



Conscious Life presents

Trauma Support for First Responders

Guest: Majet Reyes

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview, I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. Today I'm speaking with Majet Reyes, an immigrant, former paramedic, and now trauma therapist who gives unconditional, positive regard to her clients, who are mostly first responders, healthcare professionals, creatives, and BIPOC.

Majet is the owner of DivaGirl tribe, which is a lifestyle community that educates and empowers women by hosting conferences, workshops, and volunteer trips abroad. Majet Reyes, thank you so much for being with us today.

Majet Reyes

Hi. Thank you for having me, I'm so happy to be here.

Meagen Gibson

I want to start out by saying thank you for being here and putting a perspective on first responders, and stress, and trauma, that we haven't had before. I want to open it up by asking you, what is the key to managing stress for first responders?

Majet Reyes

The key to managing stress for first responders is really being able to reconnect with themselves. This is something that nobody teaches about, this is something that nobody really talks about. It's really about taking care of themselves. When we hear about taking care of themselves, we think of self-care, I'm not talking about mani, and pedicure, and spa days, but I'm really talking about being able to reconnect with themselves.

When they put on their uniforms, they become saviors, they become people who go into situations and save other people. Going into those situations that are traumatic for them as well, that's something that they carry with them, not only for the rest of the shift, but also something that they take with them after they take off the uniforms.

[00:02:02]

Then without the uniform on if they're not connected to their authentic self, to who they are, they're going to be walking around holding on to these traumas, these emotions that they felt when they went into these incidents that are traumatic, that were not being processed.

Those emotions, a lot of them are fear, anger, loneliness, frustration, stress, anxiety. They don't have a way, or a safe space to be able to process and talk about those feelings. Therefore, they're walking around with these traumas inside their bodies, and they start to disconnect from who they are.

So the key to manage their stress is to be able to find ways to reconnect with who they are, reconnecting to themselves. And that is activities that bring them joy, people who are going to accept them, and love them, and celebrate them for who they are.

Going back to activities and also spaces where they feel happy and joyful. That's the number one thing that I hope most first responders are able to bring into their lives more, so that they can manage stress and show up at work, outside of work, with the eight C's. Which are with compassion, with clarity, with calmness, curiosity, connection, creativity, and courage, if I didn't say that yet. So the eight Cs.

Meagen Gibson

That was such a great answer, and there's so many parts of that that I want to come back to. As a first responder yourself, you can speak to this from your own experience. When you said uniform, I was like ahhh because there's so few professions where we don a specific uniform that signals not only to ourselves, but to other people, what our role is.

I think about teachers, and other than a lanyard they go to school dressed probably similarly. Every teacher is probably going to write me an email now and be like, no, I definitely have a teaching uniform. Maybe if you're in corporate America, maybe you wear a suit, and that's what you associate as your uniform.

But first responders specifically have very specific uniforms, and I imagine that that lends itself to feeling like the reconnection part is taking off the uniform, when perhaps it goes a lot deeper than the surface level. They take off the uniform, I take off the fireman's boots and the jacket, and I get in my regular car and go home, and now I'm not a fireman anymore. And there's just more to it than that, as far as integrating back into your normal, typical self.

Majet Reyes

Yeah, exactly. It's like that literal taking off a role. But then it's hard for most first responders to leave that role. It's not easy. It defines most of them so much that it really takes away themselves, their real selves, their true selves.

Meagen Gibson

That identity piece that you're talking about, and how much pride and honor they have in being able to say, this is my job, and this is where I do it, and these are the people I do it for. And the way that people respond to you.

[00:06:06]

There's an entire house full of firemen, literally across the street from me, out the window that's right behind the camera. It's an entire house full of firemen. I get a lot of amusement from them. Every once in a while the truck comes down the street, and they stop at the house for lunch or whatever, and they're just wonderful dudes, probably in their 20s, late 20s. Wonderful people, different types.

There's a lot of different types of first responders, ambulance, EMTs, even hospital staff, people that are in social work. I think all would qualify as first responders. Who am I leaving out?

Majet Reyes

These people, their job is very challenging, it's very demanding in their mind, body and spirit. But they got into this work because they really want to save lives. They really want to help people, and with that, they also risk their lives. But these people are really, they want to help, they have this desire of duty, or for duty, and they're really committed to public service.

