EDUCATING FOR TOMORROW

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Public Safety and Military Personnel Values in a Global World

Conference Story

First International Conference · June 12, 2026

Hosted by Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, Canada, and online

The series continues as Public Safety, Military and Veteran Values in a Global World.

Written by Oleksandr Kondrashov on behalf of the Organizing Committee

DROKACADEMY · Kamloops, British Columbia · 2026

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Planting Seeds of Support

A Friday Morning for Those Who Respond First

On Friday, June 12, 2026, the Educating for Tomorrow series opened its third track: a conference on the values of public safety personnel, first responders and military personnel. It met online, in one Zoom room, hosted from Kamloops, British Columbia. Speakers and participants joined from Canada, Ukraine, the United States and Bangladesh.

The programme included four keynotes and a six-minute 360 Format presentation.

Bring in the Dogs

Ngaire Abernethy, Co-Executive Director of PATDogs in Brandon, Manitoba, gave the first keynote. She described herself as a frontline social worker with 45 years of experience in child welfare, trauma response, health care and mental health, and a long-serving critical incident stress management (CISM) debriefer and educator.

Her keynote, "Bring in the Dogs: CISM and Canine-Assisted Crisis Response," showed how trained therapy dog teams support the five principles of crisis intervention: a sense of safety, calming, self-efficacy, connectedness and hope. A calm dog in the room signals that the room is safe. A hand on a dog offers touch without pressure. A question about a dog can open a conversation that leads to other help.

She was equally clear about standards. Crisis response is advanced work for a therapy dog and its handler, and animal welfare comes first. PATDogs grew from two hospital dogs after the pandemic to 50 therapy dog teams. In 2025, with Project Resilience 911, it trained 12 of them to national standards as its TREAT team (Trauma Response Emotional Assistance Team). Her closing message: "Bring in the dogs," but do it with a credible organization and with the right training in place.

A social work student who had volunteered in dog rescue asked how to begin in this field. Ngaire pointed to university programs in animal-assisted social work and to a new Canadian research network on the human-animal bond, and she offered to visit Kamloops with her dogs one day to help start a local network.

FORCES+: Naming Everyone Who Serves

Constable Amanda Conway of Project Resilience 911 and Dr. Oleksandr Kondrashov presented the FORCES+ framework. Amanda spoke about the need for policy change in how public safety personnel are supported, and about peer support teams that are properly trained.

Each letter of FORCES+ names a group of trauma-exposed professions: firefighters and emergency rescue workers; officers in policing, border services, corrections and enforcement; rescue and maritime safety personnel; combat and armed forces personnel; emergency medical and dispatch professionals; and social workers in crisis and child protection work, chaplains and spiritual care providers, and conservation and protection officers. The plus keeps the model open. It now names therapy animal teams, situational first responders (anyone who steps in to help in a crisis) and volunteers, whose supports differ from those of paid professionals. Amanda spoke in particular about rural volunteer firefighters, who return from a crisis to everyday jobs rather than to a team that shares the experience.

Sasha also described SHIELD, a planned curriculum that would offer education pathways for every group in FORCES+ and invite practitioners to help design the courses.

Is It Enough?

Dr. Tetyana Podkupko of Odesa National Medical University asked what Canada does to prevent burnout among first responders. Amanda described a new provincial program in Manitoba, a welcome start but with only three clinicians for the whole province. Dr. Kathie McKinnon, a trauma specialist in British Columbia, added that support is "not nearly enough." She spoke of rising assaults on paramedics, nurses and emergency physicians, of crews responding to overdose after overdose, and of the moral injury that follows. She named it a responsibility of government, through legislation and policy.

Silence, Stigma, and Survival

Dr. Heather Persellin-Deere of the University of Kentucky spoke as a social worker, an educator and a military spouse. Her keynote, "Silence, Stigma, and Survival: Lessons

from a Soldier's Suicide Attempt," drew on her own family's experience to ask what happens after a service member survives a suicide attempt, and who supports the family.

Her lessons were direct. Support must reach beyond the crisis to recovery and long-term well-being. Families carry much of the caregiving and need support of their own. Stigma must be reduced so that asking for help does not feel like punishment. And no single system can do this alone. She called for therapists who are "fluent in military," culturally competent in military and first responder culture, and for mental health first aid training for families and colleagues.

After her keynote, Sasha proposed adding loved ones to FORCES+: the family members, friends and neighbours who support a first responder, usually without formal training.

Inclusion by Candlelight

Dr. Tetyana Podkupko presented in Ukrainian, with Sasha translating, on "Inclusion through culture: the role of Ukrainian traditional practices in the socialization of youth with disabilities." In wartime Odesa, families carry a double burden: supporting loved ones at the front while caring for children with disabilities, often after displacement.

In the Odesa area, blackouts have lasted more than a week. During those times, children learned traditional practices such as painting pysanky (decorated Ukrainian Easter eggs), using large eggs so that children with motor difficulties could take part. Families charged their phones and power banks at Punkty Nezlamnosti ("Invincibility Points," centres with power and heat), and kept in touch by Zoom with Ukrainians abroad. Medical students worked with children of diverse abilities in small groups, learning inclusion in practice before they become doctors.

Family Traditions and the Sea

Natalia Bykovets of the Danube Institute of the National University "Odesa Maritime Academy" gave a six-minute presentation, "Family traditions: succession of professions." She described seafaring families who pass on not only skills but discipline, resilience and devotion to family, and how a sense of belonging helps seafarers through long periods away from home. She closed with a short video of the institute community at a sports event.

Looking Ahead

In closing, Amanda described the conference as planting a seed that she and Sasha have been planting since 2022. Sasha thanked the speakers, participants and partner universities, said the proceedings would be shared online, and invited everyone to the next conferences in the series and to the work ahead on SHIELD.

Sources

This story is based on the Zoom recording transcript of June 12, 2026, which begins with the first keynote, and on the conference proceedings. Titles and affiliations are taken from the submission form.

Public Safety and Military Personnel Values in a Global World

The story of the conference, told by the people who were in the room: first responders, military personnel, veterans, families, researchers and educators. Free and open to all.

Inside this story

- How support for those who serve took root
- Stories from every session, from first responders to families
- What the conference asks of us next

Read the full proceedings

The program and every abstract from this conference are in the first conference's Final Program and Proceedings, free to read at https://doi.org/10.66989/eft.ps1.2026.

Read it your way

Large clear type, bookmarks and headings that screen readers can follow. For large print, plain text or another format, write to educatingfortomorrowconference@gmail.com.

About the Author



Dr. Oleksandr Kondrashov is Associate Professor of Social Work (tenured) at Thompson Rivers University and founder of DROKACADEMY, a healing and writing space. Born in Lviv, Ukraine, he has taught over 7,000 students across five Canadian universities. Accessibility is the through-line of his scholarship.

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