



FIRST RESPONDER MENTAL WELLNESS SUMMIT NC 2026

DAY 2 - FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2026

0700–0800 – Registration & Coffee Bar

Sponsored by: CFCC EMS Club

Union Station Lobby

0800–0815 – Welcome Back and Announcements - Brandon Davis - Event Emcee

Daniels Hall

0815–0915 – Day 2 Opening Keynote: Cody Spaulding – “The Salty Paramedic”

Daniels Hall

0915–0945 – Break / Visit Vendors



0945–1030 – Breakout Sessions (Choose One)

- **Classroom 1 Ivy Bagley – Bullying in Healthcare**
Bullying in healthcare is a widespread but often overlooked issue that damages team relationships, contributes to burnout, and threatens patient safety. This session examines how bullying shows up in healthcare settings, its impact on staff well being and organizational culture, and practical strategies for prevention and intervention. Participants will explore ways to foster psychological safety, accountability, and respect to support healthier teams and safer patient care.
- **Classroom 2 Tim Anderson – Pressing Reset for Whole Body Wellness**
This session introduces simple, natural movement patterns that help regulate the nervous system, calm emotions, and reduce neurological tension in the body. Participants will learn how these movements can improve strength and range of motion while also supporting mental and emotional well being, offering a practical approach to feeling better both physically and mentally.
- **Classroom 3 William Blanchard – Leading with Compassion**
First responders are trained to act and anticipate, often at the expense of being present. This session explores spiritual growth through presence, helping participants reconnect with their purpose, find calm amid chaos, and reframe what success looks like. Through reflection and discussion, attendees will gain tools to cultivate clarity, gratitude, and fulfillment both on and off the job.
- **Classroom 4 Scott McPherson – Moral Injury and the Soul Wounds of Service**
First responders routinely witness trauma that leaves wounds not only on the mind and body, but on the soul. This session explores moral injury and how unaddressed soul wounds can impact long term recovery. Participants will examine how trauma affects the whole person and learn key principles for comprehensive healing, including forgiveness, identity, healthy processing of grief and loss, and intentional responses that support lasting recovery.
- **Auditorium Morrissa Ahl-Moyer – Trauma Goggles: How High-Stress Work Shapes Perception, Communication, and Decision-Making**
This session focuses on how exposure to high-stress and trauma changes how the brain filters tone, threat, responsibility, and meaning. These filters are often referred to as “trauma goggles”. Rather than teaching coping techniques or therapy tools, this class emphasizes professional sustainability. The goal is not to eliminate these adaptations, but to use them more intentionally.



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- **Daniels Hall Cody Scheuermann – Welcome to Dispatch**

911 dispatchers are often the first first responders, absorbing panic, trauma, and crisis without ever seeing resolution. This session examines the hidden toll of dispatching, including trauma by proxy, sleep disruption, burnout, and the cultural expectation to stay silent. Participants will gain insight into how this work impacts the mind, body, and heart, along with practical strategies to support dispatcher wellness and ensure these professionals receive the care and recognition they deserve.

1030–1100 – Break / Visit Vendors



1100–1145 – Breakout Sessions (Choose One)

- **Classroom 1 Amy Ramsey – If Only My Eyes Could Unsee**

This presentation shares the personal journey of an EMS professional navigating PTSD and unresolved childhood trauma. Through honest reflection, it explores coping mechanisms, stigma within the profession, and the impact of carrying trauma in silence. Participants will gain insight into the challenges of seeking help, the importance of finding moments of grounding and joy, and the role of ongoing support in healing and resilience both personally and professionally.

- **Classroom 2 Michelle Mouring – Polyvagal Theory vs. The Brain Gut Axis**

This session explores the connection between mental health and gastrointestinal issues, highlighting how chronic stress and a constant state of high alert affect both the mind and body. Participants will gain insight into natural stress responses and how understanding these patterns can support better health, regulation, and overall well being.

- **Classroom 3 Christopher Goenner – The Weight of a Thousand Calls**

This presentation explores the often overlooked reality of cumulative trauma in EMS, where years of repeated exposure can quietly erode well being. Through a personal journey shaped by decades of service, the session examines how unprocessed trauma builds over time, the cultural barriers to seeking help, and the critical role of peer support and early intervention. Attendees will gain insight into recognizing cumulative stress and normalizing mental health care as an essential part of a sustainable career in emergency services.

- **Classroom 4 Laura Chase – Finding Your Passion**

Public safety work can easily become all consuming, leaving little room for rest, identity, or joy. This session explores how shift work, long hours, and trauma bonding contribute to burnout and disconnection from what once brought passion and meaning. Participants will be guided to reconnect with what fuels them, rediscover personal interests, and begin rebuilding a sense of balance beyond the job.

- **Auditorium Felicia Kelly – The RICH Method for Living**

The RICH Method for Living™ offers first responders a practical framework for building balance, resilience, and purpose beyond the uniform. Centered on five core values, this session provides tools to reduce burnout, set healthy boundaries, and steward time, energy, and relationships—helping participants move from surviving shifts to living with clarity and fulfillment.



