



STRUGGLE WELL

**A TRANSFORMATIVE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR FIRST RESPONDERS
BASED ON THE SCIENCE OF POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH**



FIRSTNET®



**GARY SINISE
★ FOUNDATION ★**

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A LIFE-CHANGING APPROACH TO FIRST RESPONDER MENTAL HEALTH

Struggle Well is a training program that teaches first responders to metabolize the stress faced in the day-to-day line of duty. Built on the science of Posttraumatic Growth (PTG), the training focuses on turning struggle into strength, a departure from traditional mental health approaches.

Developed by Boulder Crest Foundation, the program is based on our successful work with military veterans struggling with PTSD. Since 2021, Struggle Well has trained nearly 28,000 first responders across 28 states, helping them make peace with past experiences, strengthen relationships, grow, and find new meaning in their service. Through comprehensive training, family support, and sustainable partnerships, Struggle Well is transforming first responder culture from one of silent endurance to one of growth, connection, and positive change.

What is Struggle Well

Struggle Well is transformative training featuring a range of engagement pathways to suit agency needs.

Core Training Options:

- 1-day awareness sessions
- 2-day intensive workshops
- 5-day comprehensive programs
- Family member training
- Ongoing refresher courses

Support Infrastructure:

- Digital learning tools, including the Struggle Well app
- 150 Microtrainings of varying lengths
- Continuous learning resources
- Community engagement opportunities

Why Struggle Well Works

Traditional mental health approaches often focus on coping mechanisms, but Struggle Well shifts the paradigm by enabling first responders to grow from their experiences.

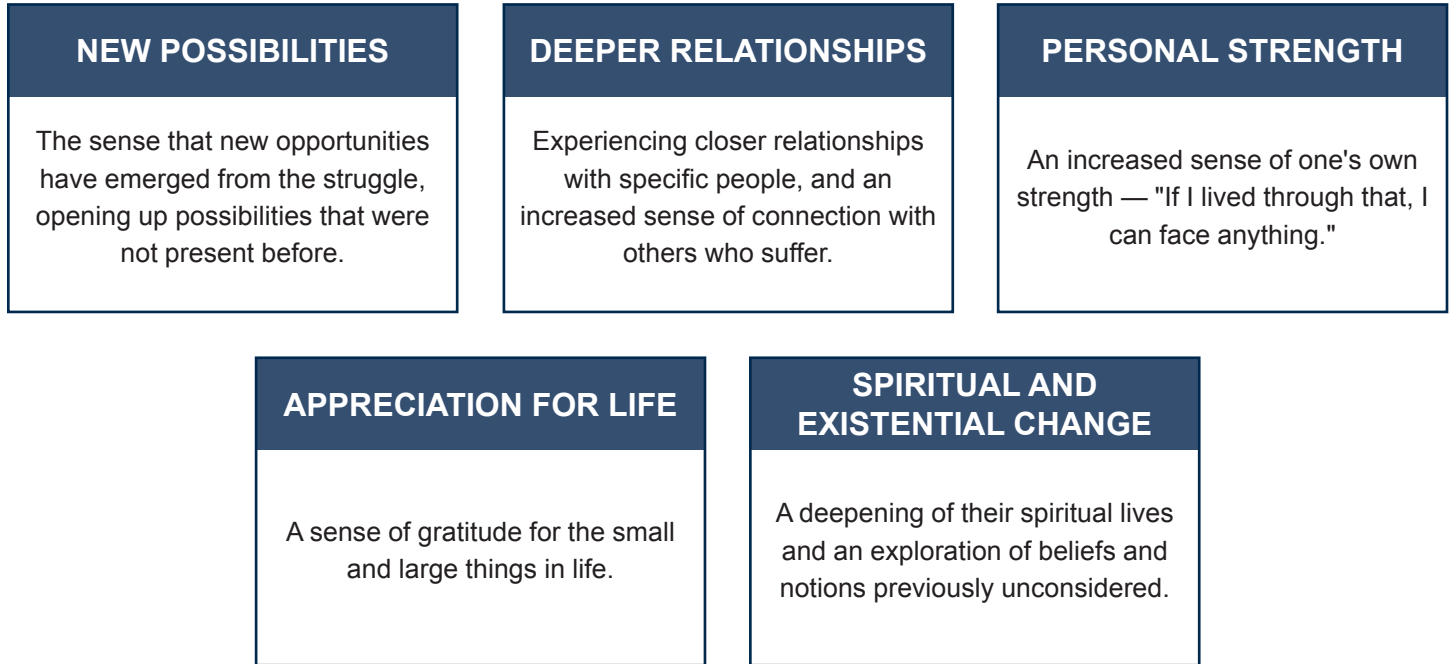
The program:

