



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:

March 11, 2020

Peer support training hosted by Boone County Professional Firefighters

Over the past two days, Boone County public safety personnel have participated in a two-day peer support training hosted by the Boone County Professional Firefighters Local 5195. This educational opportunity allows 30 participants from Boone County to be trained as peer support providers for their departments and to also assist other departments in the county and central Indiana.

Participants include firefighters from Zionsville, Lebanon, Whitestown and Jamestown Fire Departments well as police officers from the county.

Behavioral health issues among first responders is a growing challenge due to the graphic images and trauma they experience. This program trains firefighters to assess their peers for signs of stress that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and other behavioral disorders.

“Every department in Boone County will benefit as the peer support providers will support first responders from every public safety organization in the county,” said Steve Hayes, Zionsville Fire Department Lieutenant and President of the Boone County Professional Firefighters. “This is a great opportunity for our firefighters.”

The course is instructed by retired Indianapolis Fire Department Firefighter Dr. Robert L. Smith. Smith specializes in psychotherapy and consulting.

Funding for the course was provided through a generous donation from Zionsville Fire Department Captain Todd Scales and his wife Leigh Ann Akard of Akard True Value Hardware in Zionsville. In 2018, Todd and Leigh Ann lost their son to suicide.

Because of their donation, the course was free of charge to participants.

“This was important to us because mental health is such a big issue in public safety departments,” Akard said. “We wanted to do this in memory of our son Stuart and to also help public safety personnel realize that there are people to talk to. We see this course as a first step in creating a community to come together and support each other.”

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