

K9 Therapy

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Incorporating into support for first
responders’ mental health wellness
and resiliency





Objectives

- Impacts on first responders' mental health
- Tools
- Research on CAI
- Incorporating CAI into support
- Volunteer organizations

Impacts to First Responders

EMS

- 69% EMS recovery between traumatic events
- 6.9% depression EMS
- 10.4% of Suicidal Ideations
- 3.1% Suicide attempt

Law Enforcement

- Suicidal ideations
 - Female 25% Male 23.1%
- Suicide attempts
 - Range 0.7 – 55%
- Burn Out
 - 117% increase in suicidal thoughts

Fire Fighters

- 50% deaths contributed to stress and exhaustion
- Suicidal ideation 46.8%
 - General population 13.5%
- Suicide plans 19.2%
 - General population 3.9%
- Suicide attempts 15.5%
 - General population 4.6%

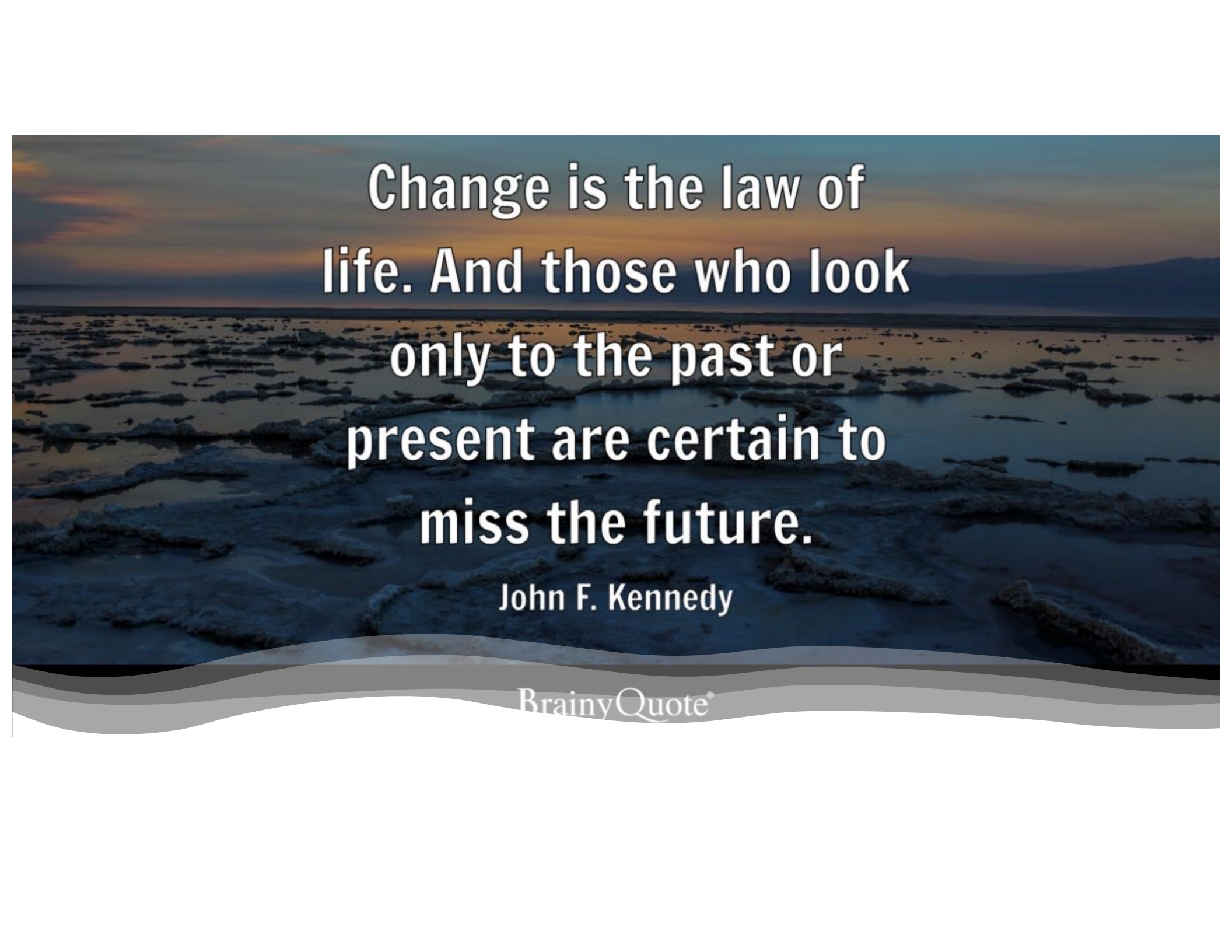
<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>

