

The Definition of a Hero:

NOVA Volunteers Respond to 9-11



The National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)

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*Dedicated to the victims of the
September 11 terrorist attack
and those who serve them*

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A Survivor's Story

U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Brian Birdwell remembers walking down a corridor in the Pentagon when a hijacked plane slammed into the building about 50 meters away from him*:

I heard the sound [of the plane crashing into the building], and it's louder than anything I could describe to you. In a nano-second [microsecond], I was thinking "bomb," because I had just seen the World Trade Center and what was going on there in New York. I knew this was not a normal sound. I went from a well-lit corridor, knowing exactly where I was going, to an immediately dark corridor. I had no orientation to where I was going. I was on fire. Inhaling all of the crud that I was inhaling, I was asphyxiating my body, at the same time [I was] expending all of that energy trying to get to my feet. My balance was way out of whack from a concussion. . . . Shortly thereafter, I felt a liquid running down my face. [I thought,] "It's not warm. It's not blood." But it was water. The sprinkler system functioned very well, thank goodness.

Col. Birdwell says the sprinkler system put out the fire on his body—and cleared the thick smoke in the hallway. Someone found him and led him out of the building. He was burned over 65% of his body. He describes his hands as looking like "melting wax," and remembers a friend checking his identification tag to see who he was.

Col. Birdwell was taken by helicopter to the Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C., where doctors specialize in burn victim surgery:

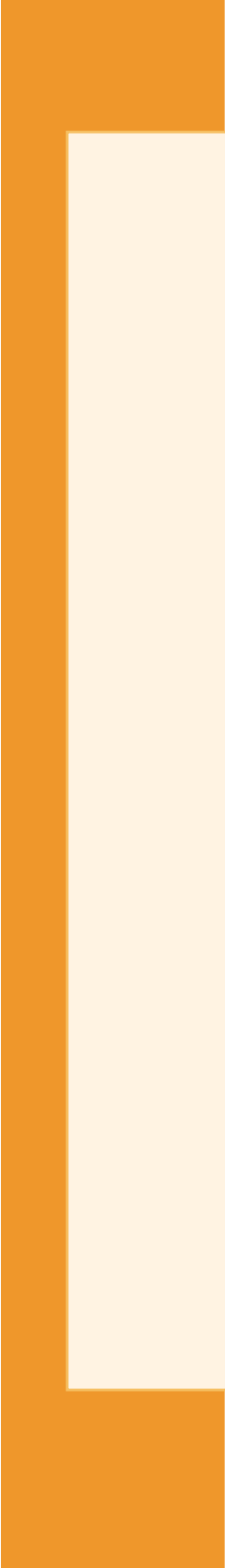
*These quotes from Col. Birdwell are excerpted from a Voice of America radio interview aired on June 25, 2002, by Andrew J. Baroch.

I really wasn't worried about pain at that moment. It was really more just saying prayers, "God, get me through this, keep me alive, get me to the hospital." Going through an experience like this, particularly at the moment of impact, when I was on fire and on my own, you get your strength from your faith. That's what got me out of the building, got me through not just the events of that day, but the 12 weeks in the hospital, the surgeries, the [skin replacement] graftings, the things that are physically painful, physically draining, emotionally draining.

Having gone through what I've gone through, when I see all my scars in the mirror or during bandage changes with my wife daily, I think about the scars other people have, that their bodies weren't injured but their family members were killed. So I'll never forget about it, but it's not the center of gravity of who I am. But, I'm not too worried about exactly how good-looking I'll be after all this is done. I'm just thankful to be alive.

Col. Birdwell is one of thousands of survivors of the September 11 attacks. His story is typical of the tremendous physical pain and psychological trauma that affected so many survivors, and of the great strength that accompanies the process of recovery. Beyond that, Col. Birdwell's experience speaks to the courage and skill of those heroes who came to the aid of victims and survivors of September 11—the emergency managers and workers, victim advocates, medical professionals, family members, volunteers, public safety and government officials.

To honor these individuals, to give a voice to survivors and victims, and to identify the lessons learned from this tragedy, the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) organized a conference in April 2002 for members of the NOVA National Crisis Response Team who responded to the September 11 attacks, victims of September 11, and other disaster relief and crisis response professionals. The material in this handbook was largely drawn from their experience and their expertise.



**The National
Organization
for Victim Assistance**

The National Organization for Victim Assistance

NOVA

The National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA), founded in 1975 as a not-for-profit membership organization, is the oldest national victim advocacy organization in the world. Today, NOVA is recognized nationally and internationally as the premier public policy and service-oriented organization specializing in crime victim rights, assistance, and victimology. NOVA's mission is fourfold: to serve its members; to provide professional development opportunities for victim assistance professionals and their allies; to help develop and implement public policy initiatives to meet victims' needs; and to provide direct services to victims of crime and other crises where such services are lacking.

NOVA's National Crisis Response Team

During the 1980s, NOVA increasingly provided direct crisis response services to communities in need. In 1986, the national organization formalized this role by creating the National Crisis Response Team (NCRT). Today, the NCRT's primary expertise lies in the area of violent crime, including terrorism, although teams also frequently respond to natural disasters, accidents, and other catastrophes.

NOVA's National Crisis Response Team is composed of thousands of volunteers, who are skilled professionals intensively trained in the NOVA model of crisis intervention. NOVA teams are multi-disciplinary, enabling them to provide the precise constellation of skills needed by a specific community, at no cost to that community. Team leaders are usually licensed mental health practitioners at the Ph.D. level. Team members can also include other professionals, such as physicians, victim service professionals, emergency response professionals, public safety officers, members of the clergy, and child and/or elder trauma

specialists. At major crime scenes, such as acts of terrorism and school shootings, the NCRT's in-depth knowledge of victim rights laws and services offers a unique set of resources, including close relationships with local victim assistance and victim compensation programs.

The NCRT has worked in hundreds of communities—always at the request of community members. NOVA teams of 2 to 12 members stay in the affected community for a discrete period of time to support local groups, and new teams are rotated in as needed. In the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, for example, NOVA fielded a total of 47 volunteers. In response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, NOVA provided more than 600 volunteers from 27 state crisis response teams.

NOVA's collaborative approach has forged strong networks with other crisis relief organizations. As a member of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, NOVA has collegial relationships with all the major disaster relief agencies throughout the country and with local, state, and federal emergency management agencies. NOVA's formal relationships with faith-based disaster relief organizations help to facilitate communication with spiritual leaders in times of disaster. In addition, NOVA is formally affiliated with a wide range of local, national, and international trauma and victim assistance organizations.

