
**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
NEW JERSEY CHAPTER**

Disaster Mental Health:
Opportunities for Social Work Involvement



**Provided as a public service to social work professionals and the
general public**

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INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001 social workers across America realized why it is vital to be trained and prepared for disasters. Many were eager to volunteer their services, but only those who had already been properly trained were able to assist. Since that fateful day, disasters have occurred throughout the world. All have required the aid of social workers and mental health professionals. For that reason, it is important that those who want to help in a disaster are prepared in advance and know how to utilize their social work skills in order to help.

This guide is meant to give some direction to those admirable intentions. Its pages are filled with resources where you can be trained and volunteer to assist when disaster strikes. Remember, it's up to you as a professional, even more, as a citizen, to act on your good intentions. This can be done by contacting the organizations found in this manual, participating in training, getting certified, and honoring your skills. Although disaster may not be affecting your community right now, your services could be needed at any time!

Walter X. Kalman, MSW, LSW
Executive Director

**How many social workers
does it take
to make a difference?
Just one!**

Using This Guide

This document is a “work-in-progress.” It is a starting point in understanding local, national, and international responder organizations, credentialing bodies, support organizations, trauma references, and training opportunities. This list is not complete, nor do we attempt to judge the quality of the organizations mentioned. When trying to choose an organization where you will volunteer (or possibly work), we do recommend the following:

- Research different organizations, talk to them, and talk to experienced volunteers and employees. Find out each organization’s required training and its scope of practice for disaster mental health volunteers.
- Do not wait until a disaster occurs to volunteer. Due to quality control and liability issues, most organizations require their own training as a prerequisite for all volunteers.
- If you are not interested in the mental health aspect of disaster services, consider service in another support category.
- Some organizations define their service as covering certain niches of the population and/or as restricted to certain responsibilities. The reality may differ at the trauma site! Flexibility is a key asset to participation in disaster services.
- Stress management is a necessary skill in surviving trauma work. Consider development in this area as a companion to your disaster work involvement.
- Any additions or corrections to this report will be appreciated and carefully considered for inclusion in future editions. (See inside back cover to submit additions or corrections).

Thank you,
J. Hugh Gratz, LCSW
Consultant

Reference Guide

This is a list of organizations that provide opportunities for volunteers in Disaster Mental Health Response. They are divided into 4 categories: Organizations that provide services within our state; those that respond to disasters across the country; those that work in disaster response around the world; and organizations that support professionals who work in this field but do not offer direct service.

State:

American Red Cross (AMC)
Division of Mental Health Services of New Jersey
New Jersey Crisis Intervention Response Network (NJ-CIRN)

National:

American Red Cross (AMC)
Citizen Corps
National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)
National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
United We Serve

International:

American Red Cross (AMC)
Amnesty International
Green Cross Project
International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF)
International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Medicines San Frontiers/Doctors Without Borders
National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)

Membership/Credentialing/Training/Support Organizations

American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (AAETS)
Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists (ATSS)
David Baldwin's Trauma Information Pages
International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF)
International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)
National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
The Sidran Institute
The Trauma Center

Responder Organizations:

American Red Cross

The American Red Cross (ARC) has been the country's premier emergency response organization since it was founded. It assists in emergencies and disasters on a state, national and international level. The ARC utilizes LCSW social workers along with other mental health professional as volunteers in its Disaster Mental Health Services (DMHS). ARC also uses CSW's and LSW's to assist with its general Disaster Support Services. Members of the ARC are eligible to apply for national disaster service by filling out an application for the Disaster Services Human Resource network (DSHR). These assignments are generally two weeks in duration and provide opportunities to serve nationwide. To find out about training and volunteer opportunities contact your local ARC.

<http://www.njredcross.org/>

<http://www.redcross.org/>

American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (AAETS)

The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (AAETS) describes itself as a multidisciplinary network of professionals committed to the advancement of intervention for survivors of trauma. Members may obtain Board Certification, Diplomate and Fellow Credentials, as well as listing in their National Registry of American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress.

www.aaets.org

Amnesty International

Amnesty International is an organization whose purpose is to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are denied. Volunteers can act both locally and on an international level by writing letters, organizing actions on behalf of victims of human rights, and participating in various events.

