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SUSTAINING AN ARC & RELATED DISASTER MENTAL HEALTH TEAM

Not unlike all volunteer efforts time is precious, thus having a few well attended meetings is often more effective than meeting too often.

Consider a guest speaker to enliven discussion and/or debate an important disaster mental health issue as a centerpiece to your team meeting. Continuing education is important for our work (to keep us current), and is always a means to attract people to meetings. Serving refreshments is also such an incentive. Speakers can be mental health professionals, firefighters, police, researchers, public health officials, EOC coordinators, etc.

Maintain a list (& listserve), of how to communicate with team members and of resources in your community for referrals. Offer a folder of mental health related materials, ARC handouts, web sites, and other resources.

Clarify requirements that are needed to be a disaster mental health volunteer, and encourage cross training especially around family services, disaster inquiry, etc. Announce local (mini-institutes), region and state ARC forums for various levels of classes.

Attempt to offer specific updates on CPR, etc. especially for when your mental health team is more likely to be available. Review DSHR process & support team members to join for National assignments where appropriate.

Try to provide ongoing mental health responses for your local community (where appropriate, ie; schools, EOC, service clubs), not only as an important public service, good will for your chapter, but also as an excellent training for members, and as a means to keep them involved in between major responses. Work with chapter DAT teams to explain and encourage MH use and mutual support. Participate in chapter & community drills.

Acknowledgement and appreciation for your teams' efforts are essential in promoting respect for their time and talent. Try the team newsletter concept as not only a means to honor their efforts, but as an effective way to inform, educate and communicate with team members. An excellent example of this is the method of newsletter development created by Winifred Medin, R.N., M. A., Sonoma's ARC mental health lead. Also helpful are chapter newsletters or community newspapers to congratulate, or announce your teams' work, or an interview about the value of providing disaster mental health for your community which can include a "coping strategies" &/or "resilience" handout, or points on preparedness, etc. Consider other chapter leads as source of support & collaboration.

Considering hosting a “Mentally Healthy Community Day” with panel discussions, or a town hall meeting approach, and invite community mental health organizations to participate; such as County Mental Health, Hospice, University faculty, Family Services, Schools, other chapter MH leads, etc. Consider hosting this with other near by chapters. This approach provides a public service, goodwill, visibility for chapter, recruiting tool and enhances public awareness around important mental health issues.

With support from your Chapter’s Director of Emergency Services and/or Associate Director develop a master list of team members, how to contact them, emails, whether they have had basic MH class, if member of DSHR etc.

The lead with assistance from Emergency Services staff should explain and review with members how to move along within the ARC system if they choose to do so.

Develop a pre assignment telephone check-in with those who go out on assignments, assist in screening for particularly challenging assignments, ie: aviation disasters, etc.

Similarly develop a post assignment check in for returning volunteers with a mental health team member. Perhaps a sub committee from the MH team can provide this service. Note- It is important to emphasize to all team members that one of the primary mental health functions is to be available to assist our ARC staff & volunteers, and therefore, to see that all chapter members across functions that return are offered a post assignment check in.

Notify team members of related mental health talks given in your community.

Educate yourself and your team around the importance of “self care”, “compassion fatigue” and related concepts for the individuals benefit and to enhance the quality of the teams' efforts.

Refer to summary results of the ARC California State MH Leads Survey (Bridgeman,2004) regarding training, support, etc. This also provides a means for communicating (includes list of State Leads where known) with other MH leads in the State. For the lead’s benefit, the teams’, and State ARC efforts, connect with and maintain contact with MH leads throughout the State to decrease isolation and to promote standardized training, support and thus enhance the quality of service to our communities.

Review current National & State ARC polices on chapter plans and annexes on various responses including aviation disasters, mass casualties and the mental health requirements.

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