- Normalizes discussions around mental health within departments
- Integrates wellness into every aspect of a first responder's career
- Creates sustainable cultural change by embedding PTG principles
- Builds trust between officers and command staff
- Develops department-wide support networks



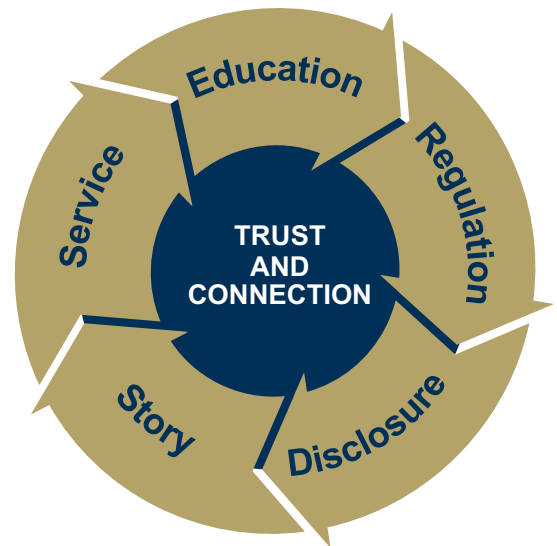
The Science of Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic Growth is the basis of Struggle Well, drawing on millennia of understanding, decades of research, and years of application at Boulder Crest. The science of PTG suggests that deep struggle prompts individuals to reflect on what is truly valuable and significant in their lives. As a result, growth is often witnessed in some or all of five areas:



Struggle Well utilizes the five phases of PTG as the basis for all our training efforts, representing the Terminal Learning Objectives of the program — these are built on an environment of Trust and Connection:

- **Education:** Identify the impacts of stress and trauma; examine how struggle can lead to opportunities for growth and transformation.
- **Regulation:** Develop mind, body, financial, and spiritual wellness practices to regulate thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- **Disclosure:** Devise ways to self-disclose personal experiences with struggle that effectively strengthen interpersonal relationships.
- **Story:** Create a positive, forward-looking personal story that integrates past, present, and future.
- **Service:** Develop a plan to serve themselves, their family, work, community, and country in a new way.



“ *A necessary training. It will save lives and provide first responders a second chance. Open dialogue is key — we must help each other.* ”

Transformative Results

The program's success is measured in two ways: through a detailed training satisfaction assessment and by using the expanded Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-X), a 25-item scale that measures the extent to which individuals report positive psychological change as a result of experiencing a traumatic event and is based on the original measure.

Training Satisfaction:

- 99% Enthusiasm and Interest
- 99% Organization of Content
- 99% Instructor Rating
- 98% Teaching Effectiveness
- 97% Class Discussions

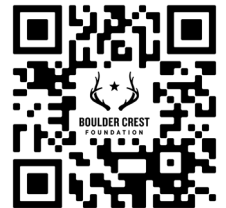
Posttraumatic Growth Inventory:

- 56% Improvement in Deeper Relationships
- 48% Increase in New Possibilities
- 46% Growth in Spiritual and Existential Change
- 36% Enhancement in Personal Strength
- 34% Greater Appreciation of Life

Success Story: Tucson Police Department

The transformation at Tucson Police Department (TPD) demonstrates the program's powerful impact. After implementing Struggle Well, TPD experienced:

