CASAT Podcast Network

We are delighted to have Mariah with us here today.

Mariah is the wife of a firefighter.

She is a first grade teacher and she is a volunteer with the Nevada's peer support network.

So thank you for joining us today.

Mariah awesome.

Thank you so much for having me.

So as we get started.

Um, as you know, this podcast is for family members of first responders and so why don't you tell us a little bit about what it's like to be a family member of a first responder?

Well, it's incredible, really.

It's a very, it's a huge honor.

I feel like I got a little emotional there right off the bat.

We are so proud of my husband also father, he is a father of two teenagers now we have a boy and a girl, 15 and 16, a freshman and a sophomore and I'll just tell you right off the bat, like they both want to follow in their father's footsteps.

That's their goal is, they really are so, so proud of him and love what he does, that, that's where they're headed.

So very honored to be married to such a wonderful man.

That's incredible that they're going to follow his footsteps and it really has become a lifelong family career.

So speaking from that from that family side of having a spouse who is a first responder and love the Conor and obviously being so proud of dad and husband.

Um, what are some of the good and some of the challenges that come with having a dad or a husband as a firefighter There's a lot, there's a lot.

I mean, we're, we're really far into it.

My husband just celebrated in, in April his 16th year with the department.

So we have gone through our, you know, entire, we've raised our family through the whole thing.

And as small Children, lots of challenges.

I mean, really being a single mom a lot of the time and so that the challenges that, that brings starting a new family.

But then the time that he on the other, there's just such a flip side to that.

On the other side, the time that we get with him, I mean when we had small Children, he was home, we didn't have to do the whole daycare thing because he had that opportunity to be home with them, you know, on like a Tuesday Wednesday thursday friday because of The way that they work their schedule where he would be on for 48 hours at a time.

But then home for 96.

So as small, you know, small Children, it was a big challenge on all of us on myself and the kids, you know, where his dad holidays plays such a big role in that, where we're celebrating.

You know, milestones are different holidays on days that aren't necessarily like calendar related, but the time that we got with him outweighed any time that he was gone.

It was just such a blessing and he, he really reflects on that now that we have two teenagers is how lucky he was to be in a career that he loved and be able to be such a family man and be really home with our kids, raising them while I was teaching five days a week.

So my schedule is kind of always been, I'm out of the house monday through friday and really attached to other Children.

And so he got to take on that role as um, the uh, daytime daddy and he loved it.

That's awesome.

And so obviously, I mean a lot of, a lot of really good and a lot of challenges and I imagine in the midst of it is more difficult than looking back seeing kind of how beautiful it was and a lot of the, the benefits and, and is it that experience that's really kind of, I don't want to say led you to or pushed you to, but that really kind of led to this volunteering to help wives of other first responder families.

I love that question.

Absolutely.

I think the fire family is so powerful and I think because We're the only ones that get each other, we get that our husbands or wives are gone for 48 hours at a time and this family of firefighters really lean on each other to fill that void when the husbands or wives are gone at the department.

So we build these bonds and I see it all over, Um, different departments, not just ours but I see it all throughout the city and county that they and you hear about it.

I mean it's kind of like that you see it on TV that the fire family like once you're together you're just together forever.

And it there is so much truth to that.

So it definitely led to that volunteer part where you know us women are together raising our Children doing our mommy thing why the husbands or again wives are gone for that 48 hours.

And that's so much support with each other and the way that we even started volunteering as a girlfriend of mine from high school had a husband that became very ill with terminal brain cancer.

And we're just kind of chatting one night about what can we do For this family and here I have these women at my fingertips that we're all just ready.

I can call on 15 of you in a in a text message and say hey can you all put together a dinner and it's like the snap of a finger and it was so easy that it just turned into and I get goose bumps just talking about it.

It turned into so much more because that that family unit that we create with the fire department.

I love that.

And what I love about this series of because I've come into it from from my main experience with first responders has been from you know probably highly accurate television shows like 911 and Grey's anatomy.

And so I think that's all my kids have watched during, during the pandemic as they watched all of these and they've gone from what to be a surgeon to a firefighter too, you know, we'll see.

But but I think the thing that surprised me is is understanding the the logistics that go into it.

But I think to the support that comes with with being a first responder and being a family and that support that you fill with each other, which is almost in a sense kind of countercultural nowadays to have that type of support.

And so I wonder if it was that easy to build or was it kind of a natural builder?

Did it takes some effort to really start connecting with some of these other spouses and stuff like that?

Yeah, I think for me it was really natural and I'll just say that's really because of my personality, I take on that role of that leadership.

And so I put myself out there, let's make friends, let's do this inviting because the, the first responders, they go through an academy together and so they're building a bond while they're together in this academy.

And so it's really easy for the spouses or girlfriends or even mothers and fathers that, you know, of younger first responders to kind of do that build on the outside, but it takes a leadership role.

So I would say that although it was really easy, let's say for my husband's academy, because I took on that role, I wouldn't say it's always that easy.

Another reason why I've developed the northern Nevada fire wives pages because I can kind of help facilitate some of that.

