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FEATURED ARTICLE

Light Beyond the Call of Duty

First Responders Trauma Services Provides Relief, Renewal, and Hope for Those Who Carry the Heaviest Burdens

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There's a place...on the edge of Windsor...down a quiet dirt road. It's a special place... where healing begins, where people feel safe, maybe for the first time in a long time. It's a welcoming space where there is no reproach but rather complete acceptance.

Two people are at the heart of this haven who know firsthand the plight of their peers for which they provide unceasing vigilance...because they've been there. Ed and Joanne Rupert are the founders of the First Responders Trauma Services, and they are an ever-present light for those seeking reprieve from the shadows of trauma.

For twenty years, Ed and Joanne have been helping first responders in a clinical capacity, regardless of the time of day or night. When the call comes in, they are there, meeting the individual in their home if necessary. Between the two of them, they have over eighty years of first-response background, making them well-acquainted with the struggles their comrades face.

To ensure they could keep providing unlimited support, they established First Responder Trauma Services as a nonprofit in 2022. Since acquiring a center in 2024, they have seen a 48 percent increase in care utilization.

Despite the number of traumas a normal shift may carry, many first responders exhibit incredible resilience. Still, the brain was not designed to sustain continual burdens without rest and care. Ed and Joanne, through their center, provide a safety net allowing responders to decompress after a trauma-laden shift, often without counseling - just a space that invites relief.

Stress from responder work can manifest in many ways. The center (**C**ounseling-**E**ducation-**N**avigation-**T**raining-**E**mpowerment-**R**esources), located in a 4,500 square foot multi-room house on 3.5 acres, offers various unique therapies in addition to traditional counseling. From vibroacoustic therapy, bee therapy, mindfulness, and hypnotherapy to lessons on sourdough bread making, these treatments help relieve stress and ease PTSI/D symptoms.

Vibroacoustic therapy uses 432-hertz sound waves through mats and pillows, sending vibrations through the body; it's like lying inside a cello. Within 20 - 40 minutes, anxiety eases, often to tears of relief. Bee therapy works similarly: the hive's natural hum in the key of C helps reset trauma responses.

For first responders, staying on high alert is a normal state of being. Their brains get stuck in fight-or-flight and can't shift into calm the way most people can. At the center, mindfulness is practiced and explained in simple, scientific terms to help retrain the brain so the body can finally feel safe and at rest. Gratitude is taught as part of this method, too. One practice is journaling after each call, finishing with one good thing that happened, even in tragedy. This helps build resilience and changes how they see the world, creating a path of gratitude.

The 2,700 frontline workers supported by FRTS span the spectrum of emergency response from 911 operators to coroners and their spouses. With divorce rates in the first responder community reaching as high as 80%, FRTS and its 25 clinicians recognize the importance of also supporting spouses, who share in the burden.

Ed and Joanne love what they do and have a beautiful vision for carrying it forward. They want this work to become a standard of care for all first responders and healthcare workers, where it isn't an afterthought but a first thought for any public service agency or provider group. They hope to have the capacity and staffing to support that internally, without uncertainty about where help will come from. And the impact reaches far beyond the center's walls: when first responders are cared for, the whole community benefits, because they are the ones who show up at our doors in times of need. To make that possible, First Responders Trauma Services welcomes donations and volunteers from the community, helping ensure this vital care continues. www.frts911.com.