The National Organization for Victim Assistance

NOVA

NOVA's National Crisis Response Team Training

In the late 1980s, NOVA launched a massive campaign to provide NCRT training and tools to individuals and agencies across the country. This capacity-building effort has already helped to establish more than 30 state—and countless local—crisis response teams, which use the NOVA model of community crisis response. Today, NOVA is building a cadre of professional NOVA volunteers who receive additional credentials for formal training and evidence of specified skills in addressing community-wide mass catastrophe. The demand for these NOVA basic and advanced courses continues to escalate. NOVA also provides training for those seeking to become NOVA trainers, and has recently implemented a professional program that offers certification to both responders and trainers.

NOVA's National Crisis Response Team Services

NOVA teams work in communities that have experienced a catastrophe of such a magnitude that the community itself has determined it to be a crisis and has requested NOVA's support. NOVA's strengths lie in conducting four major types of crisis response activities:

1. Assessment and coordination
2. Direct services
3. Training
4. Planning assistance

Assessment and Coordination

In responding to a crisis, NOVA assesses the cause and nature of the disaster, the scope of the victimization, the needs and resources of the affected community, and the logistics required for an effective response. From the outset, NOVA emphasizes coordination with other responders. NOVA teams coordinate with the state and local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) leadership, fellow national voluntary disaster relief organizations, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Voluntary Agency Liaisons, who in turn coordinate with state and federal emergency management professionals.

Direct Services

When a crisis strikes, NOVA immediately reaches out to the affected community with an offer to help. At the site, NOVA teams provide an array of direct services, including individual and group crisis intervention, counseling, spiritual care, and advocacy. NOVA's crisis intervention protocol focuses on three priorities:

- ◆ Establishing a sense of physical safety and emotional security
- ◆ Allowing participants to express their reactions to the crisis and then validating their responses
- ◆ Helping victims and survivors develop strategies for coping with the physical, mental, emotional, financial, and spiritual impacts of the crisis



The National Organization for Victim Assistance

NOVA

The NCRT network of chaplains, clergy, and skilled lay leaders—all of whom are trained in crisis intervention, represent a variety of faiths, and take an interfaith approach to working with community members—ensures that NOVA can respond to the spiritual dimensions of the disaster, if requested. NOVA teams may provide post-trauma counseling, which is often desperately needed after other caregivers have left the scene. The teams also offer strong advocacy skills in support of victims and survivors.

Throughout these efforts, NOVA is attuned to the need for cultural sensitivity and can ensure an appropriate, caring response to members of the vast range of cultures in the United States (as well as other nations). NOVA teams are specifically trained in cultural competence and are adept at working with populations that are historically underserved.

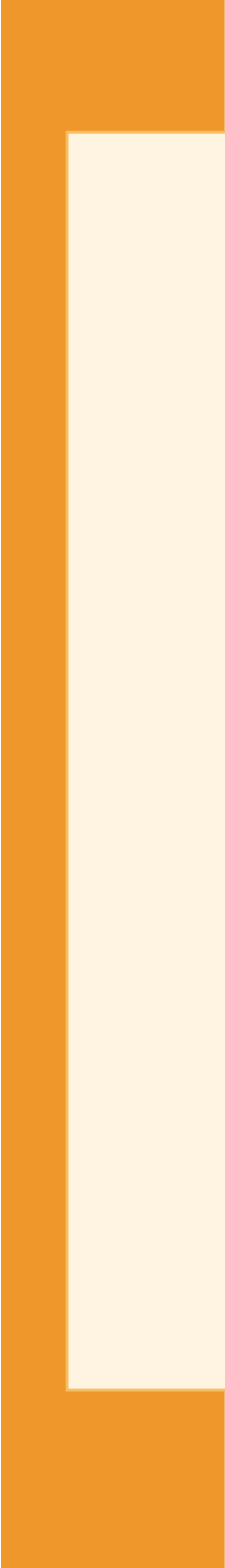
NOVA teams also offer a range of expertise to serve populations with special needs, including children, the elderly, and those with disabilities. In addition, NOVA teams are often uniquely geared toward supporting other professionals who are responding to the disaster site, including police, firefighters, and other public safety officers. NOVA also serves other needs of local communities, for example, by developing directories of key resources.

Training

As an important part of its mandate, NOVA is dedicated to strengthening local communities' crisis response capability. The NOVA teams provide on-site support, as well as refresher training and modeling of individual and group crisis intervention techniques for local caregivers. NOVA also offers training in specialized areas, such as methods of working with the media. In addition, NOVA teams educate victims, survivors, local authorities, and caregivers about typical responses during and after a crisis and how best to handle them.

Planning Assistance

NOVA helps local decision-makers plan the immediate and long-term mental health response and services to assist victims, rescuers, and survivors. NOVA also offers incident-specific recommendations, based on a community's particular circumstances; for example, NOVA teams provide information on the criminal justice issues facing a community after a major crime has occurred.



NOVA's Response
to the
Terrorist Attacks
of September 11

NOVA's Response to the Terrorist Attacks

of September 11

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Americans everywhere watched in shock as jet planes crashed into the World Trade Center, into the Pentagon, and into the ground in rural Pennsylvania. They saw hideous scenes of exploding planes, burning buildings, engulfing smoke, fleeing victims. Transfixed by the events unfolding on their televisions, they struggled to grasp what had happened.

In those first desperate hours, NOVA went into action.* NOVA members packed their bags, prepared their colleagues and families, and reported to NOVA headquarters staff, ready to help.

I prepared my suitcase in a standby fashion. When I got the call saying, "We need you to go, and we need you at the Portland airport," I had literally about an hour to leave my job, get home, pack, and be on the highway heading to the airport.

Tina Morgan, Director of Victims Services, Child Advocacy Center, Lane County, Oregon, District Attorney's Office; Oregon Crisis Response Team

NOVA team leaders began mobilizing the professional volunteers and resources that flowed in. As part of their standard outreach process, NOVA staff contacted community leaders and local government agencies in the three primary disaster sites to offer assistance. NOVA also participated in conference calls with other national victims' assistance organizations to coordinate a response.

*Eventually, 27 states mobilized teams, some more than once, and some teams had their own identity, such as the NOVA-affiliated Keystone Crisis Intervention Team. For the purposes of this report, we use the term "NOVA team" to refer to all of these teams.

We were in a phone conference with some of the other national organizations—there were 35 to 50 people—where we talked about what we were going to do as national victims' assistance organizations in response to this. A comment was made: "Well, sending a crisis response team to any of these locations is like fighting a forest fire with a squirt gun. It isn't going to make a difference." We at NOVA heartily disagreed, and we immediately felt that we could do what we do best.

Jeannette Adkins, President, NOVA; Director, Victim/Witness Division, Greene County Office of the Prosecuting Attorney, Xenia, OH

Within hours of the attack, the requests from communities at the sites came pouring in: "Please come. We need all the help we can get."

