



UCF

RESTORES

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Restoring Hope

LIVES | FAMILIES | COMMUNITIES

Reflecting on 2020

You may have noticed that this year’s annual report cover imagery is a little less bright than in years past, and that’s for good reason. At UCF RESTORES, what we do is based in the knowledge that hope can always be found, even during our darkest times. However, even for our team, that hope can be diminished during times of prolonged trauma and sadness ... and the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has been one of those times.

Though COVID-19 wages on across the world, 2020 was arguably the darkest time for those battling the pandemic in the U.S. Collectively, as a society, we were pushed to the limits – the limits of our empathy, of our understanding and, in some cases, of our optimal physical and mental health.

2020 is a year none of us will soon forget. It was a time marked by trauma, loss, and tragedy, and our team will continue walking hand-in-hand with those affected. The tolls of COVID-19, both evident and hidden, will only continue to mount as the virus lingers around the globe and we navigate the creation of our new normal. There is no denying that challenging times remain ahead.

However, we are also coming to see this past year as proof of our collective resilience. In hindsight, for many of us, 2020 served as a communal road that bridged a traumatic experience – one that unified people of all walks of life – to the potential for posttraumatic healing and growth that we know lies “on the other side.”

As we reflect on the work done and strides made over the past fiscal year, please know that we could not have made it down this “road” the way we did without your support. From community advocates and legislative leaders to our university colleagues and those we are so proud to serve – we were spurred forth by the fierce resilience we’ve witnessed throughout this tragic time. We are proud to be a part of this incredible system of mental health warriors and are eager to advance our joint cause.

-The UCF RESTORES Team



A Letter from the Director

To remain an invaluable resource to the Orlando community, the state of Florida and beyond, we must continue to forge a path ahead – and for us at UCF RESTORES®, that lies in the development and delivery of revolutionary treatment services, crucial education, and other trauma-focused initiatives. The 2020-21 fiscal year was one of exponential growth and progress, despite barriers imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last year, our team remained steadfast in a shared drive for advocacy and awareness to continue advancing accessibility to effective mental health care, including breaking down stigma- and financial-related barriers.

- As COVID-19 took hold globally, we quickly pivoted to provide new, potentially life-saving pathways to treatment with the rapid launch of telehealth services, as well as stress reduction and suicide prevention-related social media education initiatives.
- Additionally, in rapid response to COVID-19, our team developed a no-cost, single-session consultation program specifically for Florida’s essential workers. In these one-on-one sessions, UCF RESTORES’ clinicians work to develop a personalized plan for stress management unique to each participant’s individual experience.
- With special project funding from the U.S. Department of Defense, our team was proud to finalize development of our proprietary virtual reality (VR) treatment tool. The system has now entered the clinical trial phase, and our team is developing intensive training materials for licensed clinicians who may seek to incorporate this tool into their own exposure therapy treatment programs in the future.

And, of course, we remained dedicated to our signature, one-of-a-kind approach to treatment which combines evidence-based exposure therapy, emerging technology, individual and group therapy sessions – all at no cost to Florida residents.

This fiscal year came to a particularly uplifting close, with the Florida Legislature and Governor DeSantis engaging in full support of UCF RESTORES for the coming year. This funding will allow us to continue delivering hope to those in need, including our state’s first responders, as well as survivors of military combat trauma, military and civilian sexual assault, mass violence (and victims’ families), and natural disasters. To those who made this step forward possible, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Not only are you working with us to re-instill hope for countless individuals, you’re aiding us in Restoring Lives, Families, and Communities.

Sincerely,

Deborah C. Beidel, Ph.D., ABPP
Executive Director, UCF RESTORES®
Trustee Chair and Pegasus Professor
Deborah.Beidel@ucf.edu

COVID-19 Pivot



Telehealth

To further advance accessibility to its services, UCF RESTORES adopted a telehealth model for delivery of our clinical treatment to first responders, medical personnel, veterans, active-duty military personnel, survivors of sexual assault and mass violence, and others affected by trauma. These virtual services – including the center’s three-week intensive outpatient program (IOP)* – were available at no cost to individuals affected by trauma and suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

** Although the number of telehealth IOP participants, per cohort, was low in comparison to in-person sessions, the outcome percentages remained the same.*

Serving Azalea Park

From March through December of 2020, UCF RESTORES led an initiative to make free, bilingual telehealth mental health therapy sessions available to residents of Azalea Park, many of whom moved to the area after being displaced from Puerto Rico by Hurricane Maria. The funding for this initiative, as part of a larger Orange County CARES Act grant, also covered iPads with Wi-Fi hotspots that residents could use to take part in the therapy sessions at several buildings throughout the Azalea Park area, removing the need for cross-county transit.

Azalea Park was identified as having a need for these services as residents were dealing with problems such as job loss and reduced income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The area had also been recognized in the spring as a hotspot for new COVID-19 cases. In addition to telehealth services, videos were produced in both Spanish and English that focused on stress management, helping viewers learn techniques for better sleep and for coping with anxiety and depression.