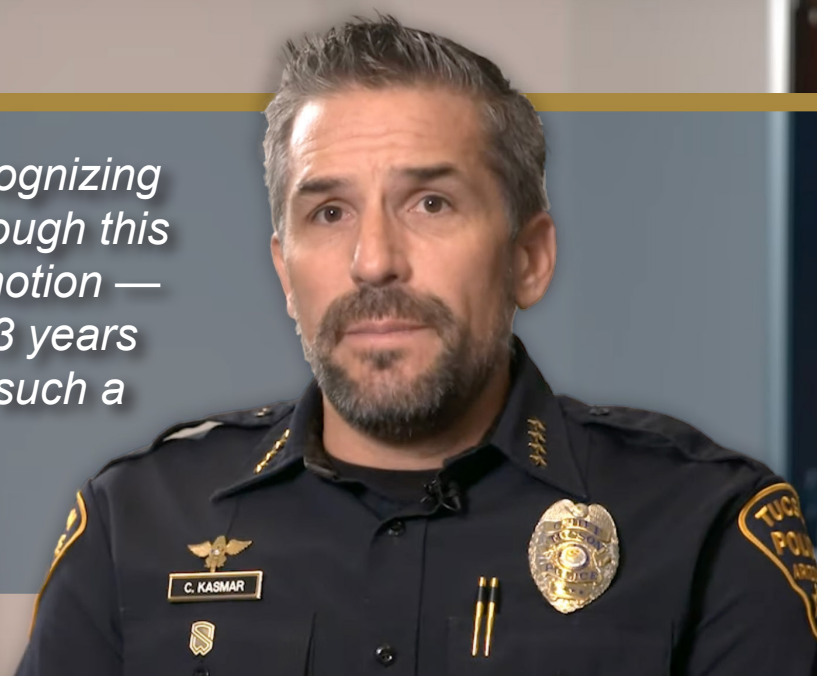
- Significantly improved retention and job satisfaction
- Enhanced trust between officers and command staff
- Development of a department-wide support network that replaced individual isolation
- Creation of a common language around struggle and wellness
- Integration of Struggle Well principles into all training platforms, from basic training through advanced courses
- Empowers Agency Mental Health Services



TPD's success came from comprehensive implementation, including embedding Struggle Well elements into all training platforms and beginning command meetings with gratitude practices. As one participant noted: *"I absolutely think this changes how we deal with the public, each other, our families...It changes the way that you interact with people and the way you see people and your appreciation for the struggle that they might be engaged in."*

"It's almost like a rebirth... It's recognizing that when you allow someone through this process to be human, to have emotion — that that's ok. I've never in my 23 years of doing this type of work seen such a powerful program."

— CHAD KASMAR
TUCSON CHIEF OF POLICE



Implementation Strategy

Boulder Crest Foundation partners with departments, associations, and leaders to help them reclaim their role as guardians of their people's wellbeing. This effort aims to shift first responder culture from a "suck it up" mindset to one that normalizes struggle and democratizes access to support. Struggle Well ensures the principles and practices become a natural part of your organizational culture, supporting long-term success and wellbeing through saturation and institutionalization.

Saturation: Changing Lives and the Culture

Our immersive 2- and 5-day training programs reshape how individuals and teams understand and respond to challenges. We work with a critical mass of team members to fundamentally shift how your organization thinks about struggle — from something to avoid into an opportunity for growth. Through the PTG framework, we help both formal and informal leaders develop new mental models, emotional responses, and practices for turning struggle into strength and lifelong growth.

Institutionalization: Building Lasting Change

We help organizations cultivate sustainable growth by:

- Integrating Struggle Well principles throughout the career journey
- Developing internal trainers to maintain program momentum
- Creating self-sufficient support systems that reduce external dependencies

*“ This program should be mandatory. ”
Outstanding in every way.*



Our Geographic Focus

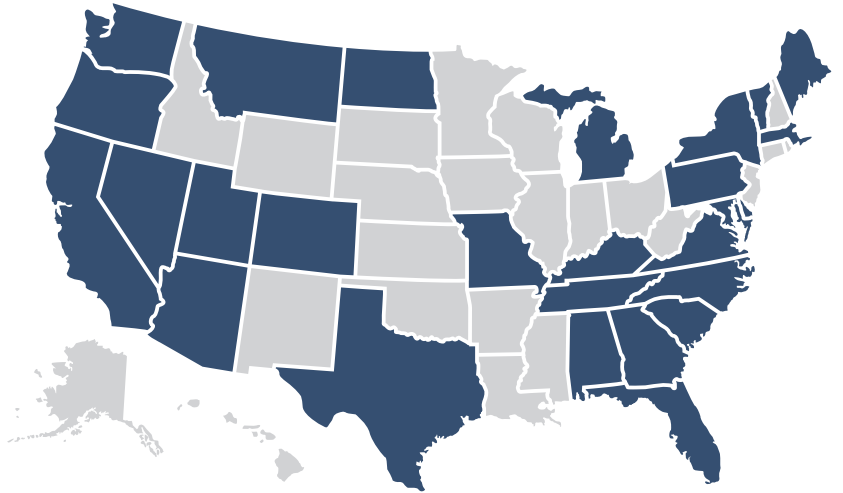
From our initial success with pilot programs, Struggle Well has strategically expanded through a regional hub model designed to maximize impact while maintaining program integrity.

