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# AUTISM NEWS NETWORK

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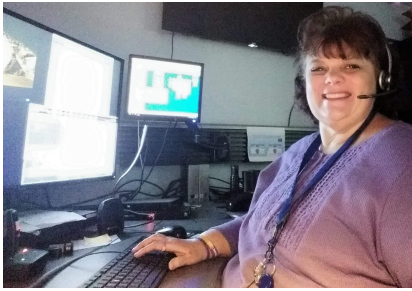
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## The month of January

As we start the New Year, we find ourselves still going through Covid-19 which has been a struggle for a lot of people, especially for our healthcare workers, 911 dispatchers and first responders. During the start of this new year, let's take this special time to give them extra thanks as most of them are not appreciated enough as it is they have been working extra hard to help keep us safe.

I have interviewed my cousin Melissa Chaffin, a 911 dispatcher of 21 years, about how Covid-19 has made her job more challenging and the effects on the community. She said the main challenge has been the increased stress of keeping the first responders she dispatches (Police, Fire & EMS) safe and healthy from Covid-19. "As a 911 dispatcher it is my job to properly screen each and every caller with a list of mandated Covid questions in order for first responders to suit up properly and respond in the healthiest way possible to keep not only themselves healthy but also the citizens we serve. People calling for help don't always understand or appreciate the extra questions we are mandated to ask, which in turn adds to the extra stress this year. We as dispatchers attempt to keep ourselves safe and healthy and like most other places now are screened at the beginning and end of each shift. The main difference in this year compared to others is the fear and uncertainty we face with people calling for assistance. We find ourselves as Dispatchers more than any other time in my 21-year career, to be the calm voice in the dark storm. To understand that people's fear will at times seem like an attack, not to be taken as a personal one just a sign of the pandemic, it is our job to be as patient, calm and reassuring as we can in the midst of shouldering all the extra stress and fear we ourselves feel during this time. People have experienced a lot of loss and uncertainty since Covid has started and as the pandemic continues.

I asked her in the interview, "If you could give advice to people during this time, what would it be?" Her response was simple and something we should all remember. She said we ALL need to be patient with one another, love one another, be kind to one another and work together to get through this scary time in life. Be understanding to ALL essential workers, the safety measures that have been placed may seem to be a waste of time or inconvenient, however, they are placed for the safety and overall health of you and them. Together we will get to a better time.



A special Thank you to ALL essential workers for your service and job well done during the whole Covid pandemic!!!

Remember the people with autism as they feel deeply the fear and emotions around them in normal times, now place yourself in the midst of the chaos of these uncertain times as they feel not only their heightened fears but also ALL the fears of everyone in the world around them.



**Dear God, I end this year  
with this simple prayer.**

Please heal the broken people.

Make well the sick.

Restore happiness to those in  
despair. Bring love to the lonely,  
food to the hungry and peace to  
our world.



Amen.



Happy New Year from the Autism News Network.

May God Bless you, Stay safe & Healthy.