On November 28, 2015, my friend and co-worker committed suicide leaving behind three young children. She was a beautiful, 36 year-old police officer who had been on the job for one year. About a month before her death I saw her and observed pain and exhaustion on her face as we passed and spoke for mere minutes outside the police academy. I encouraged her to join the FOP and provided her with my phone number.

When I heard of her death, I was heartbroken and angry at myself for not reaching out after our conversation. I understood the exhaustion and difficulty of being a mother and a police officer, particularly as a single mother. I was angry she didn’t feel safe or comfortable reaching out for mental health assistance due to possible perceived taboo or that she didn’t know where to go. I wondered if the officers I supervise would feel safe and comfortable reaching out in their time of need and decided if it was going to change I had to start somewhere.

More police officers complete suicide annually than are killed in the line of duty. Mental health is becoming an important topic for emergency services administrators, particularly in law enforcement. The well-being of our officers and their families is paramount. Historically, those who work in law enforcement have felt taboo regarding seeking mental health assistance. This barrier is being broken down by wise administrators nationwide as they create open discussion and invite trained professionals to provide information regarding self-assessment and the services available.

Knowledge regarding PTSD, depression, anxiety, and mental health services (including EMDR) should be provided to all emergency responders. To fill this need, I invited local licensed clinical social worker, therapist, and EMDR provider, Rhonda Kamai-Kekela, to present to the officers I supervise. Her presentation was approximately one hour and filled with timely and appropriate information and assessments officers and their families could utilize in the privacy of their own homes to evaluate their mental health and determine if and when they need professional assistance.

Ms. Kamai-Kekela created an environment of trust that was warm, knowledgeable, and compassionate. She clearly articulated valuable information and provided copies of assessments the officers could utilize to identify the level of PTSD, depression, or anxiety they could be experiencing now or in the future. As a current police officer and volunteer peer advocate support team member for the national charity, The Wounded Blue, and having been trained by Warrior’s Rest in Oklahoma City, I highly recommend Ms. Kamai-Kekela to provide training and assistance to your emergency services personnel. She is committed to helping the “helpers” and we should be too.