

SOS—Expanding Services to Families
Ann Buscho, Ph.D.

The First Responder Support Network (FRSN) mission is to provide treatment programs that promote recovery from stress and critical incidents for first responders and their families. The FRSN is a collaboration among emergency service peers (police, fire, corrections, dispatchers and emergency medical services), mental health clinicians, and chaplains who volunteer their time. **Significant Others and Spouses (SOS):** The SOS residential program is for emergency responder partners and spouses who have been affected by their partner's critical incidents (resulting in secondary or vicarious traumatization), but may also experience their own depression or anxiety symptoms and need a program to address their needs. In addition, Significant Others and Spouses may have their own trauma history, which is re-activated when his/her partner experiences a traumatic event.

The SOS program was started about six years ago as an adjunct to the program for emergency responders. As a police wife and a family psychologist, I felt that emergency responder families would benefit from a program like WCPR. With the help of peers and Dr. Mark Kamena (the Clinical Director of FRSN), SOS has developed into a unique program designed to address the complex needs of spouses and partners. This program is currently offered once or twice a year and at no cost to the attendees. This program is the only one of its kind in the country.

Attendees come for six very full days. The attendees and volunteer clinicians, peers, and chaplain all stay together at our beautiful retreat house on the coast of Northern California. Meals and lodging are provided at no charge. Over the course of six days and five nights, attendees experience intensive education, treatment, and self-care modules. About 6 attendees are in each group, and the group usually becomes tightly bonded by the end of their stay. Many have stayed in contact with each other following their stay at SOS.

Most of the attendees at SOS have been women in relationships with first responders. Some have been doing emergency responder work as well. Their ages have ranged from 22-84. Some come before or

after their partner attends WCPR. Others come to SOS but their partner does not attend WCPR. Some have been divorced or widowed (line of duty death).

While the week includes a yoga class, an art experience, and several relaxation exercises, there are also discussions and presentations on sleep hygiene, co-dependency, domestic violence, mental illness, PTSD, compassion fatigue, and others. An Al-Anon and an AA meeting are held during the week. Tools and healthy coping strategies are modeled, taught and practiced during the week. The core of the program includes extensive debriefings in a group, individual sessions of EMDR with licensed and specially trained clinicians, and the creation of a 90-day plan for follow-up treatment and action steps. The presence of a chaplain throughout the week lends a compassionate and spiritual presence to the group. The ratio of staff (mostly peers) to client is about 3:1, so clients get a lot of support and attention from staff and previous attendees who return as peers.

Is this program right for you? If you are experiencing depression, anxiety, isolation, suicidal thoughts, sleep problems, relationship stress, work difficulties, the loss of a spouse or partner, domestic abuse or violence, or addiction issues, and are having trouble coping with daily activities, then you should seek help. If you have had previous counseling and/or medication without improvement in your symptoms, then SOS may be right for you.

If you would like to come to SOS, call us for an initial telephone intake. This interview takes 60-90 minutes and together we will determine if the program is a good fit for you. A minimum of 30 days sobriety is required prior to attending SOS.

We encourage you to contact us if you or someone you know is in need of some assistance. Please see us on the web at www.wcpr2001.org You may also contact me at www.drannbuscho.com for more information.