Since founding the National Crisis Response Team, NOVA had pledged to meet all requests. If there was any question that they could do so for September 11, that doubt was quickly eliminated. From throughout the nation, hundreds of experienced NOVA team members responded to the call.

We were fortunate to have a statewide team and a lot of professionals trained in the NOVA method. We had such an incredible response that we were able to put teams together to go out almost immediately.

Debbie Rehder, Executive Director, State Attorney's Office, 18th Judicial Circuit, Viera, FL; Florida Crisis Response Team

NOVA leaders organized teams of professionals from every discipline, who were placed at the primary sites of the attacks: the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Pennsylvania. Later, the list would expand to include secondary sites across the country.

NOVA's Response to the Terrorist Attacks

of September 11

NOVA staff and volunteers worked frantically to keep abreast of news that changed by the minute. We were blessed to receive a donation of office space in New York so that NOVA could set up a command center to better coordinate our volunteers working in the tri-state area. The walls of our offices were covered with charts as we tracked our volunteers and the requests for our help.

*Cheryl Guidry Tyiska, Director of Victim Services, NOVA, Washington, D.C.;
National Crisis Response Team Coordinator*

From rural communities in Iowa, from their offices in Florida, from their homes in Oregon, NOVA volunteers around the country made their way to the sites of the attacks. It was a tough journey. Planes were grounded. Phone service was frequently unavailable. People were stranded in towns across America and in Canada. Undeterred, NOVA team members organized car pools or hired buses, and they headed for the stricken sites.

For the next 10 months, wave after wave of NOVA volunteers provided services. They helped local authorities plan and organize a response to the crisis. They provided a range of direct services and support to victims and survivors, as well as to first responders, caregivers, and government officials struggling to handle the crisis. They conducted training sessions for caregivers and others.

Throughout the crisis, NOVA teams in all locations coordinated and partnered with other crisis response groups from both the public and the private sectors. They worked with government agencies, The Salvation Army, the American Red Cross, Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief, FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons, national and local unions, and many others.

I was never so proud of NOVA's volunteers and staff as I was in the first few days after the attacks. I was on the phone around the clock, and every person I called didn't hesitate, and didn't raise questions. Every one of them said, "Yes, I'm on the way" – even if that meant a 1,000-mile car trip before the airlines went back into service. Every one of them put their lives aside to bring compassion and courage to the survivors. Over the months that followed, I got used to that selflessness – because it never wavered.

Marlene A. Young, Ph.D., JD, Executive Director, NOVA

Preparing to Meet the Need

At the three primary sites—the World Trade Center (New York/New Jersey), the Pentagon (Metropolitan Washington, D.C.), and Pennsylvania—NOVA teams and affiliates faced a situation unlike anything they, or any other crisis intervenors, had encountered before. The scale of the terrorist attacks was massive: thousands killed and injured; thousands more suffering from emotional trauma. Drawing on their intensive NOVA training and direct experience, they plunged into work, addressing each need. The first “beachhead” teams focused on helping local authorities rapidly assess the need and establish operations. The teams that followed worked on improving and streamlining these initial procedures.

New York/New Jersey

As one of the first crisis intervention teams to arrive at the World Trade Center site, NOVA worked with other relief organizations and government agencies in New Jersey to set up a Family Assistance Center (FAC) at Liberty State Park, NJ, directly across the Hudson River from the ravaged World Trade Center, and close to the Statue of Liberty. The NOVA team helped create the FAC as a “one stop” site where victims and survivors could access the entire range of services they needed. Trailers were brought in to house representatives of virtually every social service agency. Food and supply tents were hastily constructed.

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Security measures were established. A huge room, dubbed “Remembrance Hall,” held room dividers that served as “memorial walls,” where survivors could create memorials for those missing or deceased. NOVA teams also began creating vital materials they knew desperate victims and survivors would seek.



Throughout the following months, NOVA teams provided feedback to improve service processes. For example, their close relationships with survivors alerted NOVA teams to the need to simplify access to services. NOVA worked with authorities and caregivers to streamline this process.

Metropolitan Washington, D.C.

The Capital Area Crisis Response Team (CACRT), a NOVA-affiliated team, responded immediately to requests for help from communities affected by the attack on the Pentagon. Working with a range of officials, from naval officers to hospital staff, Crisis Response Team members joined planning sessions and explained the kinds of psychological reactions to expect. They helped organize services that victims, survivors, caregivers, and first responders would need. They also assisted in establishing emergency measures, such as a crisis hotline for Navy personnel.

Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania, the NOVA-affiliated Keystone Crisis Intervention Team participated in the initial meeting called to coordinate the activities of the various responders. The team partnered with other crisis

response organizations, airline staff, and local authorities to organize services for families directly affected by the attack. Drawing on their experience dealing with victims' responses, the Crisis Intervention Team members advocated for the inclusion of victims' compensation services among the range of services offered to the families. At the Family Assistance Center set up to serve surviving family members, the team helped ensure that the state Crime Victims' Compensation Program was involved and had representatives available in the Center.

Providing Direct Services

At each site, NOVA teams focused on providing direct services to victims, survivors, first responders, and other caregivers. Well aware that they were breaking new ground, they adapted the NOVA model and drew on their experience responding to other community-wide catastrophes. Working one on one and with groups, teams provided crisis intervention sessions: they encouraged people to articulate their reactions and validated those reactions; they helped victims and survivors develop coping strategies for grappling with the emotional, social, and financial challenges they would face. Team members who were skilled spiritual care providers served those who urgently wanted to talk about faith issues.

New York/New Jersey

At the New Jersey Family Assistance Center, NOVA teams worked the very long hours that the Center was open each day, while at the Port Authority police station in Jersey City, NOVA's law enforcement crisis intervenors worked the same shifts, day and night, as the Port Authority officers.

Special thanks to the NOVA volunteers. The comfort and help they brought to us was immeasurable.

A message posted on a bulletin board in the NJ Family Assistance Center

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One of the most important services NOVA created at the FAC was “companioning.” Under the coordination of the New Jersey State Office of Victim Witness Advocacy, NOVA “companions” helped victims and families navigate the FAC’s complex service landscape.

