Counselors, but for folks who might not be as familiar, what can you share with them about what you do and what sets you apart from others?**

First Responder Trauma Counselors and First Responder Trauma Services 501(c)(3) is proud to be opening the first drop-in center for first responders, frontline workers and their legal partners. The CENTER (Counseling-Education-Navigation-Training-Resources) will be available for our first responders and frontline workers to stop by, have a cup of coffee, decompress, work out, and/or have a check-in session with a culturally competent service provider.

Eventually, it will be open 24 hours a day, every day of the week, with a service provider available should a first responder/frontline worker have a rough shift and just need a place to go and decompress before they bring the trauma home – The CENTER will be available to them. We have used our own personal funds to acquire the building and are working on a capital campaign to continue to fund this life-long project of ours.

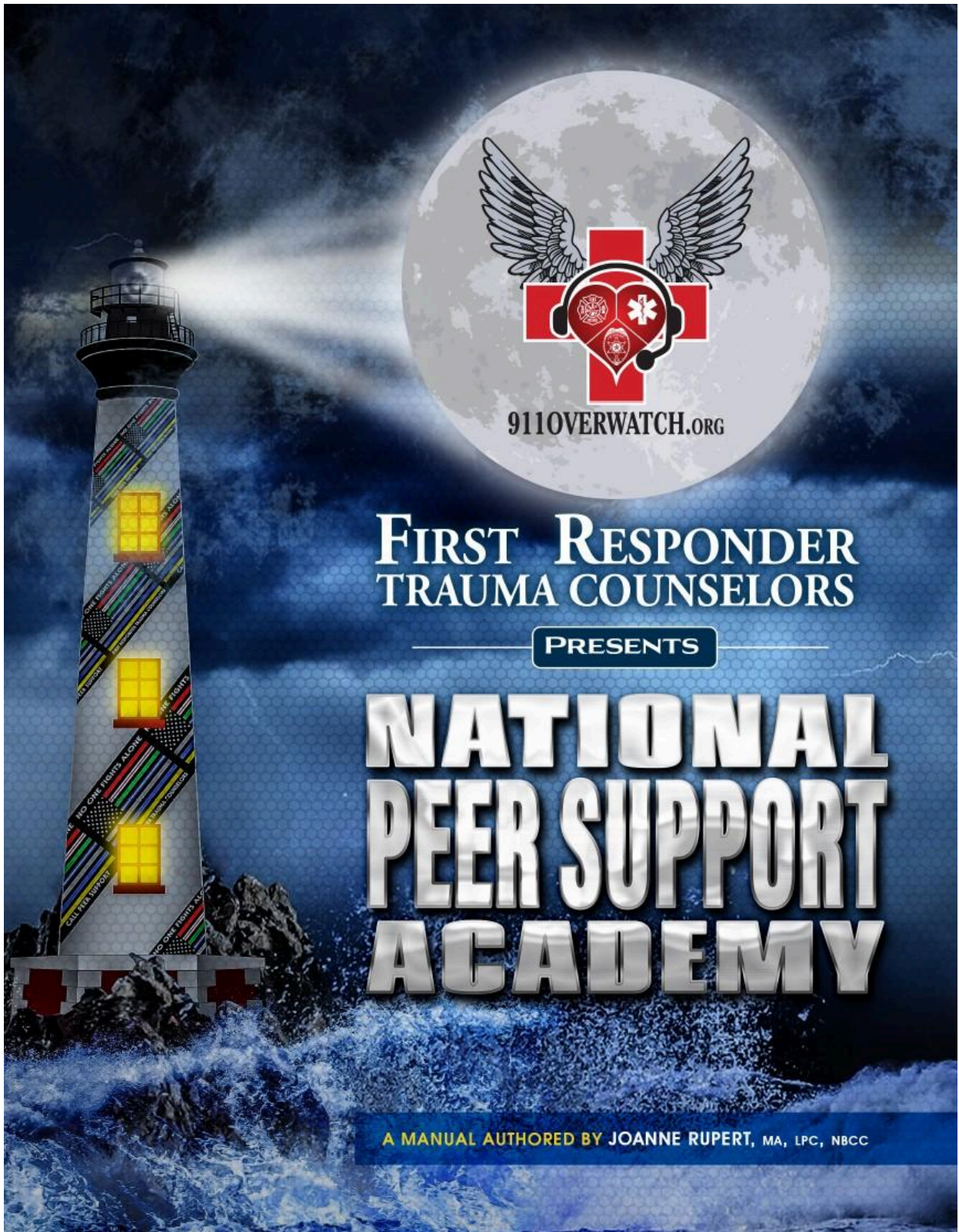
**What makes you happy?**

The ability to work every day together with my husband, Ed Rupert. He's the brilliance behind everything. I'm so honored to share this journey with him and for us to continue to have a purpose bigger than ourselves. Our amazing adult kids give us both pride and value.

We have four working dogs, all goldendoodles: Bunker, Badge, Stryker, and Moose. They serve with us and support our first responders and frontline workers. They create an abundance of joy in the lives of so many others. And finally, the men and women who have allowed us to serve and support them in both good times and bad times. Ed and I find this work exceptionally fulfilling.

**Contact Info:**

- Website: [frts911.com](https://frts911.com) & [911overwatch.org](https://911overwatch.org)
- Facebook: [First Responder Trauma Services](https://www.facebook.com/FirstResponderTraumaServices)



911OVERWATCH.ORG

# FIRST RESPONDER TRAUMA COUNSELORS

PRESENTS

# NATIONAL PEER SUPPORT ACADEMY

A MANUAL AUTHORED BY JOANNE RUPERT, MA, LPC, NBCC



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**NO ONE FIGHTS ALONE**



**FIRST RESPONDER TRAUMA COUNSELORS**