Putting on their uniform is their commitment, putting on their badge, putting on all their gear, it's like their commitment to public service. They really want to make a positive impact on the communities, and assist in emergencies. When everybody's running away, they go into the accident, to the incidents.

And a lot of them, their family backgrounds, they came from generations of firefighters, police officers, dispatches...

Meagen Gibson

Traditions of helpers.

Majet Reyes

Yeah, helpers, exactly. The paramedics, the EMTs, and yes social workers, people in hospitals, doctors, and nurses, they put on a uniform, and they're putting on their uniform because they're committed to serve the communities, to serve the public, and make a positive impact in other people's lives.

Meagen Gibson

We spoke briefly about this before, but tell me if this is true for first responders. I remember when I was a news journalist, one of the things that I loved the most about that job was not only serving the community, but that every day was a clean slate. We didn't carry one day's work into the next day. Every day was like a completely fresh set of problems, or news, or whatever it is.

It feels like there's a lot of overlap there for first responders, in that when your day is done, you don't technically have to take any part of that day into the next day's work. However, you do have a lasting impression of that work on you perhaps, and you are affected by that work. And so is that, in your experience and expertise, also true for first responders?

[00:09:03] Majet Reyes

Oh, my God yeah, totally. Yes, you're right, in a sense when the shift is done, they're done, they do paperwork, but they have to do that at work, and then they don't take it technically, literally take the job home to them. However, first responders are really good with compartmentalizing.

What they're compartmentalizing are the emotions that come up for them, when they go into a scene. They go into a traumatic scene, and then it brings up an emotion for them, however, they can't be emotional. They can't show emotional dysregulation at the job. They have to be able to keep it together. Keep it together so that you can do your job. Keep it together so that you can solve the problem, help someone.

And then here's the worst part, after that incident, or after that call, after you do your job for that call, you have to still keep it together so you can go on to the next call. And sometimes there's no downtime in between those calls. So therefore, write the emotion that you felt from that first call, let's say the first call of your shift, write something really traumatic and horrible.

You saw that. You witnessed that. That's vicarious trauma that you absorbed for that. And then that, because you're a human being, you have an emotion that will come up, and then you can't express that. You can't process that. Not just because you don't have the time, you don't have the space, you don't have the people to process it with.

It's like right away you have to go on to the next call. And then when you get on to the next call, a different emotion will come up for you, and then you have to compartmentalize that. And then how many more calls are you going to get from that shift?

And then you come home. Yes, you don't bring work home. However, the emotions that you have been carrying throughout the shift, you take that home with you, and then the last thing you want to do is talk about what you saw, what you witnessed, or how you felt during those calls that you went into your entire shift.

And who are you going to talk to? A lot of first responders don't want to talk to their kids, for obvious reasons, about what they had witnessed. They don't want to talk to their spouses, because they don't want to burden their significant others, or their loved ones, about the events that they saw.

Therefore, the first responders left with these pent-up emotions, and they don't know how to deal with that most of the time, because no one really teaches them how. It's not something that they teach at the fire academy, or in EMS, or the police academy. So, yes, they don't technically take their jobs at home, but the emotions that they felt during their job, they take it with them.

So just like Gabor Maté is saying, it's like trauma is not the actual event that happened, but it's the emotion that we felt during that actual event that we didn't get to process. So here we are, we have these first responders traumatized walking around, and we expect them to show up for us, the community, empathetic and compassionate, while they themselves haven't had the time to feel compassion and empathy for themselves.

[00:12:44] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely, and also I imagine even if you did feel like sharing, even if you took the step to share, what happens often is now you're helping the person you've talked to process their emotions about what you shared, or their responsiveness. And you're like wait a minute, I experienced something really hard, I shared it with you, and now you're having an emotional experience that now I have to help you with, and I'm still in rescuer mode, and not processing what happened.

Majet Reyes

Yes, exactly. Again, nobody's taking care of the first responder, and we really need to start looking at taking care of them, especially their mental and emotional well-being.

Meagen Gibson

How does the nervous system play into that? What do first responders know? Where is nervous system regulation in the things first responders aren't taught about, and don't know how to do?

Majet Reyes

I love talking about this. As a trauma therapist, you're familiar with this, talking about the nervous system, and the sympathetic and the parasympathetic parts of our nervous system. When it comes to first responders, it's really empowering for them to be able to know how to ground themselves. Especially in stressful situations, which is like it's a Tuesday at work...