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/>

Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists (ATSS)

The Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists (ATSS) is an international organization dedicated to serving the needs of professionals working with the traumatized. ATSS offers three distinct certifications to individuals providing support, education, intervention and treatment of traumatic stress. ATSS also offers continuing education training in multiple areas.

<http://www.atss.info/index.html>

Citizen Corps

The mission of Citizen Corps is to provide education, training and volunteer opportunities to those interested in making their communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to various threats and disasters. Those interested can participate in Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) where they will be educated about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and be trained in basic disaster response skills.

<http://www.citizencorps.gov/index.shtm>

David Baldwin's Trauma Information Pages

David Baldwin is a licensed Psychologist who specializes in the treatment of emotional trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He has created an educational website where those with a similar interest can visit to learn more about trauma and PTSD.

<http://www.trauma-pages.com/>

Division of Mental Health Services of New Jersey

In conjunction with the state and county Offices of Emergency Management (OEM), each county Mental Health Administrator has been charged with creating a network of qualified mental health professionals within their geographic area and assuring that those individuals have complete Disaster Mental Health training facilitated by the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services. Anyone interested in volunteering as a Mental Health Disaster Response Crisis Counselor (DRCC) must undergo certain required training and obtain certification as a DRCC. As a DRCC, volunteers are allowed to provide services on a counselor level. To become a DRCC visit

<http://www.njdisasterresponsecrisiscounselor.org/>.

Those interested should contact their county Mental Health Administrator to find out about their county's disaster mental health plan and the process for volunteer recruitment and training.

<http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/dmhs/home/>

Green Cross Project

The Green Cross Project provides immediate trauma intervention when a crisis occurs worldwide. Prerequisite training in Field Traumatology through the International Traumatology Institute at the University of South Florida is needed, but training involving other debriefing models may be acceptable. This organization responds to requests from individuals, organizations, and other entities following a traumatic event. Those interested can receive training through the Green Cross Academy of Traumatology and complete an application to join Green Cross.

<http://www.greencross.org/>

International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF)

The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) is a non-profit, open membership foundation dedicated to the prevention and mitigation of disabling stress. ICISF provides education, training and support services for all emergency service professionals, continuing education and training in emergency mental health services for human service workers, and consultation in the establishment of crisis and disaster response programs for varied organizations and communities worldwide. The ICISF provides teams to manage critical incidents and works primarily through local teams.
www.icisf.org

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies carries out relief operations to assist victims of disasters, and combines this with development work to strengthen the capacities of its member National Societies. Volunteers are encouraged to participate in the Volunteering Development Program in order to become more educated. Unfortunately, volunteers can not travel overseas, but there is much work that they can assist with in their own country.
<http://www.ifrc.org/index.asp>

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)

The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) is a professional association focused on research and practice in the area of traumatic stress. ISTSS is an international, interdisciplinary professional organization that promotes advancement and exchange of knowledge about traumatic stress. In addition to providing the latest news and research, ISTSS provides online continuing education courses in the area of trauma.
<http://www.istss.org/Home.htm>

Medicines San Frontiers/Doctors Without Borders

Medicines San Frontiers/Doctors Without Borders deliver emergency aid to victims of armed conflict, epidemics, and natural and human induced disasters, and to others who lack health care due to social or geographic isolation. Mental Health specialists are needed throughout the world. Those interested should complete an application to join Medicines San Frontiers/Doctors Without Borders.
<http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/index.cfm>

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

The National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is a center of excellence for research and education on the prevention, understanding, and treatment of PTSD. While the organization's emphasis is on PTSD in relation to veterans, the information and research found through this organization can be applied to anyone who has experienced trauma and may be suffering from PTSD. Their website includes Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress (PILOTS) with over 40,162 article citations as of July 2010.
<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>

National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)

NOVA is a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to promote rights and services for victims of crime and crisis everywhere. Through resource referrals, a 24 hour hotline, and a victim service program in Washington D.C., NOVA provides direct service to crime victims across America.

Through a twenty-four or forty hour NOVA training course, volunteers are educated on how to lead a successful Crisis Response Team (CRT). The three primary tasks of the CRT include helping local decision-makers identify all groups at risk of experiencing trauma, training local caregivers to reach out to those groups after the CRT has departed and leading one or more group crisis intervention sessions to show how those private sessions can help victims start to cope with their distress.

www.trynova.org

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (National VOAD) is a forum where organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle from preparation and response to recovery. National VOAD also helps disaster survivors and their communities.

