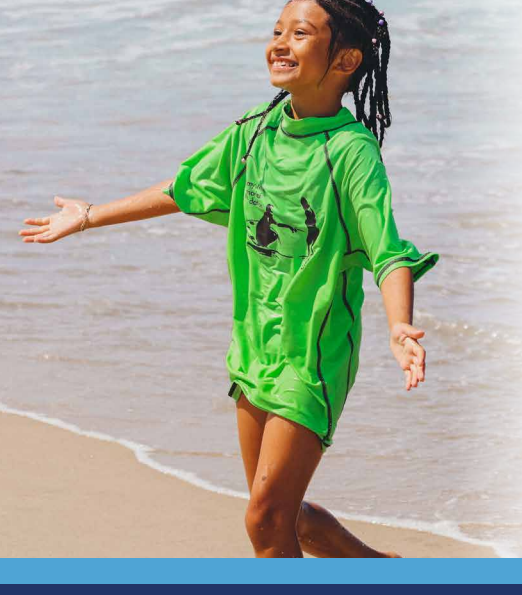




2024 OCEANS OF GRATITUDE



2024 was a banner year for JMMF. While we mourned the loss of Jimmy (20 years), Kevin Sousa and countless others that left us too soon, we also hosted more Ocean Therapy sessions (71 to be exact) and helped more people (410) suffering from mental and physical illness as a result of trauma and stressors. For that, we are grateful. While our team and our programming have adapted to serve the changing needs of the populations we work with, our mission has not. Our mission is to help as many people as our resources will allow. Simple...I like simple and easy to understand mission statements!

One of our largest initiatives in 2024 was launching our program for First Responders – police, fire, medics, dispatch, etc. It all started with a simple question: Have you ever thought about offering an Ocean Therapy program for first responders?

I was chatting with Tim Hageman, an Air Force veteran and retired police captain that spent 33 years in law enforcement with a good portion of his service at the Manhattan Beach Police Department. It was November 2023 and we were just wrapping up a great event Tim invited us to participate in called VetFest hosted by the MB Rotary Club at the Kinecta HQ. I confided in Tim that I've always wanted to create an Ocean Therapy program for cops and other first responders but the main obstacle was that we didn't have a single corresponding agency that would screen, coordinate the participants and help us promote the program internally. With all of the other groups that JMMF serves in our Ocean Therapy program, we correspond with a clinician, social or case worker, or therapist that coordinates participants from their side. I wondered aloud to Tim – I'm just not sure how it would work with each city having their own department, and frankly I questioned if cops would even come to an Ocean Therapy session and risk being labeled as "broken" or "damaged", or admit they were struggling?

Being a cop for 33 years and on the front line responding to horrible traffic accidents, suicides, child abuse and other unimaginable violence, Tim shared that most first responders suffer from the effects of on-duty trauma but many don't want to talk about it...mostly because of the cultural stigma around mental health in law enforcement and because any form of perceived "weakness" could be career compromising or career ending. Like many, they struggle isolated and alone. Not surprising then that the suicide rate among law enforcement is 53% higher than the general population. It's also no secret that first responders, and specifically cops, have taken a beating in recent years, and morale is cratering. The calls to "Defund The Police" and social justice movements encouraging the killing of cops are not real motivating when your professional calling is to protect the health and safety of those that are out to bring you down. Tim admitted that the bridges between cops and their communities have been badly damaged in many places, as well as the overall mental wellness in the first responder community. The need is often hidden, but it is real.

Around this same time, I was introduced to another former officer turned wellness advocate and now first responder chaplain, Matt Domyancic. Matt reinforced Tim's perspective and wisely counseled us of some additional challenges we would likely face. First, due to the recent "social justice" movements and calls to "Defund The Police" and due to the inherent hazards of the job, there is a shortage of officers. As a result, most are overworked and have little personal free time. Second, what little free time they might have, they want to spend it with family, friends, going to their kid's sports/games or just recuperating, and not at another "work related event." Matt, Tim and others warned us that another issue we would face is trust. First responders, like military, have an inherent "cautionary approach" toward anyone outside of their unit. It's a natural safety protection in their line of work. And many civilian organizations posture as wanting to help first responders, but in reality many want to claim their "support" primarily for positive press and marketing purposes. Distrust, damaged bridges, burnout = mental health challenges.