Meagen Gibson

Lunchtime.

Majet Reyes

Yes, exactly. Regulating their nervous system is very important, like what I said earlier, so they can show up at work, and at home, with the 8 Cs. The 8 Cs being again, creative, curious, courageous, calm, clear, connected, compassionate, and then being curious instead of judgmental.

If they understand their nervous system, then they can regulate and ground themselves, and show up with these 8 Cs. That's the type of first responder we want to answer our call for help. If they understand their nervous system, they are self-aware, they're able to look within themselves instead of looking outside of themselves. And instead of finding meaning outside of themselves, instead of finding fulfillment outside of themselves.

A lot of first responders, and I'm guilty of this, I'm a savior, I am this job, I put on this uniform, and that's what defines me. But then that's not necessarily true. We are more than just our uniform. And then when we're self-aware, if a first responder is self-aware, they also start to learn and understand that they really can't control a lot of things.

You go into accidents, you go into calls, it's unpredictable. You don't know what's going to happen. You actually don't know what you're going to show up for. The dispatch will tell you, a 40 year old woman down. Okay, can you tell me a little bit more?

[00:15:59]

They give you the address, down, 40 year old woman down. And you show up, they're not really sure what's going to be there. Then if a first responder is always in need of control, they're not going to be able to show up with the 8 Cs, in these incidents, in these calls.

So if they're self-aware, they're going to be able to know that they can't control things, and they can't control people. They can reflect on themselves more, reflect on what they can control and what we control, just like for everybody else who are not first responders, is that our thoughts, our actions, our words, and what we consume?

When I say consume, it's like what we read, what we hear, what we eat, what we listen to. We become advocates, if we understand our nervous system, we can advocate for ourselves. The first responder can advocate for what they need, they can ask for what they want, and they can actually tell their truth, and express how they feel without attachment to the outcome.

Then if they understand their nervous system, they're able to self-regulate, and understanding their autonomic nervous system, they'll be able to know that, okay, I'm in a fight or flight mode right now.

Well, I understand that I'm at work, so I have to be on my fight or flight mode to be able to do my job. And then for them to understand that when they get home, that's the rest and digest. When, okay, now I'm not in my fight or flight mode, and emotions are starting to come up for me. And they're able to understand when they feel dysregulated. And why am I being dysregulated right now? Why am I being triggered?

Our central nervous system, it's a history of what happened to us, our nervous system, so therefore, when a first responder goes into these calls, they're going to be triggered, and they need to understand, okay, I'm being triggered. What is that part of me that's being triggered? And how can I respond mindfully instead of reacting to this patient, or this survivor, or to this victim.

They'd be able to regulate themselves. I actually give them a tour, one of the tools I give them is PALM. P-A-L-M, and it stands for being able to Pause instead of reacting, and A is being able to just Acknowledge. Acknowledge what's coming up for you, and naming it, is it anger? A lot of times, anger is an emotion that a lot of first responders feel. Is it sadness? Is it disgust? Name it and then accept it.

Acknowledge that, accept that, instead of judging it. Instead of judging that emotion, instead of saying that that emotion is wrong, I shouldn't feel that way. But really being able to Pause, Acknowledge and Accept the emotion that's coming up for you, and then maybe take a moment.

And L. L stands for Learn why. Why am I feeling this way? What is this triggering? Oh, this person is reminding me of my father. This person is reminding me of my supervisor. Or this person, if you go to a call and it's a child, and if you're a parent, you're like, okay, I'm feeling afraid. Why? Because this is a child, and it's triggering that part of me being a parent.

Instead of reacting, you'll be able to mindfully respond to that person, to that situation, and show up for your job with more mindfulness, instead of being just reactive.

[00:20:00]

And then lastly, if they understand their nervous system, they can emotionally regulate. And when they're emotionally regulated, they know that the role of their brain and their emotions. Understanding their brain's role with their emotions, and how that can help them manage the emotions that are coming up for them.

Because if you're able to understand your emotions, you will stay empathetic to the people. To the people in the community, and you can provide the effective support that those people need. Because you're not personalizing, you're not taking things personal, and you're able to let go of the outcome.

Meagen Gibson

Is the M manage? I just want to be really clear.