At the NJ Family Assistance Center, each NOVA companion led survivors through the maze of requirements:

- ◆ Submitting a state police missing person’s report
- ◆ Providing death notification
- ◆ Offering grief counseling
- ◆ Providing crisis counseling and pastoral care services
- ◆ Providing DNA for identifying remains
- ◆ Registering for assistance from FEMA
- ◆ Applying for Crime Victims Compensation
- ◆ Signing up with the Social Security Administration, Workers Compensation, emergency financial and medical assistance, and other state and federal programs
- ◆ Applying for emergency assistance from nonprofit disaster agencies and independent charities
- ◆ Identifying other sources of financial support, including banking and insurance offices
- ◆ Retraining and job search services
- ◆ Applying for legal assistance with death certificates, powers of attorney, wills, and estate issues

A NOVA companion met each family who entered the FAC, gently assessed their needs, and determined the resources that would be of assistance.

We met a vast array of people, from survivors of the missing to people who escaped the buildings themselves, and we were responsible for assessing who they were, their needs, and their purpose for coming.

Tina Morgan, Director of Victims Services, Child Advocacy Center, Lane County, Oregon, District Attorney's Office; Oregon Crisis Response Team

The companion guided the family through the entire procedure of accessing services, which often had to be done in a particular sequence. Drawing on their crisis intervention skills, companions helped families cope with their reactions and plan for the next steps.

We provided a safety net for them, somebody they could rely on, who could guide them at a time when it was hard for them to even think about what they needed. A lot of people came back several times. Often they would bring other family members to meet the NOVA companion. It really validates the importance of having that type of service, that connection, for the victims. We were very touched by how much it meant to people. They would say, "Thank you for being there beside me."

Barry Blackwell, Illinois School Crisis Assistance Team

Some families were so overwhelmed by the process that they simply could not repeat the same information to the various agencies, so they asked the NOVA companion to do it instead.

There were times, as we went from station to station, when we had to tell their story for them. They would stop and say, "Will you tell them? I just can't do this any more."

Danny Gregory, Pima County, Arizona, Crisis Response Team

NOVA teams also worked with government authorities to offer survivors opportunities to memorialize and mourn the loss of loved ones, and supported family members through this process. One NOVA team worked with New Jersey state officials to arrange for families to take state police boats to the World Trade Center site.

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NOVA volunteers provided “companioning” to thousands of family members who made the heartbreaking trip by ferry from the Family Assistance Center in New Jersey to the private family viewing stand at the World Trade Center. Companions were each assigned a family, whom they accompanied along the path lined with members of the public, whose sad faces and tears testified to their pain and their sympathy with the victims.



A father came to the Center with his sister—he had been to several other places seeking help. We took him through all of the services. Then he asked that he and his sister be allowed to go on a boat and do a memorial service for his son. I went across with them, and it was incredibly emotional. When we got back, he held my face, and he was crying, and he said, “Of all the places I went and found no help, I found it here. I will never forget you.” And he gave us hugs and kisses, and he left.

Robyn Light, Victim Assistance Program Director, Yakima County District Attorney's Office, Yakima, WA

NOVA teams were also careful to assess survivors' ongoing needs and help them access long-term services.

After three weeks, I was forced to face the possibility that my husband would not be coming home. The most helpful connection I found is the support group for victims set up by NOVA. When a member of the group says, "I understand how you feel," I believe them.

Mrs. Ellen Steiner, whose husband was killed in the terrorist attack

Throughout this terrible experience, NOVA volunteers were acutely sensitive to the diverse cultural needs of victims and survivors, often providing bilingual volunteers who understood the special legal and cultural circumstances of some victims and survivors.

There were so many victims: widows and widowers, children who had lost parents, parents who had lost children, those who lost businesses, and those who had lost jobs. There were Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Muslims. There were Americans, Russians, Ukrainians, Hondurans, Ecuadorians, Egyptians, Pakistanis, Italians, Indians, Poles, and many others. All bore the scars of victimization and loss.

Frank Zenere, Coordinator of Crisis Response, Miami/Dade County Public Schools, Miami FL; Florida Crisis Response Team

Among the most vulnerable were families of undocumented workers who had the added stress of losing their primary financial source of survival. Ineligible for government assistance, often without language or other skills to negotiate the service landscape, these families were in desperate straits, and their needs had to be addressed with particular sensitivity.

Since I speak Spanish, many a time I had to work with three or four families at once. Some revealed to me in confidence that they were not here legally, that they had false Social Security numbers. They were without electricity, without food. They had worked and paid their taxes, everything, under a false social security number. They had incredible losses, but they were not eligible for much assistance. I tried to help them access the limited programs that were available to them.

Concepcion Trevino Eason, Toledo/Lucas County Prosecutor's Office, Victim Witness Assistance Program, OH; Ohio Crisis Response Team

NOVA's Response to the Terrorist Attacks

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All too often, providing guidance, information, and emotional support was not enough: NOVA teams had to draw on their advocacy experience. Frequently, they expedited bureaucratic processes to help victims access services. The teams facilitated distribution of information from authorities to the families. On many occasions, team members advocated for victims traumatized by overly aggressive members of the media, and mentored survivors with tips on handling media requests for interviews. In some cases, NOVA volunteers were asked to act as spokespersons for victims and survivors.

In addition to serving victims, witnesses, and survivors, NOVA's top priority was to support those working directly with victims—from first responders to volunteer attorneys and public officials—who were overwhelmed by the enormity of the need.

A woman came into the Family Assistance Center because the Park & Ride wouldn't let her take her husband's car. We took her to the Department of Motor Vehicles [DMV] desk, and she told the DMV person that her husband was killed. The DMV rep said, "Do you have your husband's driver's license or social security card?" The woman replied, "I think it's crushed with him in the building," and then she just lost it. Then the DMV person broke down too. So it was important for us not only to take care of families, but also to take care of the workers.

Danny Gregory, Pima County, Arizona, Crisis Response Team

At the site of the World Trade Center in New York, NOVA's multidisciplinary teams met different challenges from those in New Jersey's FAC. In addition to serving victims and their families, they supported those working at the site, the hundreds who had barely escaped the attack with their lives, the thousands who had witnessed the horror, and the many who felt guilty simply because they had survived.



