



Curt Searcy

The morning of January 9th, 2017, Engine/Rescue/Tower 9 responded to the shooting of an Orlando Police officer. I was the first member of Station 9 to get to the officer, and I recall that there were multiple entrance and exit wounds to the officer. Station 9/C personnel quickly packaged the patient for transport to ORMC. En route to the hospital, 4 paramedics worked to try and stabilize the officer's condition in hopes that the doctors and nurses at ORMC could save her life. Shortly after transferring care to the ER team and giving a patient report, one of the lead physicians for the trauma team instructed ER personnel to cease resuscitative efforts. This angered me given how hard OFD personnel had worked to save her. I felt like this doctor did not give the officer a fighting chance.

Unbeknownst to me, but recognizable by everyone else, I was struggling to process what I had experienced with that call. My supervisor at my side job, who knew about the call, pulled me into her office to ask me if I was feeling alright, and that she had noticed that I was not acting like myself. I told her that I was fine and that I was just having a bad day. Then in early May of that year, I was at a movie with my family that we were all excited about seeing. I had been acting distant and distracted when around my family for the past 5 months. My wife leaned over to me as the movie was starting and said "How about you act like you want to be with your family today"? That was the moment I realized that I had been a different person to everyone around me for months, and that I needed help.

I had heard about the UCF Restores program from members of the Orlando Fire Department Peer Support Team, and decided that I would contact them to seek professional help with what was troubling me. In the course of the next 7 months, the counseling, mental, and emotional support that I received at UCF Restores helped me to not only understand why I was feeling the way I was, but it provided me with the tools and knowledge to be able to deal with my problems in a healthy and productive way. I believe that enrolling in UCF Restores helped my family as well, as I was eventually able to return to the person that they knew before the January 2017 call.

Since “graduating” for the first time from UCF Restores, I re-enrolled in early 2021 due to a combination of job stress and stress from finishing my Bachelors Degree. Once again, the support I received there taught me more about recognizing my own stress and how to constructively deal with it. As a supervisor in the Orlando Fire Department, having the ability to recognize when your troops are struggling with stress, depression, or substance abuse problems is vital to the success of not only the department, but to that individual’s family and friends.

I understand that there are many stigmas attached to mental and emotional problems, especially so in the fire service. But if you don’t have productive ways to deal with your problems, UCF Restores can provide you with the knowledge and support you need to become the person you were before life’s stressors overwhelmed you. I would recommend UCF Restores to anyone who is becoming overburdened with the daily grinds of the fire service and life in general.