Majet Reyes

M is Mindfully. Mindfully respond, yes.

Meagen Gibson

I just didn't want our audience going. What's the M?

Majet Reyes

Yes.

Meagen Gibson

I love it when somebody gives us an acronym, that's fantastic. So it's Pause, Acknowledge, Learn, and then Mindfully approach it.

So many things that you said, I want to come back to, you're doing great here. I can imagine if you don't understand your nervous system, and you're in the role of rescuer, helper, savior. And you've got that uniform on, if you go to a really bad call, and afterwards, once things are, you're out of that scene, and everybody's been taken care of, and it's over. If you get emotional, or if you begin to shake, or like any normal nervous system response to, an appropriate response, to that situation and stimulus.

But if you don't know that about your nervous system, I can imagine the sense of shame, or confusion, or all of the assignments of meaning that you would give to that response, if you weren't aware of your nervous system's job, and what it's supposed to be doing for you.

Majet Reyes

100%. It's like, I shouldn't. The shoulds. I shouldn't feel this way. Why am I feeling this way? It is a culture of being tough, being resilient, and you're expected to be tough, you're expected to bounce back. And there's really no space for emotions, for feelings.

[00:22:27]

And then, just like what you're saying, there are no wrong feelings. You're a human being, you are expected to have those feelings, to shake, to be dysregulated for what you just seen, and what you just put yourself through. It's a normal reaction.

So therefore, being able to understand that, then you know that, okay, there's no need to be ashamed about this. This is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation that I put myself through every day I go into work.

Meagen Gibson

I'm just imagining the context and community as much like, there's the call, there's the person that's called for assistance in any situation, and then there's the context around them.

I remember I have a gentleman who lives next door to me, who is a nonverbal, autistic gentleman, and he is also a special Olympian. He rides his bike, and we love him, and he's a staple on the street. During COVID he stopped riding where he was training, and he started riding here in our neighborhood.

And one of the other neighbors, I live in Florida, so all of my neighbors are very elderly, but one of my neighbors needed to call an ambulance. Ambulance comes, the fire truck comes. In the US, we send too many people. So the fire truck comes, the ambulance comes, everybody shows up.

And as the EMTs and first responders are trying to start assisting, my neighbor is riding his bike, and basically they're on his track. He doesn't understand why they're there, they are in his way, not the other way around. I see what's going on through my little vantage point, and I run out to tell them, hey, here's the situation. He's training, you're on his track, and if you talk to him, he's probably not going to respond, he's not going to understand what's going on, and I want you to understand this about him.

And they were like, thank you so much for giving us the context of what's happening here. Because the one fireman, he was like, I was about to get in a fight with the dude. I was about to take him off his bike, and not because that's the appropriate thing to do. He was just like, I was starting to get really angry, and feel disrespected, that he wasn't giving us the space that we need to do our job.

And so there's so many things. There's not just the call. There's the community, there's the context, there's family, there's neighbors, there's traffic. There's all kinds of things contributing to the nervous system of the first responder on the scene.

Majet Reyes

Yeah, it's a lot to manage for one person for a short period of time, and then they're expected to do their job with all of these distractions.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I want to talk about the maladaptive coping mechanisms of first responders, and what is common to them. How do you? I'm sure that you deal with that a lot in your practice, and with people that you are consulting with, and that might even be for me to assume, please tell me if I'm

wrong, like how they get into your office in the first place? They're like, here's what I've been doing, and that's not working for me, or it's not working for my family. So how do I choose something better?

[00:25:40] Majet Reyes

Yeah. Oh, my God, you're right. The common maladaptive coping mechanisms, actually is what leads them to my office, you're right. I've said this earlier, compartmentalizing, that's something that they learned, and they had to do at work.

It's like really suppressing their emotions, and bottling up their emotions, trying to appear strong, and appear unaffected. That can lead into anger outbursts, and other psychological issues like depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal ideation, and substance use disorder.

I'm going to go into the substance use, substance abuse, using of alcohol, or drugs to numb, because a lot of times they are not sure how to process, or deal with these emotions that are coming up. So to numb and escape the emotional toll from their work.

There's substance abuse, and then there's the denial. This is something that they deny the impact of the traumatic experiences on themselves. If you ask a first responder to tell war stories, they can tell you the details of the event, but they usually leave out the emotions that they felt.