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- **Daniels Hall Jim Mitchem – Understanding and Addressing Vicarious Trauma**

Understanding and Addressing Vicarious Trauma explores how repeated exposure to trauma impacts first responders emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. This session examines why we are drawn to this work, the cumulative effects of caregiving, and the signs of vicarious trauma. Participants will gain insight into risk factors, protective strategies, and leadership roles in prevention, with practical tools to support resilience and reduce long-term harm.

1145-1245 – Lunch Break – Panel Discussion



1245–1330 – Breakout Sessions (Choose One)

- **Classroom 1 Kristen Clark – The Medic Who Got Raped**

This presentation shares a survivor's experience of sexual assault within the EMS workplace and the journey through reporting, accountability, and recovery. It explores how trauma impacts the body and mind, the realities of navigating HR and legal systems, and the long path to healing. Designed to challenge the belief that "it couldn't happen to me," this session raises awareness and encourages safer, more accountable public safety cultures.

- **Classroom 2 John vonRosenberg – The Cognition of Stress**

Stress is a constant part of first responder life, but it is not always harmful. This session reframes stress as a cognitive process that can enhance focus and performance when properly managed. Participants will learn practical strategies to control stress in the moment, recover after high intensity calls, and prepare for the long term effects of working in public safety.

- **Classroom 3 Emilee Landreth – Critical Incident Mental Health and Hard Talks**

This mental health focused presentation highlights the importance of culturally competent care for first responders. The session explain why responders often benefit from working with therapists who understand the profession and why agencies should prioritize culturally informed providers. Participants will also receive information on available mental health resources and support options.

- **Classroom 4 Roman Barker – The Trauma Within: Taking Time to Treat Yourself**

This interactive session examines peer support from the provider perspective in high acuity, high stress environments. Through candid dialogue and lived experience, participants will explore real world challenges and practical strategies for effective peer support. Attendees will leave with tools to strengthen resilience, build authentic connections, and better navigate pathways to professional mental health care when needed.

- **Auditorium Tara Tucker – The Resource Roadmap**

This session equips participants with practical tools to support first responders in crisis. Attendees will learn how to connect individuals to appropriate mental health and substance use services, identify key local and national resources, and understand funding options that support access to care. Designed for peer supporters, leaders, and clinicians, the session focuses on bridging gaps in support so no responder walks alone.



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- **Daniels Hall Rick Dunton – The K9 Responder Academy – How to Build a Therapy Dog Program in any Department**

The K9 Responder Academy explores how departments can build and sustain an effective therapy dog program. This session covers program structure, handler selection, training standards, and policy considerations. Attendees will gain practical guidance for implementing a therapy dog program that supports responder wellness and strengthens agency culture.

1330–1400 – Break / Visit Vendors (Last Break with Vendors)



1400–1445 – Breakout Sessions (Choose One)

- **Classroom 1 Ashley Barnes – My Wings Felt Heavy Until I Learned to Fly**
Wings Felt Heavy Until I Learned to Fly explores the emotional and cultural challenges of transitioning roles in EMS, from new providers to seasoned professionals changing agencies or practice settings. This session addresses culture shock, imposter syndrome, and identity shifts that often accompany change. Through personal experience and practical tools, participants will learn strategies to build resilience, confidence, and belonging during transitions. The session emphasizes self kindness as a foundation for long term success and mental wellness.
- **Classroom 2 Leland Wainright (Lee) – Going Upstream in Mental Health**
This session focuses on proactive mental health awareness rather than crisis response. Participants will learn how to recognize early warning signs, identify available resources, and reduce barriers to seeking help. Designed for peers and supervisors, the class emphasizes early intervention and practical steps that can save lives.
- **Classroom 3 Fee Shepard – The Mind-Body Connection**
This session explores the powerful connection between physical health and mental resilience in first responders. Participants will learn how nutrition, exercise, sleep, and lifestyle habits directly influence stress tolerance, mood, and performance. Designed for demanding schedules, the presentation offers realistic, evidence based strategies to support sustainable physical and mental wellness on and off the job.
- **Classroom 4 Melissa Levitsky – How a Dog and a Horse Saved My Life**
This session shares a raw, personal story of loss, survival, and resilience following the death of a fellow paramedic. It explores the impact of first responder suicide, the role of canine and equine support in anxiety and PTSD, and how animals can aid healing through connection and presence. Grounded in honesty, the presentation also highlights resilience, peer support, and pathways to help for those who are struggling.
- **Auditorium Will Rivera – We Can't Suck It Up Anymore**
This session examines the impact of structured counseling on burnout and suicidality among EMS providers following the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing from research with North Carolina paramedics, it highlights reductions in burnout and improved resilience among those who engaged in counseling, while addressing persistent barriers such as stigma and access to care. Participants will explore evidence based recommendations for integrating counseling and peer support into EMS culture as essential components of workforce wellness and retention.



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1445–1515 – Break / Dance Competition



1515–1615 – Day 2 Closing Keynote: Conrad Weaver – Wellness Begins with Leadership
Daniels Hall

1615–1645 – That’s a Wrap! Final Thoughts: Brad Lawson – Don’t Leave This Here
Daniels Hall

1645–1700 – Closing Ceremony & Final Raffle Drawing (Let’s give away a cruise!!! Must be present to win!!!)
Daniels Hall