

## MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM SERVICES FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

The American Group Psychotherapy Association has expertise in group based mental health responses. AGPA provides evidence-based and supported interventions within pre-existing systems in order to deliver services efficiently, effectively and insure that the effort can be sustained into the future. We strive to build expertise and strengthen infrastructure simultaneous with direct service delivery.

The Association also uses a “train the trainers” format whereby national experts teach others to carry out the work. There are over 30 local and regional affiliates of AGPA positioned to work in their communities with assistance from a national network of experts. We have been delivering these programs nationally and internationally in response to a variety of traumatic events including the events of 9/11, hurricanes and tsunami, and school violence. An overview of our programs and the populations serviced follows; these can be tailored to the specific needs of different communities.

### Organizational Structure in Place for Disaster Response:

- Access to national directory of 2,000 Certified Group Psychotherapists, with verified licensure and liability insurance, searchable by language spoken, areas of clinical practice and population expertise
- Training in treatment of trauma in groups and basic tenets of group psychotherapy, based upon published training curricula
- Consultation and support to groups and individuals providing disaster related services through a broad network of highly experienced clinicians

**Service Providers/Caregivers Services:** Helpers have an enormous need for consultation and support in the face of the demands of trauma work and at the same time agencies, hospitals and other public health settings are frequently understaffed with large client populations. The following are program elements that can be stand-alone or integrated based upon need.

- **Didactic and experiential group intervention training in working with trauma, bereavement, the medically ill and more:** basic group dynamics, the elements of responses to trauma, whether for chronic issues or responding to catastrophic events, as well as in-depth training in evidence-based group programs.
- **Support groups and consultation for mental health professionals and clergy:** a key element is the provision of a forum in which to process their experiences and connect with colleagues.
- **Groups for other personnel providing trauma-related services (management, administrators, etc.):** a more psychoeducational orientation for non-clinicians to support the cooperative goals of a setting requiring multiple areas to cooperate for overall patient care.
- **Educational programs focusing on self-care:** Provides clinicians, clergy and other helpers with self-care tools to assist them in their work going forward, increasing their resiliency.

**Community Based Programs:** The following programs have been developed specifically for delivery within the community setting and can be modified even further to attend to the unique needs of specialized populations.

- **On-site support services at local agencies/groups:** provides an opportunity to receive care and support in a familiar and easily accessed setting.
- **"Family Days" for spouses and children:** A program model successfully initiated with the Fire Department of New York, which provides support and connections for families .
- **Couples programs to provide relationship support:** Also initiated with the FDNY, this program is designed to provide support and increase familial resiliency by strengthening relationships.
- **Telephone and online consultation with experts in working with trauma in groups:** For those situations and locales when an in-person visit is not practical or timely (such as for the homebound or those in remote locations). An ongoing group with one's peers can be an important support providing ongoing connections with peers and an experienced clinician.

**For Children and Adolescents:** Children and adolescents are best helped with programs designed to recognize their differing needs according to their age and developmental stage, which can be impacted by chronic stressors.

- **School-based groups for affected children** (with possible co-leadership with school staff): Provides direct services to children and is designed to aid the healing and increase the resiliency of children using the school system (a familiar, naturally occurring setting with minimal disruption and stigmatization).
- **School-based training and support for teachers and guidance counselors:** Providing adult caretakers with the tools to provide the services insures continuation of the program and increases the community's resiliency.
- **Groups for affected families (including parents):** An intervention model that provides the family structure with support and a forum in which to develop coping skills, augment personal resiliency and strengthen supportive resources. This program works in cooperation with local groups including faith based service groups, public service agencies and schools in order to utilize existing and familiar community structures.
- **Consultation and educational programs for caregivers (parents, teachers, daycare/after-school workers and others):** Another avenue of providing adult caretakers with skills and tools to attend to the needs of children.

#### **Program Format Options:**

- **Single Session Public Education Groups** - This often involves a speaker offering information about a selected topic (e.g. trauma and its impact, the effects of trauma on children and adolescents, etc.) followed by small group discussion; this format is highly effective in coping with the stigma attached to mental health issues as it normalizes responses and feelings.
- **Time-Limited Groups** – A specified number of group sessions, usually from 10 – 15, during which membership may be closed, or open when a "drop in" format is used. The goals of these programs are usually to help work through a specific challenge, avoid relapse and/or bolster coping and resiliency skills.
- **Extended Services Groups** - Groups extending beyond 15 sessions for those who need more work to recover. Members usually stay until they have accomplished their goals and are ready to move on.
- **System Consultation** - This usually involves a needs assessment followed by an intervention tailored to the particular needs of the organization in question, in conjunction with recommendations on infrastructure changes to continue to support the program and the staff/community needs.

#### **Printed Materials Available:**

##### **Training Curricula**

- **Group Interventions for Treatment of Psychological Trauma** - Ten (10) training modules for mental health professionals who work with different populations and phases of trauma work. The modules address: group interventions for adults, children and adolescents; evidence-based programs for adults, children and adolescents; the later stage (coping with the aftermath of traumatic events); countertransference, unique aspects of group work, masked trauma reactions, and bereavement. Powerpoints that can be used for training accompany each module.
- **Public Mental Health Service Delivery Protocols: Group Interventions For Disaster Preparedness And Response** - A set of population-specific best practice interventions for use in delivering mental health services following disasters including Uniformed Service Personnel (also applicable to the Armed Services), children and families, school communities, adolescents, survivors, witnesses and family members, helpers and service delivery workers, organizations and systems, local community outreach programs, and the role of the philanthropic community.
- **Group Psychotherapy Curricula** - the association has additional curricula including *Adolescent Group Psychotherapy: Method, Madness, and the Basics*, *Group Psychotherapy with Children*, *Principles of Group Psychotherapy*, *Training in Group Psychotherapy Supervision*, and *Ethics in Group Psychotherapy*

##### **Public Education Information:**

- **Group Works: What Everyone Should Know About Trauma** - a short brochure geared to the general population which describes what groups are and how they work, and which contains an insert with information about responses to traumatic events. Electronic and hard copy are available, in both English and Spanish.

##### **Clinician Research Tools**

- **CORE Battery-Revised** - An assessment toolkit for promoting optimal group selection, process and outcome.

If you are interested in more information about any of the above, please feel free to contact Diane Feirman, CAE at AGPA headquarters in New York City. She can be reached at (212) 477-2677 or toll free at (877) 668-AGPA (2472), or via email at [dfeirman@agpa.org](mailto:dfeirman@agpa.org).