Single-Session Consultations

In response to the pressure, stress and demand placed on medical and emergency staff amid COVID-19, UCF RESTORES established a new program offering no-cost, 60-minute, single-session consultations for individuals seeking a space to discuss their unique challenges. Through this program, with guidance from a UCF RESTORES mental health clinician, each participant develops a personalized plan, building on each individual’s resiliency, for managing day-to-day stressors.

While the program was originally developed for Florida’s essential workers, it is available to all state residents. Even once the pandemic ends, UCF RESTORES’ single-session consultation program will remain intact for those that may need this type of support.





Community Education & Advocacy

Every faculty and staff member at UCF RESTORES strives to raise awareness of current mental health concerns and provide extensive education around mental well-being and support in addressing areas like stress, anxiety, loneliness and substance use. Beyond delivery of treatment for those suffering from PTSD and other trauma-related concerns, major, relevant initiatives in the 2020-21 fiscal year included:

- The rollout of web-based educational initiatives, including the UCF RESTORES Facebook Wellness Education Series (developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis to address relevant concerns and

stressors) and the center’s “Power of Peer Support” Q&A series during National Suicide Awareness & Prevention Month. While the series’ programming is relevant for all, the subject matter is particularly crucial for our first responders and medical personnel, as well as the family, friends, loved ones, and communities that support them each and every day.


- Bolstering national awareness through provision of subject-matter expertise for regional, statewide, and national media outlets. From partnering with in-state first responder publications like Florida Fire Service and Florida Firefighter to collaborating with outlets like The Associated Press and National Public Radio, UCF RESTORES is privileged to support the reporting and advocacy of so many seeking to shine a spotlight on the importance of mental health awareness, support, and treatment.



UCF RESTORES CLINICAL
CASE COORDINATOR
MONICA POTTS, LCSW

“There is nothing uncommon about feeling hurt, sad, scared, angry or anxious. Seeking mental health treatment should be a common response to managing common emotions.”


”



UCF RESTORES-Trauma Therapy Program posted an episode of UCF RESTORES Wellness Education Series.

★ Favorites · April 13, 2020 ·

We are living in unprecedented and uncertain times. While the challenges faced by our frontline heroes – including first responders and medical personnel – are not the same as what those quarantined at home may experience, that doesn’t change the fact that l... See More



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Mental Wellness Amid the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak

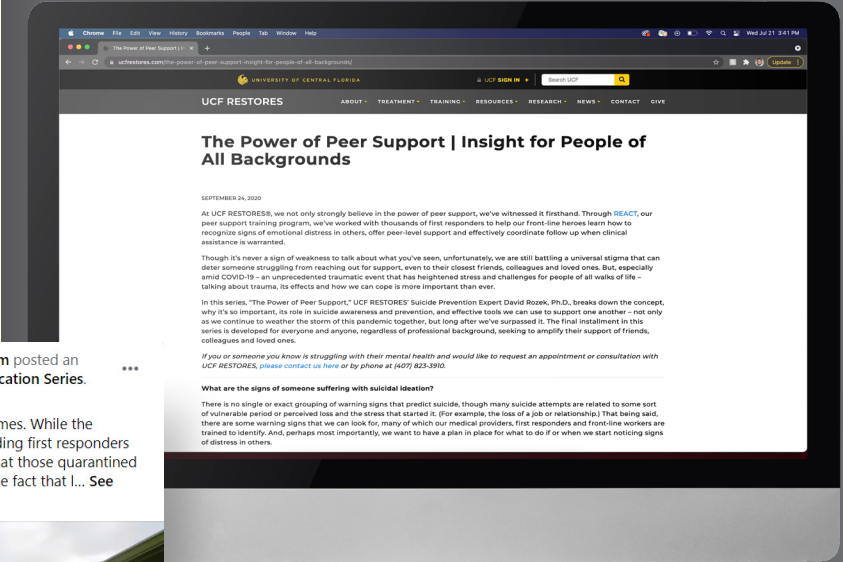
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These efforts have led to unsolicited positioning of UCF RESTORES as a leader in health care innovation in outlets such as Forbes, The New York Times, Orlando Sentinel, Orlando Business Journal, and more.

- Ongoing engagement with members of the first responder community through the center’s REACT training program to introduce, improve, and strengthen peer support skills among firefighters, EMS personnel, and law enforcement officers. Knowing that those in the field are more likely to open up to peers with similar experiences, background, and history, this program helps first responders learn how to recognize “stress injuries”



and evaluate the mental health of their peers, offer peer-level support and effectively coordinate necessary follow up in the event professional intervention is warranted.

Despite barriers brought on by the pandemic amid the 2020-2021 fiscal year, UCF RESTORES hosted 32 REACT trainings, engaging with nearly 400 participants from 66 agencies.