I'm getting women and men that are well it is just a wives page, but getting them involved with each other and every time I do something in our community or for our department, more and more people are meeting each other.

So I've really kind of taken on that motherly role for the whole department where it did just start with my my husband's own Academy 16 years ago With his small group of 15 people.

I love the theme that keeps coming up is I mean obviously these first responders and fire support us as a community and I think what this is series has been all about is the support that first responders need and their families need.

And so what I love about your experiences, not just what it's like as a as a spouse of a first responder, but providing that support right, and the need for that.

And I think it's important for our community and for families that are listening to this, you know, to know that that supports out there and if they're not getting that support that it doesn't mean that it's not available.

Right?

And so it's important to reach out for that and to find that and to just ask around until you can because I think that support is so necessary.

I absolutely agree.

Absolutely.

It is definitely with these first responders to that are gone for many hours.

I mean, I know the fire department's schedule looks a lot different than some of our other first responders, but they're all worked at a very different level than, you know, our, our business world.

I'm curious what are some of the services and events that your organization does We have?

We started out with helping a family friend and then we went into kind of our community.

I was just so blown away by the response of being able to Again, I kind of felt like this is at my fingertips.

I have to utilize this.

So I did a towel drive.

We just lightly or you know softly used or new bath towels and then we delivered them all to the local women's shelter and I've got hundreds of towels.

I have pictures of just these piles and piles as they added up in my, on my ping pong table.

And then we also got involved with the reno, the big reno coat drive one year or what we've done it a couple of years.

But the first year you did it, it was so awesome.

I'm like bring me all your coats and all of a sudden I'm just like buried in coats.

So that one was awesome.

So those are some ones that we've done for our community, but we've done so much to just support our men and women right at the fire department when some really massive tragic calls have gone out and the ones that hit us all wives and responders so hard.

Our Children, you know, when the Children are husbands and wives go on calls that and deal with small Children, those are the ones that they really bring home.

So a few years ago there was a pretty traumatic call and so for that fire station that had to deal with that, Um, the fire wipes got together and we had breakfast, lunch and dinner catered for them at the station for their entire 48 hour shift.

And that one really hit a lot of, um, that one really resonated in our department because they just thought, wow, they don't like that recognition.

And I think it's easier for them and I could be misspeaking but just talking to them, I feel like it's a little bit easier when it's coming from the wives that know what they're going through versus the, you know, the person down the street bringing them cookies, which they greatly appreciate and they get those kind of things all the time and it's beautiful, but I think they're really able to let loose and, and the response that I got from the firefighters that were on shift when we did that was having those meals delivered and catered.

They sat down and they talked about it.

And then sometimes they don't do that.

You know, they just go onto the next call and because we brought the food and there was it brought up the conversation of this is why this food was delivered was because of what we just witnessed and had to deal with.

So let's sit at this table and enjoy this beautiful meal and talk through some of the things that we're all feeling right now.

And I remember when I delivered the food to them, one gentleman in particular, he was so thankful that he got that time because they don't make that time for each other.

Mm hmm.

And that's so no, don't be sorry.

Thank you.

Um it's so much of what we're hearing in this podcast is acknowledging the difficulty, acknowledging the emotions that arise from seat taking in such horrific um accidents on a daily basis.

And then the need to support each other in community.

And so, um, it's a beautiful example of that.

So, thank you.

And I think that that's great when they do have that time to talk because so many of them don't want to bring it home and my husband and I haven't been one in a relationship where we did bring it home.

He's left it really there at work because I think he just knows that it's not something that I want to have a conversation with.

We find other ways to help him get through his day when he gets home instead of that release of talking about it.

And I'm really glad you brought that up.

We've heard from first responders particularly that transitioning home can be really challenging from going to here.

I am in my role as a firefighter or police officer.

Um, and now I'm mom, dad, uh, you know, son, daughter, etcetera.

And that transition can be really challenging.

So I'm curious, what do you guys do in your family to support that transition?

We lots of love and support.

I think that when the kids were little because dad got to take care of them, it was a huge distraction as they've gotten older.

We've just really got into our groove where especially the weekends when we're all home together.

It's just like go mode.

We've just come home.

He gets home from shift, we make a big breakfast, we spend time together.

We talked about some of the stuff he went did at work, but unless it's like really fire related and not very tragic, those conversations do come home and I think, um, my kids kind of have just that angle and they know dad sees lots of things, but they get to see, he tells more of the exciting stories and we are super family, really busy family were skiing every weekend boating when it's when the sun's out and so we can, we really, I think we cope with that with distraction, I think um we just, he knows it, this is that time we come home and he, he meaning my husband um the way that he handles that is just he just really just dives into just being the dad, the sleep deprivation is the biggest part that really he struggles with and I mean we're just a great example of him just getting off a 72 hour shift, thursday, friday, saturday came home sunday morning, he wants to be like, here I am, it's dad, I'm home, what are we doing today?

Are we golfing?

Are we going to Tahoe, are we skiing?

And you can, I can see it in him when I know like you need to sleep, this is not because he's a lot more edgy, he's not as patient and he's such a patient person, I'm like just give yourself time and because of my schedule and knowing like this is our only day and the kids schedule, you know, they're in school, monday through friday, I'm in school monday through friday, he kind of has it in his head like I'll rest monday, I want to be with my family, such a family man.

