

Customer Spotlight Q&A

Dr. Mandy Gattis

Project Coordinator at
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Can you tell us about your background?

I have been a first responder for nearly 15 years. I have been a volunteer firefighter, a member of my local rescue squad, and I hold numerous certifications, including Emergency Medical Responder. I just finished my Doctorate in Education with my dissertation focusing on first responder mental health resiliency and post-traumatic growth. Currently, I work for the South Carolina EMS Association as their Project Coordinator. I wear many hats in my position, and one of those is working collaboratively to create a statewide peer support program called Peer Connect. This proactive program created through the South Carolina Public Safety Wellness Initiative has partnered with First Response Mental Health and local peer support teams to build an online application platform to help manage internal and external support teams, wellness programs, and provide support to first responders all over the state.

What motivated you to take the *Mental Health Resilience Officer (MHRO) course*?

I have always been an advocate for first responder mental health; through my own experiences and watching those that have worked alongside me, I knew that there was a need for first responder mental health awareness not only locally, but on a bigger scale. When I heard about the MHRO course, I saw an opportunity to further learn about first responder mental health and learn some ways that I can help my first responder peers learn and cope. I am striving to teach others and create awareness about first responder mental health and help break the stigma that surrounds it.

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PRODUCT USED

*Mental Health Resilience Officer
(Online Course)*



Key Benefits

- ✓ Emphasized that first responder mental health programs are no longer a “one size fits all” approach
- ✓ Learned about different types of aid and new ways for EMS organizations to address mental health
- ✓ Found the information in the course applicable to her background and useful in teaching others about the importance of first responder mental health programs

How does the course address some of the critical mental health issues that EMS professionals and agencies experience today?

The MHRO course provided a great deal of valuable information in it; everything from proactive practices to helping cope and build resiliency after a traumatic situation has been experienced. The course helped to show that critical mental health issues exist in every agency in the EMS career field and that every agency should take proactive steps to create a safe place for those that are experiencing these issues. Establishing a mental health resiliency officer program should be standard practice. The subject that was addressed in the course I found most interesting is that it introduced different kinds of aid. The old way of dealing with mental health issues was to employ Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) or Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), and those programs work in some cases, but they aren't for everyone and aren't feasible for small departments that are already understaffed. MHRO shows that there are different methods to employ, such as peer support, chaplaincy, counseling and therapy, etc. This course emphasizes that mental health programs are no longer a "one-size fits all" approach and can allow agencies to tailor their program to the different needs that their employees may have.

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How have you found the course valuable in your day-to-day work?

I have been able to use the information in this course in my own research on first responder mental health and resiliency and to help teach others the importance of first responder mental health and wellness. I am hoping to share this valuable information locally with agencies as well to enhance/create their own MHRO programs.

What advice would you give other EMS agencies or professionals before taking this course?

The advice I would give is to be open-minded about the course and to look at all the options that are available for an MHRO program. I would also say that it would be very beneficial to have a designated employee as a MHRO in your agency when the program is implemented. There are so many ways to create an MHRO program that will be successful and having the staff and knowledge from this course will ensure that success.

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