

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Volunteers for Trauma Intervention Program Help Locals In Need

By Austin Reagan
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They say that time heals all wounds. And regardless of how much time elapses, overcoming an emotional tragedy is near impossible when done alone. Often, individuals find themselves faced with the burden of trauma and depression, and are unable to move past these barriers unless aided by the support of others. However, through the Trauma Intervention Program (TIP), many locals have found the help they need. TIP, which was founded in 1985, offers a unique service to the community, assigning trained volunteers that provide victims of tragedy the emotional support they need. These “emotional first responders” have served hundreds of San Clemente residents, and have helped thousands across the nation get through the first difficult hours following an agonizing ordeal.

The Trauma Intervention Program was started in the mid-1980’s by mental health professional Wayne Fortin as a non-profit organization completely dedicated to providing immediate support for those traumatized by crisis events. The primary objective of TIP is to prevent the mentally wounded

from experiencing the so-called “Second Injury”—something initial emergency-service personnel, in their rush to respond to the incident, did not provide in regards to the solace and compassion needed for those dealing with the reality of tragedy.

Because first responders often don’t have time to attend to those grieving, many are left feeling betrayed or neglected. In these situations, TIP steps in and provides emotional support that was not given by the police officers, firefighters, or paramedics. In this way, TIP offers the mental supplement to the physical assistance provided by the traditional first responders.

In the South Orange County area, TIP volunteers have helped hundreds of people suffering from emotional despair and difficult times. One local volunteer, Dana Galasso, first joined TIP in August of 2008. Galasso dedicates three 12-hour shifts each month to aiding the victims of crisis, and helping them endure the unbearable hours immediately following a tragic event.

“When I arrive on scene I meet my client or clients and be there for them,” Galasso said. “I do everything from just sitting with the clients, to helping them make phone calls, to obtaining information, to reminiscing.” Galasso, who works as a counselor at

San Juan Hills High School, recalls a particular case in which she helped a teenage boy manage the difficult hours following the death of his mother. “My heart just went out to him,” Galasso said. “It was an honor and a blessing to be with him as well as every client I am with on a TIP call.”

Before being assigned to clients, every TIP volunteer undergoes two weeks of specialized training in which they learn how to approach and console people in their time of anguish. In addition to the initial two weeks of instruction, volunteers also attend monthly meetings in continuing education. Contrary to what one might expect, TIP volunteers don’t arrive on the site to instantly reassure the victim that things will be fine. Rather, volunteers assess the situation, and behave according to the comfort-level and openness of the client. Sometimes, the victims being attended to are quick to speak, and explain their story to the TIP volunteer. But other times, the grieving are less prone to engage in any conversation. In cases like this, TIP volunteers just sit with the client, providing compassion merely with their presence and assuring the sufferer that support is always available.

The TIP theme of “Compassion In Ac-

tion” is made evident through the dedication and humanity of the volunteers. “I think for me, the most rewarding part of being a TIP volunteer is being able to help people on maybe the worst day of their life,” Galasso said. “Sometimes it amazes me when people suffer a tragedy and then allow and accept a complete stranger (TIP volunteer) to come be with them and help them through the first horrible hours.”

The San Clemente City Council and the first responders have thoroughly supported the program, relying on the services of the volunteers and contacting TIP when an individual needs help. TIP operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, ensuring that regardless of when tragedy strikes, emotional support is always available. Some volunteers are even specifically trained to attend to teenagers, children, or senior citizens.

The Trauma Intervention Program has made a huge impact both nationwide and within the community of San Clemente. Volunteers such as Galasso work to ensure that even those who choose to mourn silently are given the opportunity for support.

“I cannot say enough wonderful things about this program and feel like the luckiest person in the world to get to do this kind of work for others,” said Galasso. **SC**