In addition, we have built mobile capabilities that allow us to bring Struggle Well to partners outside of the five key regions. The map shows the 28 states where Struggle Well training was delivered in 2024.

Regional Structure: Each region operates as a center of excellence, with dedicated leadership and support systems to support the entire breadth and depth of first responders and types of organizations.

Five Key Areas:

- New England Region
- Mid-Atlantic Region
- Carolinas+ Region
- Southeast Region
- Southwest Region



This regional approach has enabled us to grow from our pilot program to serving over 500 agencies and training nearly 28,000 first responders while maintaining program quality and cultural relevance. The model allows for both consistent delivery of our core methodology and adaptation to local needs. Our hope and expectation is to continue expanding nationally, and cover all ten regions of the country in the coming years.

In May 2023 I attended a Struggle Well training at our police department. I learned a lot in the course but didn't know at the time how much I would rely on some of the concepts. On July 14, 2023, my partners and I were ambushed on a traffic accident; my one partner died and I was shot 7 times and in critical condition.

The Struggle Well hat that was given to me at the class has been something I've worn proudly almost everyday! To me it represents the ability to find peace in the storm. I always fall back on the idea of Posttraumatic Growth and that has really helped me keep pushing forward through this tragedy. My faith has been the cornerstone to my healing and so has Struggle Well. I truly believe every aspect of that course prepared me for the biggest difficulty of my life.

Our Partnership Model

Successful implementation of Struggle Well relies on mutually beneficial partnerships with agencies and organizations. We have identified six essential partnership elements, the "6 P's of Partnership," that facilitate successful long-term relationships.

Partner: Leadership engagement is critical — we seek departments and organizations with command staff deeply committed to fostering positive cultural change and willing to champion the program throughout their organization. These individuals become the catalysts for lasting change within their departments.

People: In order to continue our growth and expansion in a sustainable and responsible fashion, we need agencies to provide qualified individuals who can be trained as Struggle Well instructors. These instructors can train within their own agency or be utilized across an area, state, or region.

Place: Partner organizations must provide convenient and suitable spaces for recurring training sessions, creating environments conducive to learning and connection.

Provisions: Building community through shared experiences is vital. Partners facilitate connection and collaboration through shared meals and other communal activities during training sessions.

Proof: We work closely with partners to collect comprehensive data (pre, during, post) to rigorously assess program effectiveness and demonstrate tangible results, ensuring continuous improvement.

Philanthropy: Long-term success requires sustainable funding. We develop diversified funding strategies with partners to ensure program viability and growth. This work is generously supported by Struggle Well's key sponsors — FirstNet, built by AT&T, and the Gary Sinise Foundation.



“ Never have I experienced such an amazing class. FINALLY, something that is geared for our men and women in service. This course gets you uncomfortable, shakes the tree, makes you dig deep inside and ask the bigger question, WHAT ABOUT ME? What am I doing to better myself and grow from my problems, issues, hardships or situations. Whether it be personal or professional. This is something that definitely needs to be shared with everyone in law enforcement. I urge you to do whatever within your capacity to have not only departments send their officers, but ALL to include command staff. ”



Is Struggle Well Right for Your Agency?

Many organizations can and have benefited from Struggle Well training, particularly those experiencing any of these common challenges:

Organizational Indicators:

- High turnover rates and declining job satisfaction
- Underutilized wellness resources and support services
- Critical incidents, including behavioral issues or suicides
- Poor engagement levels within teams and departments
- Resistance to existing wellness initiatives

Cultural Indicators:

- Environment where vulnerability is seen as a weakness
- Hesitancy among staff to report struggles or challenges
- Breakdown in trust between leadership and staff
- Sense of organizational disconnection or betrayal
- Limited peer support or community connection
- Resistance to discussing mental health and wellness

These indicators often signal profound systemic challenges that Struggle Well's comprehensive approach is designed to address. Our program helps transform these challenges into opportunities for growth and cultural change.

“ *In 20 years on the job, Struggle Well is by far the best training I have ever received.* ”

Looking Forward

Struggle Well is expanding to transform first responder culture nationwide. We aim to reach all 50,000 police and fire departments across the United States and support nearly 5 million first responders on their journey from struggle to strength.

Get Started

For more information or to bring Struggle Well to your department, visit www.bouldercrest.org/struggle-well



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