

'ROUND THE RANCHO

TIP offers emotional first aid for people in crisis

When Carol Grams retired from 35 years of teaching psychology at Orange Coast College and moved from Laguna Hills to Rancho Santa Margarita, taking on volunteer work was at the bottom of her list.

"I'd done so much all my life," she told me in a recent interview. "Then I noticed a blurb in The News regarding TIP."

TIP? What is that, some sort of informants group?

Not hardly. The acronym, in fact, stands for Trauma Intervention Programs, a national nonprofit founded 25 years ago in San Diego County,

with the goal of "citizens helping citizens in crisis."

And if you've ever experienced tragedy, or know someone who has, then you know the importance of having a supportive and confidential presence nearby.



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TIP volunteers furnish this presence. Whatever the emergency – fire, burglary, car accident, sudden hospitalization or death of a family member – they respond, at the request of police, paramedics, hospital and/or fire personnel, to help those dealing with emotional trauma.

To quote a TIP publication, a volunteer's services can include not just emotional comfort and support, but help in arranging for shelter, clothing, food and transportation; providing referrals to appropriate agencies; and serving "as temporary protectors for vulnerable victims."

Not to mention aiding emergency personnel as well.

As TIP volunteer Dick Oakley, another Rancho resident, told me, "We help them do their job because we free them up."

Oakley read about TIP little more than a year ago through one of our city's community publications.

Upon further investigation he learned that volunteers come from almost all age categories – there's a special TIP Teens program – as well as diverse career backgrounds.

How about his own?

"After college I was in the medical service corps," though eventually, he added, he went into sales.

Among the best qualifications for being a TIP volunteer, Oakley said, are being empathetic and a good listener.

Another requirement? Getting through the 55 hours of training, then being on call for three 12-hour shifts per month. To quote the **TIPOrangeCounty.org** website, "Being a TIP volunteer is not easy."

An individual shift goes from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. or 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.

"You're always next to your phone, with your clothes ready," Grams told me. Case in point? Recently she heard ambulances and fire trucks going by her home. Soon after she received a call to get over to Mission Hospital regarding that same emergency.

Oakley remembers the man who told him, upon losing his father, "This has been my personal 9/11."

But as difficult as individual experiences can be, Oakley added, "the reward is knowing that by the time you leave," which, on average, is about three hours after arrival, "the person is somewhat back to full functioning."

Grams, who has been a TIP volunteer about six months, cites the woman who was on vacation with her husband when he suddenly suffered a stroke.

And especially sad, she told me, are the number of calls about a family member's suicide.

But despite her earlier anticipation of a carefree retirement, Carol finds her TIP involvement rewarding since "I can give something worthwhile to those experiencing the worst hours of their lives."

TIP has been a part of Orange County's emergency response system for about 15 years.

And of the South County team, which numbers close to 60, "about a third are from the Rancho/Coto area, and five are teen volunteers," according to Crisis Team Manager Debbie Simpson.

Think you're up for the TIP challenge?

If so, call Simpson at 949-257-7022 or tipctm@hotmail.com.