Tools in the toolbox

- Fitness
- Peer Support
- Defusing / Debriefings
- Mental Health Support – Professional
- Awareness and resiliency knowledge
- Canine Assisted Intervention (CAI) or Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)

<https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/treatments/eye-movement-reprocessing>





**Change is the law of
life. And those who look
only to the past or
present are certain to
miss the future.**

John F. Kennedy

BrainyQuote®

Physical & Psychological

- Physical signs of stress
 - BP
 - HR
 - RR
- Decrease in BP
 - Suggested a canine can reduce signs of stress
- Neurotransmitters
 - Epinephrine
 - Adrenaline
 - Sustainment - Hyperarousal
- Neuroendocrine effects
 - Cortisol
 - Increases with stress
 - 5 min
 - 20 min
 - 45 min

CAI and AAI – Not a new concept

1995 Murrah
Building bombing

- Canines brought in for civilian comfort
- First responders benefited

9/11

- 500 CAI brought in as support

Sandy Hook and
1 October

- <https://k9fr.org/>

Research supporting CAI integration

- Law Enforcement
 - Binfet, Draper, and Green 2020 published research
 - Urban Police Precinct
 - 90-minute sessions for 8 weeks
 - Mean stress decreasing 3.33 to 1.95
 - Average 11 minutes with CAI

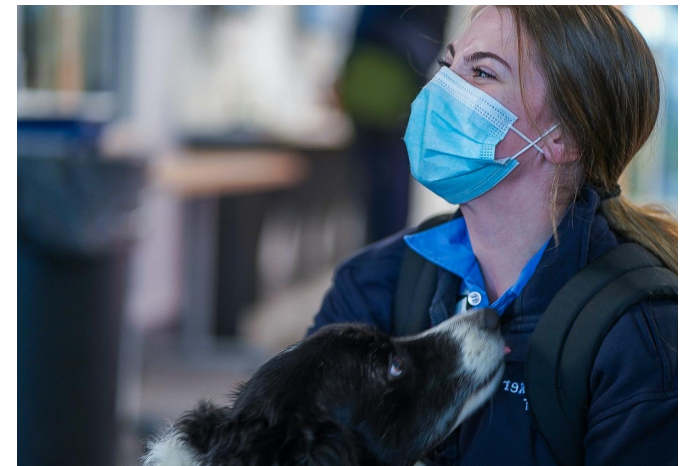
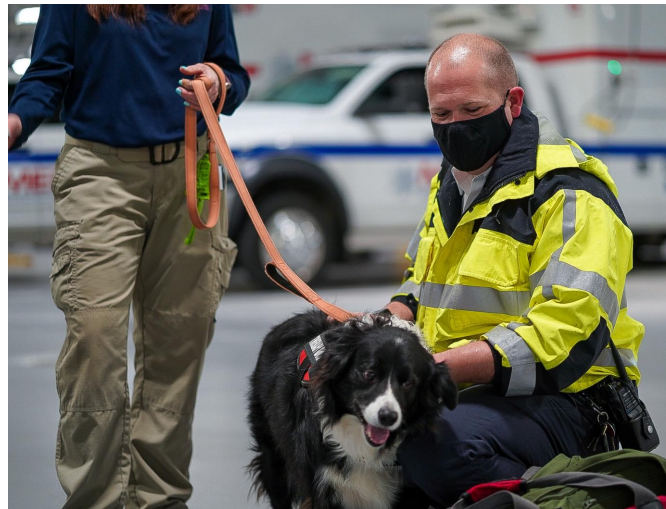
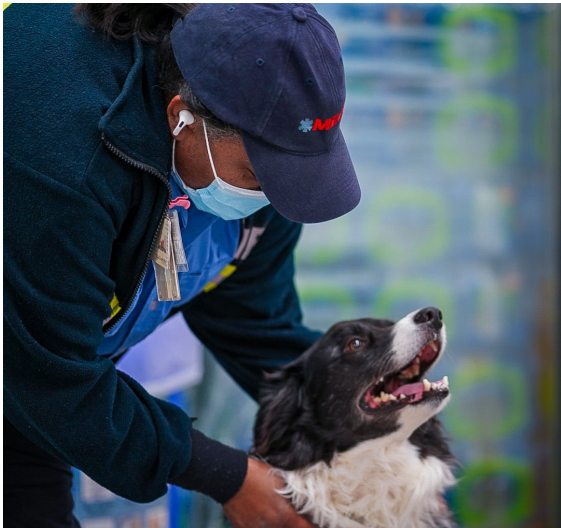
Binfet, J.-T. P. (2020). Stress reduction in law enforcement officers and staff through a canine-assisted intervention. *Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin*, 8(2), 34-52.