It's like, what I'm feeling is not valid. It's that denial. Now they start to, because they have these feelings, and then they keep denying it, now they isolate themselves, so they stay away from family, or friends because they feel like people don't understand them.

Again, they don't want to burden their loved ones with the experiences, or the emotions that are coming up for them. And then it leads into, because they're alone, especially with their emotions, they start doing self-harming behaviors.

So the maladaptive soothing mechanisms, the cutting, the bingeing, the purging, gambling, smoking. And start getting into risky behaviors and impulses, so that they can cope with the emotional pain that they're having.

Another one is that they work a lot. Again, it's all avoidance of the feeling, they overwork, and then they become burned out, physically and emotionally burned out. Then they avoid the situations that they were at before that reminds them of the traumatic events. If they live in the neighborhood, or they live in that city, it's hard to avoid those places. It's all this vicarious traumas. They're not the actual people experiencing the trauma, or going through that horrible event, but they're witnesses to a lot of this.

And then there's the anger and the aggression at some point, it's very common that it's normal, it's more accepted, actually, than sadness. Anger and aggression, it's that mostly masculine stoicism. The feeling of being lonely is so unacceptable that anger and aggression is more acceptable.

The trauma and distress manifest into anger and aggression, and it affects their professional, and also personal, their anger at their coworkers, they're angry at the people they help, and then especially the people that they love. A lot of times this anger and aggression is actually rooted in loneliness, in sadness. They need to reconnect with themselves. The risky behaviors, we've talked

about, like the temporary distractions, so here comes sexual addiction, gambling. They're adrenaline junkies...

[00:29:54] Meagen Gibson

Skydiving, fast cars, and motorcycles.

Majet Reyes

Yes, exactly. Then lastly, the perfectionism, the stress that they put on themselves. They become really stressed, and they criticize themselves so much. Thinking that, okay, when I wear this uniform, I need to be perfect, and I need to know everything that I need to know, to be able to show up and save people, which we can't. We can't save everyone.

Also to avoid the criticism, that's pretty big in that culture, the first responder culture, criticism, and not a lot of support towards other first responders. It's all masking the deeper issues.

Yeah, those are a lot. But these are the common reasons, coping, that first responders were doing. And then they finding themselves, like, these are not helpful. My significant other, my wife, or my parents asked me to go seek help, because I'm always alone, I'm not doing the things that I love. There's no intimacy, and it's not just sex, but that connection with the people you care about.

Meagen Gibson

It's almost like you're never here, and then when you are here, you're still not here.

Majet Reyes

Very good summarization. That is so true. Yeah, that's how their families really feel.

Meagen Gibson

I've heard what you described earlier as the term, moral injury. Have you heard of that term?

Majet Reyes

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Where it's like you're a witness to it, you weren't directly impacted by it. You're not the person that was involved in the traumatic event or experience, but you are the witness to it, or you've been part of the team to help, but it still stays with you, as if you were involved in it to begin with.

Majet Reyes

Oh, totally, from my own experience, too, when you see those victims, those survivors, and what happened to them, and you start looking behind your back more, you start locking your doors, double checking that. You start to become hyper-alert, hyper-vigilant. Those things didn't happen to you, but you saw victims of those people, or even driving your car, being extra careful.

[00:32:41]

It's just because you've seen it. For me, it's like simple shoes by our door. When you open the entrance door and there's shoes there, I'm like, why are you leaving shoes? Why what's wrong with it? I'm like, we can step on it and we can fall and we can hurt. We can have brain injuries. And they're like, right, yeah those are very vicarious traumas.

Or hangers, wire hangers will trigger me. I'm like, we need to make sure that they hang properly because I've seen people who were injured by wire hangers. Those things, it didn't happen to us, but we saw victims, survivors of people who got hurt, and we're like, okay, I don't want that to happen to me and my loved ones. And it's like that we carry that with us. Thanks for bringing that up.

Meagen Gibson

What I hear you say, it's like the same parts of us that allow us to be rescuers are good in an emergency. Tell me if I'm making a leap here, but I think a lot of people with trauma histories go into helping professions, because the hyper-vigilant part of us, that we've super trained from our trauma histories, is really good at assessing a situation, and taking in information, and making quick decisions. But then it's also really good at collecting data about how dangerous the world is, and making us scared to move about in it.