- Establishing strategic, dedicated partnerships with leading organizations that advocate for mental health awareness and support among the first responder community – including the Florida Firefighters Safety & Health Collaborative (FFSHC) and the National Police Foundation’s Center for Mass Violence Response Studies – to help break “the culture of silence” that often holds our nation’s front-line heroes back from seeking help, when necessary, for the traumatic experiences they encounter in their day-to-day jobs.



The Power of Peer Support: Redline Rescue™

In April 2021, UCF RESTORES and its partners at the Florida Firefighters Safety & Health Collaborative (FFSHC) launched a first-of-its kind, no-cost, web-hosted, and fully anonymous peer support portal, designed specifically for first responders – RedlineRescue.org. This portal – which serves as the fully automated version of the FFSHC’s cornerstone peer support program – was made possible with financial support from the Cigna Foundation, the North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District Administration, and the Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation.

The launch was formally announced at the quarterly meeting of The Joint Council – a convening of the top decision-makers and stakeholders in Florida’s first responder community with the mission of advancing first responder resiliency, training, health,

and safety – and co-hosted with Florida State Fire Marshal Division Director Julius Halas.

Redline Rescue™ was designed to take peer support to a new level by leveraging a statewide network of firefighters trained in peer support, as well as culturally competent mental health clinicians, to connect firefighters directly with empathic peers.

By factoring in rank, level of experience, and lifestyle components in the connection process, the portal works to provide immediate and effective support for anxiety and other distressing symptoms that often accompany

exposure to traumatic events — events that are at the core of the firefighter profession.

With the launch of the automated web portal, the FFSHC and UCF RESTORES are delivering a new, innovative way for Florida’s hometown heroes to access the support they need, with the goal of reducing the number of lives lost in the first responder community due to completed suicide.

Following the successful launch of RedlineRescue.org, UCF RESTORES is beginning development of similar solutions for the law enforcement community, military veterans, and survivors of sexual assault.

“The amazing team at UCF RESTORES has opened their literal doors and provided unimpeded access to resiliency programs for our first responders in need.”



Dustin Hawkins
FFSHC Director Emeritus

Innovation in Action

The American Psychiatric Association estimates that one in 11 people will be diagnosed with PTSD in their lifetime. UCF RESTORES’ new virtual reality (VR) treatment tool is providing hope of recovery for those suffering.

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Defense recognized the high success rate of UCF RESTORES’ treatment approach and awarded the clinic \$3 million to develop this enhanced VR tool to address a wider range of traumatic events that could result in PTSD. (Until now, UCF RESTORES’ use of VR in treatment has relied upon a third-party system.) This new tool, now in the clinical trial phase, is being used to test the efficacy of UCF RESTORES’ exposure therapy treatment in a further condensed, two-week intensive format.



Awards & Accolades

In the 2020-21 fiscal year, UCF RESTORES was recognized by regional and statewide programs for its multipronged support of individuals and communities in need over the past year.

- **Florida Blue Foundation** Sapphire Awards program – With the support of the UCF Foundation, UCF RESTORES was named a recipient of the “Mental Well-Being Goal” award in the prestigious 2021 Florida Blue Foundation Sapphire Awards program. The honor, which was accompanied by \$60,000 in direct funding to support UCF RESTORES’ continued delivery of research-backed education and treatment, was announced at the Florida Blue Foundation 2021 Virtual Community Health Symposium and Sapphire Awards. The 16th Annual Sapphire Awards – following a thorough and highly competitive review process – honors outstanding individuals, programs, and organizations for excellent service distinguished by exemplary leadership, innovation and documented outcomes, and impacts in providing service delivery in one of three “Drivers of Health:” Food Security, Mental Well-Being, or Health Equity.
- **i4 Business** 2021 Women’s Inspired Leadership Awards: Spirit of Advocacy Award – Deborah Beidel, Ph.D., ABPP, executive director of UCF RESTORES, received the “Spirit of Advocacy” award through i4 Business’ 2021 Women’s Inspired Leadership Awards program, which celebrates the accomplishments of women throughout Central Florida who are making a difference in their community.
- **Florida Public Relations Association** Image Awards 2021 – The Florida Public Relations Association honored UCF RESTORES and its partners at Curley & Pynn Public Relations



with three awards at its 2021 Orlando Area Chapter Image Award ceremony, which recognizes outstanding public relations tools and programs achieved through strategic research and planning, as well as innovative execution and evaluation. The awards were bestowed for successful execution of the UCF RESTORES Facebook Wellness Education Series (developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis to address relevant concerns and stressors) which garnered more than 40,000 non-sponsored views within its first six weeks while also driving community engagement and awareness.

- **Orlando Sentinel** columnist Scott Maxwell graciously named UCF RESTORES’ executive director as one of the “10 People Who Make Orlando a Better Place to Live” in 2020, citing the program’s uniquely successful approach to trauma treatment as a resource that is “changing lives” in the community.



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 www.ucfrestores.com

DEBORAH C. BEIDEL, PH.D., ABPP
Executive Director of UCF RESTORES
UCF College of Sciences
Deborah.Beidel@ucf.edu