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6/04

DEVELOPING AN ARC & RELATED DISASTER MENTAL HEALTH TEAM

Review what has taken place with respect to disaster mental health efforts for your chapter in the past and what has worked or not worked and why?

Consult with other chapter & professional associations' mental health leads about what worked for them and how they can be a source of support and collaboration for your chapter.

Explore whether your community has a disaster council or similar organization. Is someone from your ARC chapter serving on this committee, is mental health represented, is there an appropriate place for you? This can assist your community as well as your chapter and serve as a means to build your team. See "MH Professionals' Contributions to Lessening Critical Incidents" (Bridgeman, 2004).

Similarly confer with other mental health organizations in your community. Do they have a disaster component, would they want a ARC training to be offered? Consider meeting your mental health counterparts from County Mental Health, Hospice, County Office of Education, University Psychology Departments, Peer counseling for Police, Fire, etc. Emphasize the mutual gain by collaborating.

Approach your local mental health professional organizations (CAMFT, CPA chapter DRN members, LCSW chapter, etc.), to give a talk about disaster mental health and/or about ARC's efforts (or bring in a lead from another chapter to do so). Discuss collaborative presentations, training's, public service offerings, etc.

Invite a wide variety of mental health people to an information meeting to discuss building an ARC disaster mental health team. Perhaps also announce in your local community paper the development of an ARC mental health team. Consider the professional organizations stated above, community mental health groups, and psychologists from local community colleges or universities. Have handouts available with ARC references. Be prepared to discuss why it is important and rewarding for them to become part of a ARC disaster team, for example; excellent way to use their mental health training to give back to the community, additional training (list some of ARC courses they may find interesting beyond the basic MH course, such as WMD/T, Aviation Disasters, Mass Casualty, Family Services, etc.), reduces isolation from private practice, validating experiences, national responding if they want to pursue that, etc. Include ways they will be acknowledged, serve refreshments and be respectful of their professional training and time by explaining that future meetings will be few but

important to attend, with an educational speaker, review of procedures, discussion of current issues in the field, and ARC updates.

If no one steps forward to take on the mental health lead position, consider 2 or 3 to share or rotate the position. Develop incentives for a person to take on the lead position. Explore delegating various aspects of coordinating the mental health function responsibilities.

Work with your Chapter Emergency Services Director and Associate Director to support your efforts by providing clerical assistance where possible, use of chapter room, perhaps refreshments, ARC handouts, email communication with other mental health leads and community members. Attend your chapter DAT team meetings to review with them the function of your team and how to best work together.

After collaborative efforts have been developed consider an MOU/SOU with your ARC chapter and your County Mental Health or related organizations, State ARC Service Area may assist with this, as well as other chapters that have such agreements in place.

Attempt to find ways to keep your team involved, informed about interesting topics in the field, and remind yourself that it is a fine balance between offering continuing involvement while also appreciating that most of the professionals on your team have careers, families, and other community responsibilities,

With assistance from your chapter encourage them to develop a local chapter web site, if not already available. If a site is already established be sure to get assistance in adding a section on disaster mental health: how to join the team, courses, meetings, and resources.

See handout on “Sustaining an ARC Disaster Mental Health Team” (Bridgeman, 2004), and do consult with the mental health leads in your state for assistance, support, and collaborative efforts in general.

See summary of results from the California State ARC Mental Health Lead Survey (Bridgeman,2004), for information regarding training, team resources, support, etc. This is also a resource for communicating with other leads in California as those who responded to the survey are listed.

Be aware of National ARC changes, check CrossNet, update your team materials, share ideas and problem solve with other chapters to reduce isolation and promote collaborative efforts. Continue to network with other agencies in your community.

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