Majet Reyes

Yeah, definitely. Do you know why I became a first responder?

Meagen Gibson

No, I don't. If you want to share with us please do.

I came to the United States when I was 16 with my family, and then when we came here, for most Filipinos you go into nursing, or you join the Navy, or stay in the medical profession. I was on track to becoming a nurse, but then 911 happened. And in 911 happened, I saw people running at the building, we all witnessed it, and then people going into the burning buildings.

Coming from a country that had a lot of natural disasters. I have experienced flooding, I've experienced earthquakes. We have earthquakes, the Philippines, an island, it's like Hawaii, a lot of volcanoes, so we had volcanic eruptions, I've experienced. We had to evacuate, my friends had to evacuate. And then flooding, and storms, and earthquakes. Earthquakes happen there every month.

You got all of it, every type of natural disaster.

Majet Reyes

For me, natural disaster chaos is traumatizing. For me, not understanding that was trauma, and that was traumatic for me, because that's normal in that part of the world. Then seeing 911 happening in the United States, and living in the United States, and seeing first responders. In the Philippines, they're not really, at that time in the 80's, 90's, there were no first responders there.

We had firefighters, but they're not fully trained. First responders were probably just cops, police officers. So seeing first responders during 911 going, I'm like, who are those people?

[00:36:14]

I see cops, I'm familiar with cops, and there are firefighters, sure, I don't want to be a firefighter, I don't want to be a cop. But then there are those other people in uniform who are going in there and saving people. What are they? I wasn't very familiar with that profession. They were paramedics, we had Internet back then in 2001, but I didn't have access to it. I used a phone book, the yellow pages, and I looked for paramedic school, and then I saw a school for paramedic school, and I was like, okay, this is something that I could see myself doing.

But then not realizing that my experience as a child, I didn't understand this before, now as a trauma therapist, I can understand. And for you, bringing it up, it's like bringing up that time where I'm discovering that, oh, my experience in the Philippines prepared me to become a first responder, and feel okay helping, or going into risky situations for work, and risk my life to be able to do the job.

I don't know if I took us away from our topic.

Meagen Gibson

No, you answered me well and perfectly. I just feel like it's an understated, not coincidence but factor, involved in these lines of work, is that sometimes the chaos is what is calming for first responders, and people in that line.

I went into news, so I wasn't directly helping people, but helping the community in one way. I was on a lot of the same scenes, is what I'll say. But the more chaotic it was, the calmer I was. It took me many years after I resigned from the news business to understand what that was, and what had informed it, and to see how it would come up in my life, around when things were really safe.

I was more uncomfortable when things were calm and safe than when things were like... When you take the chaos of your position and career away, and all you've got is a calm, steady life, all of a sudden, all that stuff bubbles up and you're like, wait a minute, things are too calm, things are too steady. Now I'm uncomfortable.

Majet Reyes

Yeah, you're not familiar with it, that's totally true. Putting yourself in situations that are chaotic and dangerous to tell the news, to tell other people's stories. And feeling comfortable...

Meagen Gibson

More comfortable around chaos.

Majet Reyes

Yes, and you find yourself really honed in, and getting the job done in those situations when there's chaos, and not a lot of people could do that.

[00:39:10] Meagen Gibson

Exactly.

Majet Reyes

Then when you have those moments, when there's peace and quiet and calmness, you're like, this is so unfamiliar, I don't know what to do with this. You're like, okay, I need to work, we need to learn how to bring ourselves back, to reconnect with ourselves, because those are not sustainable. Being in those situations all the time, and wanting that all the time is not sustainable, and not healthy for anybody.

Meagen Gibson

Both things have to be happening at the same time, you're developing your awareness, you're using your PALM analogy, because if you don't have that regulation, the 8 C's aren't available to you.

How could you get curious about the way that you're feeling, and about discomfort in safety if you don't have any connection to yourself? You're not going to be able to do that, it's not available to you. That's why the work is so important, right?

Majet Reyes

Yes, exactly.

Meagen Gibson

You're going to be like, I don't want to be curious about that, I'm going to have a 6 pack so I don't think about it anymore.

Majet Reyes

And the guilt of thinking about yourself too. It's like, why other people have had it worse. For me, why am I complaining about this? Why am I worried about this? Why am I feeling this way about that? Let me go drink. Let me go numb. Let me distract myself from myself.

