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Toronto Fire Services' Movember truck. (PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN VIEIRA)

 TORONTO • Features

Movember's sirens and 'staches

Toronto's First Responders talk mental health



By Rushanthi Kesunathan on December 16th, 2018.

In November, some of Toronto's first responders ditched their razors and embraced no-shave Movember.

And for the first time, Toronto's Fire Services, police and paramedics collaborated and organized the "911 Toronto Emergency Services Movember Challenge" on behalf of the **Movember Foundation**, an idea created by the police services.

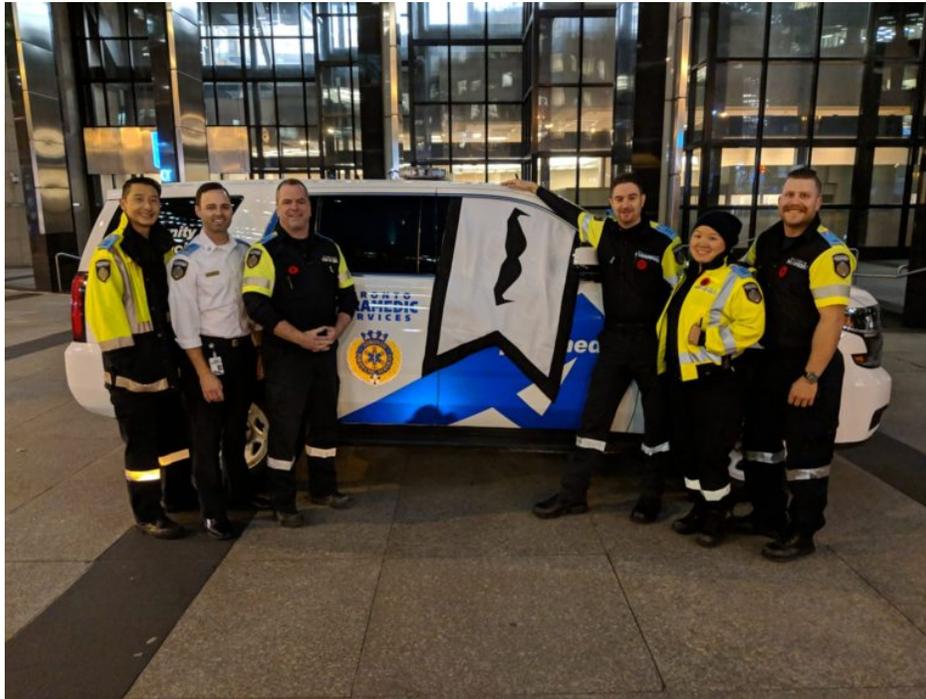
Together, first responders have raised over \$61,000 for Movember.

First responders often cope with more than challenges to their physical health. Most often, any sign of weakness while on the job is hidden. As a result, first responders rarely open up to speak about their mental health. However, the Movember campaign helps first responders by letting them know it's normal to speak up and not be embarrassed to share their feelings.

Every year, the foundation challenges men across Canada to grow a moustache to raise awareness and funds for prostate cancer and testicular cancer, as well as for mental health, and suicide prevention.

The Toronto Observer spoke to the captains of all three teams about the goals of the challenge.

[Toronto Paramedic Services](#)



Toronto paramedic and Movember team captain Jon Harper and his team. (PHOTO COURTESY OF JON HARPER)

Paramedics are often asked about the worst thing they have witnessed or to share a story about an incident that broke them. According to paramedic Jon Harper, his colleagues don't like to publicly talk about difficult calls even though people only ask because they are interested in the job.

"But what they're really saying is, 'Tell me a good story' without realizing how powerful that one question is," Harper said in a telephone interview Nov. 27.

He hopes Movember helps break stigmas. It is important for paramedics to lose the tough guy attitude, he said.

Paramedics often wear epaulettes on the shoulders of their uniform. In efforts to raise awareness and funds, this year paramedics created the Movember blue epaulette with moustaches instead of stripes to rank skill. Paramedics must buy their own Movember epaulettes and these funds go towards the foundation.

According to the team's Movember page, last year Harper's team raised \$5,570 (this number may not reflect the total amount raised).

Update: On Dec. 14, Harper said he has already started building momentum for Movember 2019. Search for Jon Harper's Moustache on Facebook and Instagram.

[Toronto Police Follicle Force](#)

@TorontoPolice FOLLICLE FORCE Help For Men's Health | Movember 2018



(Video courtesy of Toronto Police Service's YouTube channel.)

Police officers often deal with situations that the average citizen would never encounter. For Staff Sergeant Scott Bradbury, this year alone caused a lot of high-stress situations for the Toronto police, he said, referring to the July Danforth shooting and April's Yonge Street van attack.

"It isn't easy dealing with that, nor is it something we're comfortable talking about," Bradbury said.

However, to deal with these traumas, officers often put up walls for self-preservation and it's not healthy, he said.

There isn't enough time to heal.

"We deal with that situation, and move forward onto the next one," Bradbury said, in a telephone interview Nov. 27.

Movember allows the police force to have a conversation, open up more and lose the scars behind those issues and discuss men's mental health and to ensure a healthier, happier life, Bradbury said. Growing the moustache itself creates conversations, he said.

"I don't have a moustache year-round so when I have one in the month of November, it starts the engagement and opens conversations," Bradbury said. "People see you, it's different and they know its Movember."

The Follicle Force teams sold retro-type posters to raise money, had fundraising incentives and raffles.

Last year, the police force raised \$28,907.

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but I can talk about how I feel.

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"I am someone who went from being very ashamed of hating myself to someone who is very proud of what I've been through." Our World Suicide Prevention Day campaign features men opening up about what they've been through. Hear more from @andrewsjensen about what it took to be a #ManofMoreWords on IGTV.

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Toronto Firefighters L3888

Firefighter Dan Viera says firefighters see a lot of things and deal with some serious issues as a result of the job.

"It affects our mental health and we have a higher prevalence of cancer and mental health issues due to the pressure and nature of our work," Viera said.

Viera still remembers one of his worst fires- a **six-alarm fire from January 2011** that destroyed a heritage building at Yonge and Gould Streets. Firefighters had called "Mayday" after two of them became disoriented and fell off a roof.

He encourages his team to always take care of themselves by giving importance to their health.

To raise funds, the team branded a firetruck to fit the theme of Movember and used for events. They also created their own line of tuques and scarves.

Last year, the team raised \$31,580.



Firefighter Dan Viera comes down the pole at the L3888 fire hall, in Toronto on Nov. 23, 2018. (RUSHANTHI KESUNATHAN/TORONTO OBSERVER)

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#Movember Undie Run yesterday afternoon. 🇨🇦 Toronto firefighters proudly support the Movember campaign benefiting men's health initiatives with a focus on suicide, prostate & testicular cancer. Please support our team effort here: bit.ly/2AHLhaf (link in bio) #internationalmensday #Toronto #torontofire #morethanfire #verticalcity #menshealth #endthestigma #mentalhealth #suicide #ptsd #depression #prostate #prostatecancer #testicularcancer #cancerawareness #cancer #health #selfcare #itsmotime #takecare

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According to **Movember Canada**, eleven men die each day from prostate cancer and eight men a day take their own life and three out of four suicides are men.



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