

Missouri Sends Response Team to Ground Zero

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On September 10, 2001, Dr. Nancy O`Reilly, Psy.D. was a member of the Crisis Team of the Ozarks that enrolled in an intensive five-day training given by the National Organization of Victim Assistance (NOVA). Besides Dr. O`Reilly, participants were from law enforcement, fire and rescue, social services, disaster relief and emergency management. The Crisis Team wanted to hone its effectiveness for crisis intervention following a disaster. Other NOVA teams have helped the survivors cope with horror following the Oklahoma City bombings, the Columbine, Colorado shootings, and the of war in Bosnia.

On September 11, 2001, while getting ready to return for the second day of NOVA training, Dr. O`Reilly watched in shock and disbelief the explosions of the World Trade Center and Pentagon on television. The entire team decided to continue with the training, realizing how timely the learning would be in assisting the recovery of Americans.

On October 12, 2001, Dr. O`Reilly and seven other members of the Crisis Team of the Ozarks were asked by NOVA to respond to the aftermath of the terrorist attack. NOVA teams from New Jersey, New York, Texas, Ohio, Tennessee, Iowa, and Florida as well as Missouri launched a joint effort.

From the New Jersey Family Assistance Center, Dr. O`Reilly`s team accompanied families of those missing or deceased on a pilgrimage by ferry across the Hudson River to the World Trade Center site. On the ferry, they put on hard hats, goggles, and masks. They were given red, white, and blue carnations and teddy bears. They shared their family`s story and grief while the American Red Cross served a meal.

Once in New York, escorted by police, the families spent about 15 minutes on a platform overlooking the site. Many National Guard and recovery workers stopped, removed their hats, saluted, and placed their hands over their hearts. Many called it, "Ground Hero."

Seeing the devastation, many victims felt this was the closest they would ever be to their missing loved one. They realized this was goodbye; he or she would not be coming home. As a crime scene, pictures or remembrances were not permitted. But nearby a memorial had been constructed by those leaving flowers, hand written messages, poems, prayers, children`s drawings, teddy bears, pictures and memorabilia.

The families returned to the New Jersey Family Assistance Center, which was established by the governor immediately after the attacks, where 15 direct services were available. The Missouri Crisis Team stayed with the families during their 8-hour ordeal. Now might be the time to file for the death certificate or begin the process of applying for assistance from FEMA, Red Cross, and Salvation Army.

For 16 days, Dr. O`Reilly experienced an array of emotions. "Words cannot express what I have seen and the pain I have shared but there have been many joys as well-hugs, thank-yous, smiles on children`s faces, knowing that we have helped those who needed resources. I am changed forever," she reported. "I cannot believe I was

there yet I cannot believe I left. What I have learned is to pray for each other, hold those you love close to you, and live each day with great vigor and joy."