<http://www.nvoad.org/>

New Jersey Crisis Intervention Response Network (NJ-CIRN)

NJ-CIRN has active and retired police, fire, and rescue personnel volunteering as trained peer support counselors along with volunteer mental health professionals. These volunteers are trained in the crisis response model of the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF). The prerequisite training is a two-day Basic Critical Incident Stress Management course taught by ICISM approved trainers and can be accessed by going to www.icisf.org. Experience in trauma work is helpful. They provide support services, primarily through defusing and debriefings, generally to police, fire, and emergency service personnel.

<http://www.nj.gov/humanservices/dmhs/disaster/responder/njcirn/>

The Sidran Institute

The Sidran Institute is a nonprofit organization of international scope that helps people understand, recover from, and treat traumatic stress and dissociative disorders. They provide educational programs, resources for treatment, support, and self-help, trauma-informed community and professional collaboration projects and publications about trauma and recovery. The Sidran Institute also provides trauma training titled, "Risking Connection: A Training Curriculum for Working With Survivors of Childhood Abuse." This training applies to other areas of trauma as well.

<http://www.sidran.org/index.cfm>

The Trauma Center

The mission of the Trauma Center is to help individuals, families and communities that have been impacted by trauma and adversity to re-establish a sense of safety and predictability in the world, and to provide them with state-of-the-art therapeutic care as they reclaim, rebuild and renew their lives.

<http://www.traumacenter.org/index.php>

United We Serve

United We Serve is a nationwide service initiative that will help meet growing social needs found throughout America. United We Serve provides opportunities to volunteer in various areas including disaster and mental health, participate in community projects and create your own community project.

<http://www.serve.gov/index.asp>

Lessons Learned

By Hugh Gratz, LCSW, Consultant

In preparation for the tenth anniversary of the 9/11/01 terrorist attack NASW-NJ, in revising our disaster response manual, asked me to update my article, “September 11, 2001...Lessons Learned”.

As I write this, my initial thoughts flood with appreciation for all social workers who have made the enormous commitment to receive the specialized training required for competent trauma response work, and to those who have applied that skill in response to traumatic events. Regardless of the event and the benefits received, I know you pay a price. Thank you; you bring honor to our profession.

Some of my comments written in 2002 still hold true:

- Debriefing of emergency personnel is a useful process for trauma workers, but it must be provided in a quality way, and best done by skilled practitioners who have not been exposed themselves to the traumatic event.
- Always have a “plan B” for support.
- Check your ego at the door, not your common sense. There is a clear and necessary chain of command at trauma sites. Anyone of us may be asked to do the most mundane task. I was on the support team with the first group of families taken to Ground Zero. The next day, I was supervising the distribution of stuffed animals to children whose family member died at Ground Zero. The next day, I was asked to keep a check on graffiti writing in the men’s bathroom at the family center. Then I was asked to accompany family members bringing in personal items for DNA testing to match body parts. Wise administrators match staff with skills required, as well as rotate staff through “unsavory” assignments. Also, always bring your ethical standards and clear scope of expertise to the trauma arena. Know how to work as a team member, follow orders, and, in case you are asked to do the inappropriate, maintain your ability to say no.
- Bureaucracy exists everywhere, even at trauma sites.
- We cannot help those in chaos if we are in chaos ourselves. By its very nature, trauma work is unsettling. Self-regulation continues to be the major tool in the trauma worker’s survival kit. Self-soothing, focused breathing, meditation, muscle relaxing, guided imagery, yoga, massage, Reiki, nutritional wisdom, exercise, or prayer can be very important tools.
- Old buttons get pushed in trauma work, including personal hurts and previous trauma response events. I still, even 20 years later, have a body reaction anytime I drive past the hospital where my daughter had brain surgery. Anytime I watch an old movie that scans over the NY skyline, I ALWAYS look for the twin towers.

It's just the way the brain works! It is normal to be unsettled by a traumatic memory. The wise ones know how to obtain support when the memory is evoked. Create a supportive network for yourselves, just in case you need it.