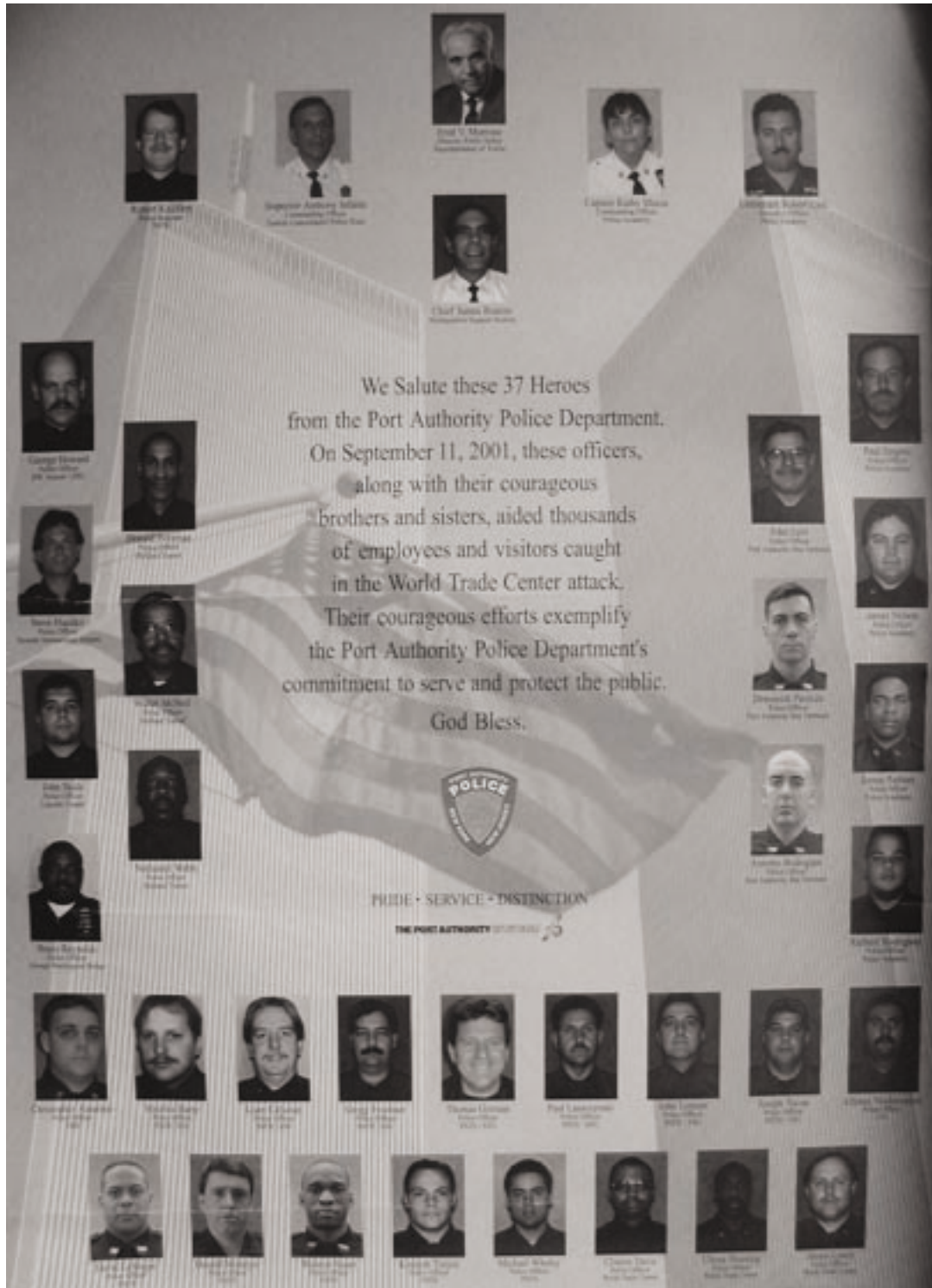
Among those in greatest need of support were the police, firefighters, and search and rescue workers who responded to the attacks and later desperately searched for survivors . . . and still later for remains.

Timothy Norris, an inspector with the Port Authority Police Department, was the commanding officer of the western zone of the World Trade Center on September 11:

On September 11, the Port Authority Police lost 37 men. On a personal note, I responded from PATH, which is in Jersey City, along with 18 police officers, and we lost 13 of them on that day. During the first two days, I worked nonstop for 48 hours, and I started to get fatigued myself. A friend of mine, Ed Nekel from NOVA, called up and asked if I needed help. And I said, "Yeah, I need help."

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Inspector Norris was keenly aware of the special challenge involved in serving law enforcement officers, some of whom believe that there is a stigma attached to seeking emotional support services:

We were very busy. There was a lot of emotion. And cops are not the easiest audience to deal with sometimes. They can pick out someone with an agenda right away. So I told Ed, "Come on in, bring a minimum staff. And don't take it personally, but if you get in the way, I'm going to kick you out."

Inspector Norris asked for a NOVA team composed solely of members of law enforcement. Within 24 hours, the special NOVA team arrived.

The NOVA team was a godsend. They were very caring but not intrusive. They would sit in our reserve room, talk to the cops if they had a half-hour break in a 12-hour draw. Some of the NOVA people did counseling, some did no counseling. They never overwhelmed us, but they were always willing to lend an ear. It was a very, very positive experience. Eventually, I saw some of my most hardened cops—some cops who saw incredible things that day—open up to the NOVA counselors. It took time and it took patience, but I saw it happen, and it was incredibly effective.

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Whenever NOVA volunteers talked with people, they were guided by the NOVA crisis intervention format. When appropriate, they provided informal intervention sessions for all types of responders, from law enforcement and firefighters to military personnel and construction workers.

One night, 10 of us stood looking at a memorial in front of a fire station. One of the firefighters came out and asked us who we were and why we were there. He invited us in— it was close to 10 o'clock at night. This fire station had had 16 people on duty. Fourteen were killed by 10 o'clock that morning. The captain told us this was the first time they had talked about it. When we left four hours later he was crying, and he said, "Is there any way you guys can come back?"

Danny Gregory, Pima County, Arizona, Crisis Response Team

All who worked at the site, including construction crews, were at particularly high risk of experiencing post-trauma stress. For these groups, NOVA teams provided crucial emotional and spiritual support.

I cannot stress enough how much we are needed. Just walking the site and talking to guys, we have heard so many stories. One of the construction union officials wanted to know if we could have people working the grounds at night. There is a high demand for our services.

Kim Dressel, City of Thornton, Victim Services Unit, Thornton, CO; Coordinator, Adams County (Colorado) Crisis Response Team

NOVA volunteers regularly walked the work-site perimeter, to be available to those who wanted to talk. They talked informally with workers at tables as they ate or rested. One NOVA member's story captured these unique and powerful circumstances:

We had a small section of the tent where drapes were hung to drown out some of the noise. Workers sometimes came in to grab naps on the pallets. One young construction worker, 6'1", 200 pounds, came in and asked if I would wake him at 1:50 a.m. When that time came, I stepped over the other weary bodies, pulled back his hat, and touched him on the head. When he didn't wake, I pulled back the blanket to find him, still sound asleep, cuddling a small yellow teddy bear. With a gentle nudge, I wakened him, and in minutes he was on his way back to the site, leaving behind the teddy bear for someone else who needed something to cling to.

Zane Brown, Ph.D., Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief Crisis Response Team, SC

Metropolitan Washington, D.C.