- Healthcare Study
 - VA in Midwest
 - Bella Etingen et al
 - Published 2020
- Lessons Learned
 - Burnout change
 - Social benefits
 - Whole community approach
 - Handlers of therapy canine

Etingen, B. M. (2020). Developing an animal-assisted support program for healthcare employees. *BMC Health Services Research*, 20(714).

Pilot Study – A look closer to home: MEDIC and Thor



- Small sample – a pilot study
- Impact of CAI
- Mixed Method
 - Quantitative
 - Qualitative



Wider and More Research Needed

- Impacts
- Limitations
- Lessons Learned

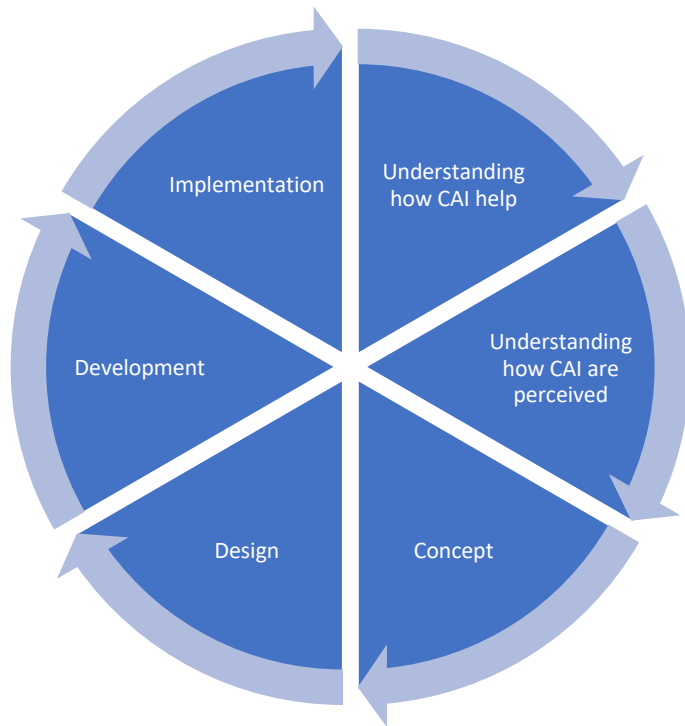




CAI or AAAI – How does it support social health?

- Social Support
 - Indirect
 - Direct
- Cognitive perception
 - Of others
 - Of environment

Perception to implementation



Perception of CAI as an adjunct

- Views and Opinions of CAI vary
- Research conducted in an emergency department by Dr. Nickolas Nahm and colleagues
- Benefits
- Hazards
- Ways to decrease hazards



A nighttime photograph of a cable-stayed bridge over a body of water. The bridge's cables and towers are illuminated, and the city lights in the distance are visible. In the foreground, there is a concrete railing with a dark metal handrail and a walkway. The text "Current standards within CAI industry" is overlaid in white, with a white underline beneath "CAI industry".

Current standards within CAI industry

Survey Study Showed.....

- Dog requirements & screening
 - 1 year old
 - AKC CGC
 - Spayed or neutered
 - Behavioral evaluations
 - Certain breeds excluded



- Dog health and safety
 - Updated vaccines
 - Nails trim
 - Keeping the dog on a leash
 - Good health

- Handler training and education
 - Zoonotic disease
 - Shadow and shadowed

Health, Safety, and Welfare

- Handler health and safety
 - Not attending if signs or symptoms
 - Regular yearly health screenings
 - Vaccines
 - Age of 18 and older
- Dog Welfare
 - Time limits
 - Understanding canine behavior
 - Understanding canine welfare
 - Training methods





It always seems
impossible until
it's done.