Meagen Gibson

The pain and trauma Olympics, where we're competing. Especially if we're lucky enough to go home to a home, we have food, we have shelter, we have employment, we have hopefully loved ones. And then to not feel, to have the audacity to not feel grateful, and connected, and calm, to not have access to that, then we feel the shame of, everyone I saw today was in tragedy, or needed help, or had it worse, or all of these things. How dare I not feel just completely grateful, warm, and connected, and calm.

Majet Reyes

We totally invalidate our own emotions that are coming up for us. The guilt and shame around that too.

[00:41:29] Meagen Gibson

So what are you doing? I'm just going to put it all on your plate now. But how can we change the atmosphere for first responders? What's happening in that world now to create communities of care? Obviously there's people like you who are trained as first responders, who are helping them directly, but in these communities of care, what's happening to help support first responders?

Majet Reyes

I don't think there's enough happening to support the mental health of our first responders. I've told you earlier how I appreciate you having this platform, and having me on to talk about the mental health of first responders, because there's not a lot of platforms wherein we can talk about the mental health of first responders.

I'm a person of color, a woman of color, I'm immigrant, and I'm a former first responder. I believe that it is essential to foster trust and mutual understanding for effective public safety.

In the United States, and in many countries, we are composed of people from different backgrounds, and different experiences, and share the same needs, people from different backgrounds share the same needs, to be seen, to be heard, to be validated, to feel safe, and to feel happy.

We need our first responders to answer our calls for help, we need them, we can't deny the importance of their job. Therefore, they too need to be seen, to be heard, to be validated, to feel safe, and to feel fulfilled in their jobs. Not only so that they can show up with the 8 Cs, but also they can stay in their jobs, because we do need them.

Therefore, I am really dedicated in building this bridge, this empathy bridge between the first responders, and people in the community, especially the BIPOC communities.

And what do we need for this to happen? Of course, we need to take care of our first responders' mental health. We need to minimize the stigma around asking for help. We need to train them for cultural competency. We need to engage the community, engage the BIPOC community leaders and organizations to build relationships and trust. And encourage dialogs and collaboration between the BIPOC community leaders and the first responders leaders. Or the first responders, people in uniform.

We need to train our first responders about unconscious biases that we all hold, that we all have. And then having accountability and oversight, having crisis intervention, training, community policing, having resources, integrating mental health, and social services in the communities.

Also for first responders diverse hiring. We need to hire first responders who look like the people they serve, that's so very important. Then we need to have transparency.

We need to have youth programs, bringing youth and having them engage in our BIPOC community. We're doing this work. For me, when I look at this work, and building this empathy bridge between first responders and the BIPOC community, maybe it's hard. It's a lot of work, and I may not be able to see it happen, maybe I'll see a glimpse of it, but we need this for our children.

[00:45:30]

We want to live in a country where there's peace and love, acceptance, and encouragement, and celebration of both first responders, and the communities that they serve, and the diversity of our country.

We need to have talks about feedback, and opening more about that, and really collaboration. And also celebrating the diversity in our communities. It requires a lot of dedication, it's an ongoing process, there's a lot of commitment and willingness. The willingness to share space with one another, to be able to feel seen, and heard, and validated.

But I think it's possible, we can work together to really foster an understanding, and build the trust, and improve our relationship between first responders and the community.

But in order for this to happen is to really prioritize the mental health of first responders, and minimizing the stigma, and giving them resources for help. And having supervisors, or leaders, who also see them with empathy and compassion, so that they can provide a more positive environment, work environment, for first responders. It's a lot. I'm going to pause and hear what your thoughts and feelings are.

Meagen Gibson

It's not just your job, as the community that benefits from all of those services, it's our job just as much as it is somebody like yours, and so we're all part of it. We all benefit from these services.

You've inspired me to look into my own community and see what else I can do, and how better I can serve these types of people, other than just making my neighbors cookies. How can people find out more about you and your work?

Majet Reyes

They can find me by going to my website resilientmindworks.com. I am on social media, and it's phillytraumacounselor. I hope to hear from you and connect, and hopefully maybe you have a platform, or we can talk more about mental health with first responders, and build that empathy bridge between first responders and the BIPOC community.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Thank you so much again for being with us today.

Majet Reyes

Thank you so much for having me Meagen.