And....there's another thing. Due to the cultural stigma around mental health (it's improving but still persistent), Matt cautioned us that many first responders probably wouldn't attend an "ocean therapy" session because they don't need "therapy." However, Matt suggested that if we pivoted our focus from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to Post Traumatic Growth (PTG), we might get some first responders to participate. Undaunted by the challenge of coordinating so many disparate agencies and motivated by the fact that "first responder" is one of the few professions in which you are almost guaranteed to get PTSD, we were committed to be a part of the solution. Thus, was born JMMF's FROPOWR – First Responders Oceanic Performance Optimization Wellness & Resiliency program. (Notice we intentionally did not use "therapy" in the name.)

Matt and Tim made introductions to their contacts and we attended meetings with Chiefs, Captains, Wellness and Peer Support leads. One agency at a time. Lo and behold, Matt and Tim's wise counsel was spot on. Every chief, peer support contact, wellness advocate and critical incident clinician at first chuckled at the FROPOWR acronym (we know how first responders and the military LOVE their acronyms!) but they all agreed that surfing just might be the catalyst to get first responders to show up and try something new.



We launched our FROPOWR Program in March with crew of brave first responders from various agencies in the LA area. Tears of joy, relief, and courageous vulnerability from everyone present. Buoyed by the response, we added monthly FROPOWR sessions and culminated with a powerful session at the Hollister Ranch in November. Word has spread amongst the first responder community and JMMF has been embraced as "legit" and now part of their unit. The cultural attitudes towards mental health are changing and there is a rising tide of wellness and resiliency initiatives. We witnessed this same shift in the military over the years and now that the stigma is diminishing slowly, the gates are open for addressing the moral and psychological injuries and PTSD that most first responders suffer.

The bridges between first responders and their communities are slowly being repaired.

To everyone that has contributed with your time, talents and treasure to FROPOWR and our overall Ocean Therapy Program, we offer our heartfelt gratitude. We literally could not do what we do without your tremendous support!



Looking ahead to 2025...

We are encouraged by the fact that discussions about mental health issues continue to emerge from the shadows and more and more resources are being deployed to support mental and physical health in the name of wellness. Thanks to our supporters, fundraising efforts and a cohesive and growing Beach Team (Ocean Therapists, Beach Managers, Safety Coordinators and Surf Instructors), JMMF will be expanding our FROPOWR program to include more sessions in more locations to offer our unique programming. By the end of January 2025, we'll have our Ocean Therapy calendar for 2025 published and we welcome you to be a part of the solution by:

- Volunteering at Ocean Therapy sessions
- Attending our fundraising events: Poker on the Beach – March 2, Paddles Out Pickleball Tournament – April 5, and our annual gala, the BeneFiesta – July 12 (Please save these dates and look for more information soon)
- Texting "SURFHEALS" to 424-424-2022 and making any size donation
- Making a donation online for the holidays in the name of someone who has everything: <https://donate.jimmymillerfoundation.org/checkout/31328>
- Contributing to JMMF via your company's Corporate Matching Gift Program
- Asking your company or employer to make a donation from their Corporate Social Responsibility initiative
- Following us on social media and reposting – Instagram: @jmmfoundation, Facebook: @jimmymillermemorialfoundation, YouTube: @jmmfjimmymillerfoundation, TikTok: @jmmfoundation
- Invite a friend to join us at an Ocean Therapy session who might be struggling
- Contacting me with new and innovative fundraising ideas: andy@jimmymillerfoundation.org

A recurrent theme in our talking circles this year has been: "A pain shared is a pain divided. A joy shared is a joy multiplied." That is what our Ocean Therapy Program is all about! I offer my own corollary to this: "A pain not shared is a pain multiplied, and a joy not shared is a joy smothered." At our Ocean Therapy sessions, we seek to create the safe space to divide the pain and multiply the joy so no one has to go it alone.

Please join us in 2025 as we celebrate 20 years of Ocean Therapy and healing others, and ourselves, one wave at a time.



Oceans of Gratitude,
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