In the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, the NOVA-trained Capital Area Crisis Response Team (CACRT) collaborated with other crisis response organizations to offer a range of crisis intervention and victim services. Partnering with other local service providers, the team worked at the Family Assistance Center in Crystal City, Virginia, set up for victims and their families. Team members also helped conduct group crisis intervention sessions for staff at local hospitals in Arlington that were treating victims of the attack. They ran additional group crisis intervention sessions at the area's three major airports, and offered one-on-one crisis intervention sessions at a crisis center established at one of the airports.

NOVA's Response to the Terrorist Attacks

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In many instances, the Crisis Response Team tailored its services to groups' special needs. Some team members, for example, helped a flight attendants' association field emergency calls from flight attendants grounded around the country. The team members included a former flight attendant, trained in crisis response, who could take calls from those who only wanted to speak with a flight attendant.

The flight attendants were wrestling with incredibly difficult and complicated emotions—fear of going back up in the air, worry about keeping their jobs, loyalty to their colleagues. We had to use all the tools of the NOVA model to help them. One of the most important things we did was to validate their feelings and help them get reassurance from fellow flight attendants that they were not alone in those feelings.

Diane Alexander, President, Capital Area Crisis Response Team; Director, Library and Field Services, National Center for Victims of Crime, Washington, D.C.

The Crisis Response Team also worked closely with the local businesses and other organizations that were directly affected by the attack. One organization, which lost staff on the plane that hit the Pentagon, asked team members to help create an internal memorial service and to plan for the follow-up support that would be needed in the future; team members also conducted group intervention sessions for the organization.

Another important role the Crisis Response Team played was to serve the general public. Working with a local TV station that established a crisis line, team members helped staff the hotline, answering questions from the public about crisis response and resources. When a Washington, D.C., neighborhood lost a well-known member in the attack, the

team sponsored a general community session and conducted a group crisis intervention for the community. Throughout the entire crisis, the team delivered the types of services people need in a catastrophe: providing information, assistance, and comfort.

Pennsylvania

The NOVA-affiliated Keystone Crisis Intervention Team (KCIT) collaborated with other crisis response organizations to serve a wide range of needs at the Pennsylvania site. Some team members worked at the Family Assistance Center established by authorities, providing services to grieving families—from emotional support to child care—as the families accessed the Center’s services.

We were struck by the dramatic trauma impact on the children, many of them very young. We tried to create a safe space for them, where they could escape the crisis around them, even for a little while, and do kid things. It was hard—there were so many children affected—but we gave them as much one-on-one attention and comfort as we possibly could.

Mary Claire Mullen, Clinical Director, Victims Resource Center, Luzerne County, PA; Keystone Crisis Intervention Team Coordination, Somerset County, PA

Other team members worked primarily with local communities. Team members assisted in training local clergy on issues of trauma and trauma response. At community meetings, held by a local mental health center, the team volunteers conducted break-out sessions and group interventions for children. Team members also provided emotional support to survivors during the clergy-led public prayer vigils.

In the days and months after the attack, among the most important services Crisis Intervention Team members provided were group interventions in communities directly affected by the crisis. Several

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weeks after September 11, tragedy struck with the suicide of a woman whose husband had been killed in the attack. Her death profoundly affected many caregivers in the area. When they turned to NOVA for help, the Crisis Intervention Team immediately arranged to provide individual and group interventions to those who had been meeting with the widow, as well as people in the wider community.

The Crisis Intervention Team also provided support to other groups affected by the crisis. To address the needs of those who lost their livelihoods due to the attack, team members conducted a group intervention with displaced workers. They helped a local organization provide a “Resource Day” that offered displaced workers a wide range of services, such as information about credit resources, legal assistance, and job retraining. Drawing on NOVA’s experience in New Jersey, the team volunteers also offered “companionship,” guiding the displaced workers through the maze of services.

Providing Training

At all three sites, NOVA teams provided training for those wrestling with the immensity of the crisis: other caregivers, disaster relief workers, emergency responders, government agencies, and local businesses. These were no ordinary training sessions. NOVA trainers often had to draw on all of their skills and experience in victim response and crisis intervention.

I was training a huge group of psychologists in a gym at the police academy in New Jersey. People spontaneously started talking about where they were during the attack. I thought, "We're just going to do a little hybrid of this and start talking to people." People started sharing their emotional responses. It was training—but it was also group crisis intervention. Several days later, I got a letter that a man had written me while he was in the class. It said, "You're talking to me right now, and I can't tell you how much this means to me." He recounted the entire training, and at the end he said, "You're leaving now. And I want to get up and hug you and tell you what it has meant to me to be in this room today."

Beth Rossman, Vice President, NOVA; Director, Victim/Witness Services, State Attorney's Office, 18th Judicial Circuit, Viera, FL; Florida Crisis Response Team

Often, NOVA volunteers provided training for responders who faced new responsibilities, for example:

- ◆ Sessions for caregivers in techniques for dealing with major community catastrophe
- ◆ Education for crisis response organizations on the needs of crime victims
- ◆ Training for local providers in individual and group crisis intervention techniques

NOVA teams also offered a range of specialized trainings, from sessions for staff of child services agencies in handling child stress and trauma to training local mental health workers in death notification methods.

Much of the training was informal. NOVA team members helped local caregivers by modeling or providing on-site tutorials on what to expect and the best ways to meet the avalanche of needs. In New York, for example, relief workers were struggling to support police, firefighters, and construction crews searching the construction site. After observing

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NOVA teams, they asked NOVA crisis responders to help them “learn how to talk to these guys.” The NOVA members helped them understand crisis reactions and basic crisis intervention skills.

NOVA teams also provided training for those working with the media. Although the media were essential in helping disseminate information and assisting in the search and rescue efforts, they also posed a special challenge to the police, firefighters, and caregivers on the scene who were already overwhelmed with critical needs. NOVA teams conducted on-site training in effective approaches to working with the media and preparing materials for public education.

As the immediate crisis passed, requests for NOVA training continued to pour in. Throughout the country, NOVA teams are training individuals and organizations who want to be ready in the face of another major event—who have seen, firsthand, the power of NOVA's crisis response skills and the value of NOVA's National Crisis Response Team.

Preparing for the Future

Often one of the first crisis response organizations on scene, NOVA is also one of the last to leave. At the World Trade Center site, for example, NOVA teams continued to meet the tremendous needs well into the summer of 2002. NOVA's commitment to ensuring the community's long-term response is paramount.

The crisis intervention specialists serving on NOVA's state and local teams frequently help local authorities understand the challenges that lie ahead and plan effective responses. NOVA volunteers help victims and survivors understand future stresses they will face—for example, at anniversaries—and obtain the long-term support and resources they need, from legal assistance to support groups. As the nation's foremost victim assistance organization, NOVA also continues to work for victims' and survivors' rights through advocacy and activism. Throughout all of these efforts, NOVA focuses on building strong community crisis response capacities and helping all affected by a crisis to reassert a sense of control over their lives by accessing the resources they need.