Some additional thoughts:

1. Nirvana does not exist on this earth... working at trauma sites changes one's world view.

Responding to trauma has changed me. I feel "weathered" and humble, more self-assured and vulnerable. I still fly, but I always count the number of seats to the emergency exit. I carry an emergency medical supply kit in my car, and I am less likely to drive during a winter storm. Both as a human being and as a social worker for hospice, I know that few of us escape traumatic occurrence in our lives. Weather happens, machines fail, human error is part of the landscape, terrorism is a reality, emotionally-ill individuals are capable of violence, evil people exist, sexism morphs into domestic abuse and rape, systemic oppression is the foundation for hate crimes.

My hospice work, certification in Field Traumatology, and in Compassion-Fatigue, training from the American Red Cross and the International Critical Incident Foundation and their crisis debriefing and management courses, training in diversity and anti-oppression work, and participation in the Eastern Mennonite University Trauma Awareness and Recovery program have all prepared me, and yet, this work has opened my awareness to a different world view. While I am blessed with new friends and resources. I also know that I live in a world filled with danger. My own health issues remind me that trauma workers have increased exposure to bio-toxins and chemicals.

2. You can't get on the floor, if you don't have a ticket to the dance.

Now is the time to sign up for trauma training with an emergency response organization, not when a traumatic event occurs. In fact, uninvited, untrained volunteers who show up at an established trauma site, can become more of a burden than a help. Organizations have liability risk for anyone on site who does not have the proper credentials, including required training. In fact, organizations are distracted from their primary mission of trauma work when individuals show up uninvited. In the 2010 Haiti earthquake disaster, some individuals bluffed their way onto an airplane and arrived in Haiti, not even having transportation from the airport, and lacking any provision for food, water, or shelter. Efforts to assist them detracted from helping the earthquake victims. Organizations like The American Red Cross have immediate access and depend on a corp of already-trained workers to respond. Join now!

3. What's the first thing you need to know when traveling to a trauma site?

One of my trainers, Jim Norman, says "you need to know where you are". Self awareness is the foundation of good trauma work. Do not deploy if you are physically or emotionally impaired. Do not deploy if your family or financial circumstances are in turmoil. Be careful of engaging in disaster tourism. Understand your own triggers. Social worker and family therapist Virginia Satir used to say that vulnerability is strength...when we recognize it and do what we have to do to support ourselves. In both NYC and in Sri

Lanka, I was involved in sending mental health volunteers home who were being treated for a mental illness and who experienced an abreaction at the trauma site.

Know yourself. I have a “cowboy” dwelling inside me...an archetype that yearns to be in the action, “Gary Cooper”-like, riding in “to save the day” for the less fortunate. I grew up with dreams of being a hero. As a child, I read books, savoring the role of underdog, taking in the courage of those who made a difference. I know that this thinking was motivation for entering a career of social work and trauma response. This thinking was also good reason for entering therapy, to better control myself. Since responding to the tsunami in Sri Lanka, I have had an illness that prevents my working at many trauma sites. My inner “Gary Cooper” has had to learn to stay out of the saddle!

4. Be ready...be prepared

Practice what you preach and have your own emergency kit at home including flashlights, batteries, food and drinking water. Maintain a trauma response bag in case you need to be deployed quickly. Keep your passport up to date. Many of those who volunteered to assist with the 2004 tsunami did not have valid passports. They had good intentions but they were not ready. Have copies of your professional license and liability insurance available.

5. Knowing your population gives you “street cred”

Become familiar with populations outside your normal social group. Expose yourself to diversity and anti-oppression training. Learn basic language phrases in the country where you volunteer. Be willing to do the homework to familiarize yourself with different cultures. Even if you do not become an expert in a culture or fluent in a language, many will respect you for trying.

As I close this, I hope you will consider these friendly suggestions, and particularly to **begin** the process of joining an emergency response organization. Social workers are busy people. Most of us do not get paid enough for what we do. Many of us struggle to find good, quality time with our families, let alone time for self-care. Yet, when a traumatic event occurs, many of us want to be part of the solution, and we will do whatever it takes to participate in the recovery and healing process. Do not put this off. A trauma is always just around the corner. Find the time now. As Mark Twain once said, “If you have to swallow a frog, don’t stare at it too long”. Becoming a trauma responder does take some upfront time commitment, but not that much, and it is not as bad as digesting a frog.

NASW-NJ invites any additions or corrections to the organizations, resources, and training related to disaster services.

We will continue to update this manual, so your assistance is appreciated.

For the most current information, view the online version at www.naswnj.org.

For additions or corrections to this guide, submit information to: www.naswnj.org or call 732-296-8070.