Nelson Mandela

BrainyQuote®

Design of a CAI Program

What type of
program

Requirements

Policies

Program
steps

Risk vs.
Benefit



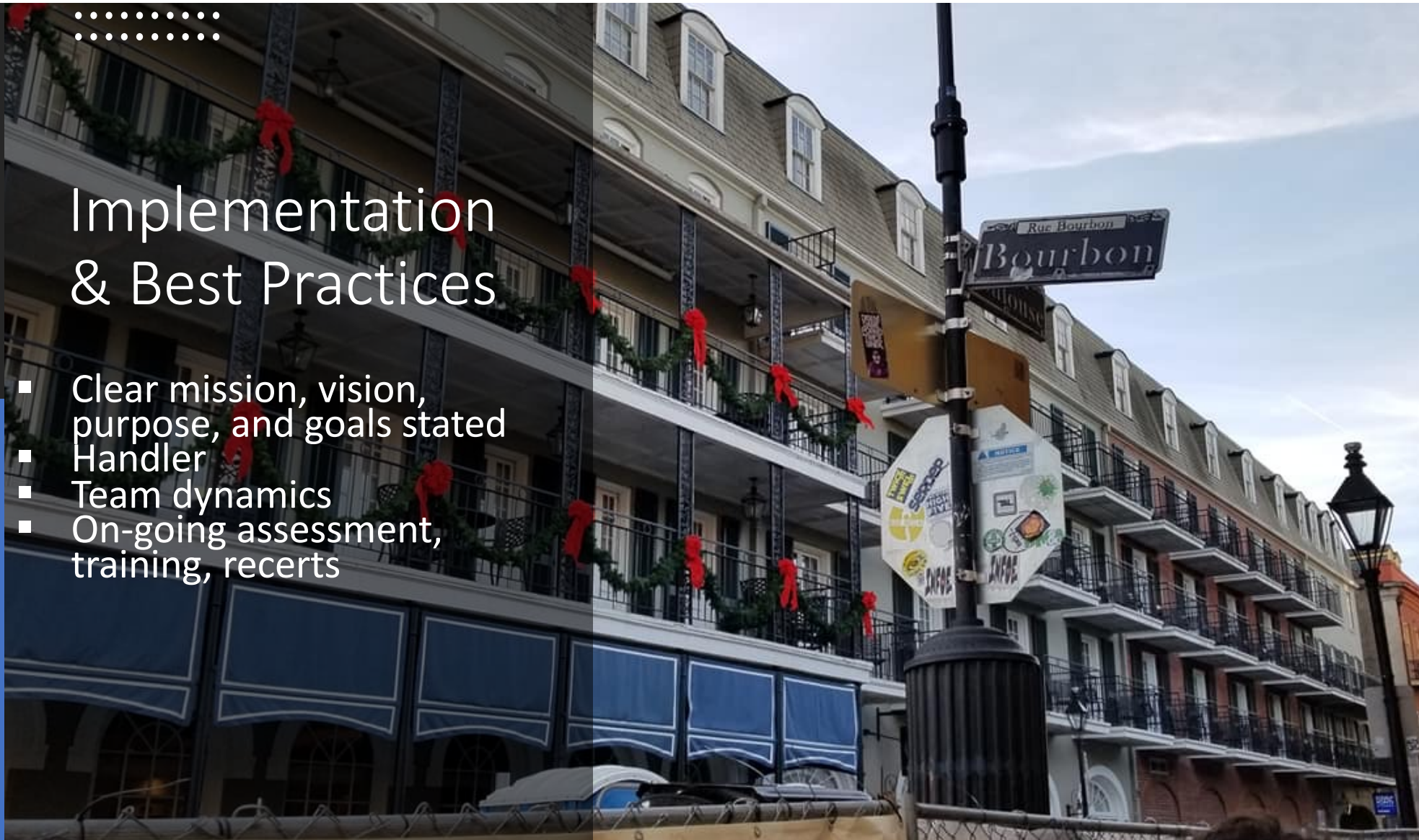
Various objectives to address for CAI peer support

- How to deploy for debriefings and defusing
- How to deploy 1 on 1 requests
- How to offer mental health maintenance in various stations, locations, precincts
- How to ensure redundancy
- How to create a whole first responder community approach
- VA Hospital Research
 - Accessibility of CAI
 - Awareness
 - Dog handler interactions
 - Flexible hours and availability to all staff



Implementation & Best Practices

- Clear mission, vision, purpose, and goals stated
- Handler
- Team dynamics
- On-going assessment, training, recerts



Volunteer Organizations with Therapy K9s



- Good for civilians
- Can be used for first responders
- Various organizations
- Different response levels
 - Stress
 - Therapy session
 - Disaster or crisis response
- Coordination and Collaboration

Limitations of volunteer therapy K9 organizations for peer support

- First responders as a whole community and individual departments
- Trust and understanding
- Willingness to open up
- Different organizations have different missions and policies
- During a time of major crisis or disaster – coordination between various different types

The background of the slide is a photograph of a beach. In the foreground, there is a wide expanse of wet, pebbly sand in shades of brown and tan. To the left, white foam from a wave is washing onto the shore. In the background, the ocean is visible with white-capped waves breaking under a bright, slightly hazy sky. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Future Forward Movement

- Need more research specific to CAI and first responders
- Helping our neighbors
- Lessons learned
- Coordination, Collaboration, and Cooperation
- Leadership buy-in

• Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.

- [Colin Powell](#)

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Questions