I had never heard of NOVA before our tragedy, and now I will never forget them. You will always be in our hearts.

A message posted to the NOVA bulletin board in the New Jersey Family Assistance Center



Recommendations

Recommendations

A Vision for Change

The potential number of victims, the extent of the impact on emergency responders, and the long-term consequences of terrorism present significant challenges and require an extraordinary response from emergency managers and public safety, medical, and mental health professionals.

Each act of widespread violence teaches us important lessons for responding to future events. Prior mass catastrophes including terrorist attacks have taught us that the psychological and physical impacts persist long after the immediate crisis has been handled. Lessons learned from the September 11 crisis response provide a foundation for improving the planning and delivery of services to victims of terrorism in the future, within both the public and private sectors.

Efforts are now underway to develop comprehensive plans for responding to large-scale terrorist attacks among all agencies in all sectors. Toward this end, we have developed a list of recommendations, largely drawn from the NOVA national conference Lessons from the Aftermath. Held in April 2002, the conference was attended by NOVA crisis response team members who responded to the September 11 tragedy, victims of the September 11 attacks, representatives of national volunteer disaster relief organizations, and first responders impacted by September 11. In addition, we conducted interviews with experts in mental health, emergency management, public health, and public safety throughout the country.

Finally, the needs of victims and their caregivers, both from the time of the immediate crisis and throughout the long-term aftermath, must be part of the planning, response, and recovery process. It is with this intent—to lend a voice to and learn from these individuals—that we present the recommendations below.

1. **Disaster plans need to integrate concrete programs to address crisis intervention, mental health, and spiritual needs of survivors. These should be updated, expanded, and continually assessed at the state and federal levels.**

One of the major obstacles in the development of an infrastructure to support disaster mental health services is the lack of detailed concrete mental health planning resources in state disaster preparedness plans.

Disaster management plans must be updated to include mental health issues. Every institution, business, and community needs a disaster plan and specifically a plan for the mental health issues to be comprehensively addressed.

Dr. George Everly, Chairman Emeritus, International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Ellicott City, Maryland

A common theme among crisis responders is the desire to call on their states to comprehensively address mental health within their state disaster preparedness plans. Participants at the NOVA conference asked NOVA to compile model state plans addressing mental health issues.

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2. All states should establish statewide crisis response teams that are prepared to provide interventions as soon as possible after any disaster. They should be affiliated with a national coordinating body to avoid duplication and assure the best distribution of resources.

NOVA was able to call upon existing NOVA-trained statewide crisis response teams from 27 states to coordinate and deploy volunteers in the 10 months after September 11, 2001. A pre-existing network of state leaders, who had listings of trained individuals within their jurisdictions, allowed for quick identification of available responders and speedy dispatch as the needs for service changed over time. It is critical that such teams receive intense and comprehensive training prior to disasters and that there is an effort to maintain quality control over the services rendered. NOVA currently has established a credentialing process for both individual team members and state or local teams as a whole. The process includes testing, review, and continuing education.

We have over 500 NOVA-trained crisis responders as members of our statewide team. You just tell me when and how many teams you want, and we will send them. If you have a special need for law enforcement officers, firefighters, clergy, or school counselors, we can ensure that we can send teams with an emphasis on these disciplines. If you have a need for responders with certain cultural backgrounds or language skills, we can find people to meet that need.

Carol Wozniowski, Coordinator, Illinois School Crisis Assistance Team

3. *Governmental agencies responsible for responding to emergencies should fully utilize voluntary organizations, community-based agencies, and faith-based groups in addressing recovery from catastrophes.*

Most states and communities utilize the services of community and faith-based organizations in crisis response planning and service delivery. Many religious organizations sponsor disaster relief services, and a number of them have come to understand the importance of providing competent, effective emotional and spiritual care. For example, in the aftermath of September 11, the Southern Baptist Convention (South Carolina) Disaster Relief Crisis Response Team received an urgent request to provide crisis services in New York. As a member of NOVA's crisis team, Chaplain John Scherberger ministered to civilians and professionals in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms and the Port Authority Police Department:

I had the honor and privilege of ministering to people from all walks of life and all faith groups. I saw the best of America, the grief of America, and the rage of America. I shared in the joys when people connected with friends and loved ones who had been missing and presumed dead; I shared in the sorrow when friends discovered others still missing and probably "gone"; I witnessed the anger of many, many people; I shared in the heartbreak of knowing that lives would never be the same. And I share in the heartbreak of each American, knowing that we will never be the same.

4. *All financial compensation programs should be coordinated so that benefits can be provided that meet victim and survivor needs effectively, efficiently, and equitably.*

One of the most divisive issues arising in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks was the administration of donated funds and the federal compensation program that was established by Congress. Some victims found themselves excluded from certain programs. Others who needed emergency funds found that distribution was delayed for months. Still

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others found that learning about such assistance and the application process was cumbersome. In many cases, private donations can supplement existing victim compensation programs in order to pay for things that are not covered under government programs. It would be ideal if such programs and national disaster relief organizations that assist in distributing donations could establish a process for coordination before disaster strikes.

The differences that existed between the various state compensation programs, the private donation structures, and the federal government's program were very confusing. Our goal was to make the process of applying for financial assistance as smooth and seamless as possible. We think we have done a fairly good job of accelerating compensation and providing information to the victims and survivors in our state, but in the future it would be useful to integrate plans for compensation and financial relief into disaster plans.

Carol Lavery, Bureau of Victim Services, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Harrisburg, PA

5. **Public and private agencies should continue to develop and fully implement a universal victim data collection process and streamline the procedure for victims to apply for and receive benefits; both victim assistance professionals and victims should assist in the development and implementation of this new system.**

A standard data collection format to assist with requests for services and benefits remains a major priority for victim assistance professionals, disaster relief organizations, and charities. Victims and crisis

intervenor who are exposed to the process have continually criticized the lengthy, cumbersome, repetitive, and sometimes irrelevant benefit claims processes and forms of the myriad of agencies providing assistance to victims.

Ellen Sarasini, whose husband was killed in the terrorist attack spoke eloquently at NOVA's April 2002 conference about the impact of the tragedy and the process of obtaining benefits:

We watched in horror as airplanes plunged our loved ones into their unimaginable deaths. My husband is Captain Victor J. Sarasini; he was the pilot on United Flight 175 that struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

I was asked to talk to you because I know that you're here to represent thousands of crisis responders. I think that all of your concerns are to make it easier for victims, which is a very noble thing to do.