So he really tries to push through some of that and I have myself and the kids are old enough now that we're like no dad relax for a little while, we're okay, we'll get you know, we'll do something this afternoon, but we just faced that on sunday, he was just, and and that's really the depth, the sleep deprivation for him, it really hits him hard.

And it sounds like you guys have gotten to that point through time and practice and noticing what it's like to push full steam ahead and noticing what it's like to give him that space to rest so that he can show up more fully for the family Mariah.

Would you tell us about how you support your own well being and then how do you help support your family's well being?

I exercise?

That definitely helps me a lot and I just grabbed a peloton off of a used website, so I'm pretty pumped about that.

I'm fully addicted, but definitely I have a lot of energy, so really keeping busy is a great self care for me.

Um also just getting out of the House five days a week.

I absolutely love what I do as a teacher.

So that keeps me so distracted and very, very busy with, you know, six and seven year olds, so that really feeds my well being.

Um during the day, also, yeah, just that exercise in the family time, I mean we're a pretty, Pretty tight unit, my husband and I have, we're getting ready to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary and together almost 30 and our time together is really, really important to us and that really feeds my my self care that time that we do get together.

Yeah.

So the exercise to help support your energy and it sounds like you have a lot of meaning and purpose in your job, just like your husband.

It sounds like you love and you're very passionate about what you do and then family first and foremost and spending time together.

That's awesome.

Congratulations on that too.

That's great.

Um, what would some advice maybe that you would give to, um, wives that are coming into this world of maybe early on of, of having a husband or, or a spouse as a firefighter and around anything around the scheduling.

I think what I love what you said about the sleep because we've heard that over and over and it's not something that I would have even thought to put at the top of a priority, but how important, trying to get that sleep is, but what's some advice that you would give to some, a spouse?

I think it's really important.

And I mentioned this a little bit as finding that connection of um, that cohort almost especially for our husbands and wives that are working.

I'm looking at this from a fire service perspective, but they go through an academy together and they're spending 12 weeks together learning and growing and they're exhausted and busy.

They do a family day and I was actually invited just to the last one to talk about that, but find your people really lean on those people that get it, you know, we have our, even if you're in a tight family unit or you've grown up in this area and you have tons of high school and friends and if you feel like you have that community, I think they'll get to a point where they're, they're not going to get what you are going through as a first responder wife, so or husband, so find those people that can relate with you and the best place, at least for that fire services, you're starting right out there with the academy and I've been really impressed with our department's academy that they do that family day where they're meeting and, and not all the first responders that are the new recruits are married, they can bring their girlfriend, boyfriend, a mom or a dad.

It's just bringing someone in that family to understand what they're going through or what they're about to embark on.

So I think them having that family day is beautiful and I, like I said, I've spoken with the uh the instructors there and giving them my point on, really push that part on finding those people that you can um understand what you're going through at that time.

Mhm.

Yeah, that makes so much sense.

It really, what you've highlighted for us is the community of support within the fire family and I'm just curious really, what you think about, like what can our society learn from this culture of support within the fire family.

Um yeah, the world, you know, you know, going back to even what Daniel was saying about the like rescue nine or you know 911 and Grey's Anatomy like you have this, I think tv portrays this um family unit within the department and that part of it is real.

I know whenever I watch any of those shows with my husband, he just kind of like smacks his forehead like you've got to be kidding me.

But I think one thing that they do do kind of a good job on is they really do make you feel like there's a camaraderie within a department and that is there.

And I think that our community can really learn something from understanding that that these are a family, they shopped together, they live together, they work together and they're supporting each other through lots of long, long days.

I think that was kind of a, I hope I kind of answer that for you.

That was yeah, I mean it's really building a community, a community of support and um showing up for one another in the good, the bad and the ugly.

Yeah, absolutely.

And is there any resources or anything you want to put out on the podcast as we kind of wrap it up for folks, you know, I would just say if especially if your local listening to this that find me, you know, if you are service related at least with the fire department and that's why I I'm gonna say northern Nevada fire wives so we can talk about that.

I don't know if that once, you know we were talking about kind of not keeping it, but I really would love anyone that's in that fire service on my end to get in touch with me was to have so many opportunities to meet different people and with the peer support.

I know that they're recently getting a building where we're going to be able to host some things where we'll be able to meet in person as restrictions are lifted.

So I'm I would definitely plug the northern Nevada peer support network because right there they can get in touch with me and I'm hoping as that grows we'll have more time to meet in person and really start just branching out into doing more and more for not only our first responders but the community in which they serve.

Mhm That's good.

And so we'll have that website listed in the show notes as well.

So make sure you check that out, Mariah, thank you so much for your time and for your energy, loved your energy today and everything you brought.

Yeah, I appreciate you.

Thanks so much Maria for sharing your passion heather.

My pleasure, my pleasure.

I really just go for any opportunity to just talk about what an amazing community we live in and the opportunities and the ability we have to help others.

Well, thank you.

We appreciate it.

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