



## WNYF 2018 - FDNY Families with Special Needs

Having a family member with special needs is both difficult and rewarding. It affects all members of a family, even one's extended family at the firehouse. It can tax a family's resources to the limit. It can take a toll on any individual, especially ones who internalize challenges, always stay calm, put on a brave face when faced with adversity, and solve problems. Does that sound like anyone you know? I just described the traits of most of the exemplary firefighters that I know. It can be a challenge for those same individuals to accept help, after all, firefighters provide help. FDNY Special Needs group allows you to do BOTH , both give and receive. Another quality that makes our FDNY special is that we look after each other. The fact is, even with the best of intentions, other family, friends, and even some of the 'brothers' at the fire house may not 'get' what you are going thru. The members of this group understand the challenges. The reward comes when you share your experiences, knowledge, and accept guidance from people who share a common bond.

The group meets monthly thru-out the year and it is organized by the counseling services unit of the FDNY. Meeting dates, times, and locations are sent out via the Intranet, FDNY DiamondPlate, and unit emails. You will be notified directly via email from the information provided at your first meeting. Family members with special needs is a broad term and includes ALL types of disabilities, ALL ages (small children, teenagers, and adults), and ALL family members (children, parents, siblings, etc.) The meetings take a 'kitchen table' format and approach to the discussion (maybe with a little less sarcasm) with the hope that you might hear some good information and act on it. The hope is that the 'brothers' and/or 'sisters' in the group may have been thru a similar situation that can be helpful to make it easier to decide on various topics.

I feel very strongly that having other firefighters around you that share this bond is vital. In 2016, my son Michael, in addition to his developmental issues, had a bad year that included several long hospital stays. My wife and I were faced with a difficult decision about choosing a long-term acute rehab facility. We had to choose quickly, had no prior experience, and limited information was available, so we started visiting facilities. Then it happened. I connected with 'Tom,' a fellow firefighter that I used to work with, and his wife and they had picked the very same facility for their son that we were visiting. That sealed the deal! They gave us a run-down of the type of services provided there and it was exactly what my child needed. Wow! Words cannot express the relief we felt in having a helpful hand in this decision. I am happy to report that both family members are doing very well.

The stress affecting our families, marriages, and/or other relationships is very real. It is financial, emotional, relational, and even physical. I am sure that attending a meeting, even if you just come to listen and check it out, will provide some much-needed stress relief, good conversation, and hopefully some good information to assist your family member with special. If you would like more information call or email.

**By Capt. Eugene Kananowicz (K-9)E-53 & Capt. Michael Doda L-148**