We thought early on that you [NOVA] needed a victim database for yourselves. You need to set up all the victims' names, addresses, and information so that you're able to make your job a little easier and you're able to get the information to all the victims.

They need information on organizations of all types that are set up and will help the families. They also need a database of standardized forms. This way the information can be retrieved, and the families don't have to fill out numerous forms for all the organizations.

When victims have to make all these decisions, you're numb when you're the victim's family, and you can't always think of everything. There's a lot to do. In fact, it's a full-time job just to do the paperwork.

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6. **Effective mental health responses to mass catastrophes must include assistance both during the crisis and throughout the long-term recovery process.**

For every disaster there is a life span, and particular victim needs arise at each phase of the catastrophe. Unfortunately, many response efforts only address the immediate aftermath of the disaster, and longer-term mental health effects may go untreated. It is essential to have early intervention as well as service longevity, continuity of services as well as delivering interventions at appropriate times. NOVA remains committed to addressing all three phases of mass catastrophes: the emergency activation phase, the immediate response phase, and the long term recovery phase.

7. **Mental health and crisis protocols should include plans to address compassion fatigue among mental health and crisis intervention professionals.**

Victims are not the only ones with mental health issues. Emergency responders may be required to perform response and recovery efforts for a long period of time, which doesn't allow them to attend to their own emotional reactions:

I learned a new grief language from the officers at a Port Authority Police Department precinct. The department lost 73 employees in the attack, including 41 officers and their commissioner. These officers were initially described as "missing." Once evidence was found that an officer was not coming back, the person was termed "gone." The word "dead" was never used. Once they had "time," they would "process" it. This "time" was not a quantitative thing; no one would venture to say when this "time" would occur.

"It's sort of like Spam." They gave me a quizzical look. "You know. You take the dregs, what's left over, the sweepings, all the junk that's been thrown at you, stuff that no one else wants. You deal with it: squeeze it into a can, seal it up, and put it up on a shelf to be processed later, when you 'have time.'"

"Sooner or later it may just explode, when you aren't prepared to 'process it,' and your life, your career, your family, everything you hold dear may just explode too."

One sergeant shared his concerns about a new officer, maybe 25 years old, about 90 days out of the academy. He was in the concourse between the towers when the first one collapsed. He was almost killed. He dove into an escalator, and the sides prevented large pieces of debris from hitting him.

Before the lights went out, he saw debris and body parts being blown toward him. Two officers who were with him were blown back into a wall about 25 feet away by the blast. They survived. He led both wounded officers and a civilian out of the rubble.

He was covered with blood. It was the blood of both officers as well as what splattered on him as two people who had either jumped or fallen out of the first tower and landed on the sidewalk in front of him seconds after he exited the building. He had looked up and seen them coming. They were still alive, moving their arms and legs. He thought he heard screams. They landed maybe 10 to 15 feet away from him. He was still seeing them fall, still hearing their screams, still hearing them hit the sidewalk, still hearing them explode.

I listened to him off and on during my first night with the department. His emotions ranged from quiet introvert to raging avenger.

He was "processing" his Spam. The people of New York, the United States, and the other countries of the earth are processing theirs as well. And so am I.

*Chaplain John Scherberger, Southern Baptist Convention (South Carolina)
Disaster Relief Crisis Response Team*

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8. Disaster plans should include methods for responding to ongoing psychological reactions that will be generated by memorials, holidays, and anniversary dates during the first year or two after a major tragedy.

Another divisive issue arises as family members, victims, and survivors make decisions about how to remember their loved ones, and as local, state, and federal governments and national organizations begin to plan for memorials. NOVA was able to distribute informational materials on helpful suggestions for handling holidays, birthdays, or other significant days for survivors. It is also useful to provide guidelines addressing issues related to memorials. Most workplaces, communities, and schools appreciate being prepared for such events so that they can avoid some of the controversies that might arise.

One of the most important things that NOVA contributed to the post-disaster planning process was an understanding of how important it would be to assist families with the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Chanukah holidays that they faced. Their volunteers also helped family members begin to think through the impact of birthdays and even the actual births of babies who had been conceived prior to September 11 and were now being born without fathers.

*Connie M. Schweddes, Program Analyst, Division of Criminal Justice,
State Office of Victim Assistance, Trenton, NJ*

9. Disaster plans should include a special section addressing the issues that arise from criminal investigations and prosecutions in the aftermath of calamities caused by criminal violence and terrorism.

When crime or terrorism is involved, and alleged perpetrators are identified and prosecuted, the criminal justice process is often confusing to survivors. Most jurisdictions currently have victim and witness assistance programs or victim service programs that provide counseling and advocacy to victims as they face such a process. However, in events where there are massive casualties and destruction, special procedures are often needed to ensure that victim rights are protected and adequate information and resources are available. This has been clear in the aftermath of the terrorist attack that destroyed Pan Am Flight 103, the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building in 1995, and the various school shootings around the United States. Plans should include the expectation that additional advocates and victim assistance professionals will be needed in addition to special cadres of crisis responders who can provide support to victims as events unfold.

It always worries me when victims are exposed to the criminal justice process. Even with the many victim service programs that exist today and the broad array of statutory victim rights, victims often feel disoriented and disregarded in the justice system. It is particularly difficult when there is large amount of media interest in investigations and trials — an interest that always follows events of mass casualties and terrorism. The skills of advocates are different from the skills of crisis responders, but both are needed.

John H. Stein, NOVA Deputy Director

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10. **The Department of Homeland Security should involve victim assistance professionals in coordination of federal plans to respond to and protect victims, and it should mandate the integration of victim assistance and crisis response in all state homeland security plans.**

The new department will be uniquely positioned to focus attention on the psychological and emotional needs of victims of terrorism and violent crime. It will have the power and authority to require the active involvement of victim assistance professionals at all stages of the planning process. Selected crisis responders and victim assistance professionals should be identified for specialized training in providing services internationally so that there is an active corps of volunteers who have the background needed to successfully provide such services to Americans who are victims of terrorism or mass casualties overseas. In addressing state and federal emergency managers, homeland security directors, and crisis responders in November 2001, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson stated, “Mental health support must be an integral part of emergency preparedness.”

We hope these recommendations will guide the work of those individuals who will respond to the terrorist attacks and other mass catastrophes in the future. We honor the work of all those extraordinary heroes who stood tall during our darkest days and faced the enormous challenges of September 11. We always will be mindful of their tremendous sacrifice and compassion

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart....To give of yourselves, during our time of need, I think that's the definition of a hero.

Timothy Norris, Inspector with the Port Authority Police Department and Commanding Officer of the western zone of the World Trade Center