



CCAPS NEWSLETTER Fall 2005

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[Disaster Services: Making a Difference](#)
(Eric Klingensmith, Psy.D., P.E.M.)

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Commission for Counseling
and Psychological Services
A Division of the American College Personnel Association

From the Editors

As the most active Atlantic hurricane season on record comes to a close and the aftermath of two major hurricanes still have the gulf coast reeling, the theme of this newsletter focuses on disaster interventions. We have articles addressing ways to get involved on a global level and also best practices on our campuses.

On a personal level, when hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast, Houston was one city that became home to many evacuees and survivors. As a trained Red Cross disaster mental health worker, I had the opportunity to volunteer and provide mental health services in a local shelter. Hearing first hand the stories of families literally ripped apart, people sleeping on rooftops for days as waters continued to rise, and young adults narrowly escaping extreme violence in New Orleans was somewhat overwhelming but mostly rewarding because we all know the importance of people being able to tell their stories and talk in depth about their experiences following a traumatic event. At that time, the thought never occurred to me that three weeks later I would become hurricane Rita evacuee and, after evacuating into the eventual path of the storm, a Rita survivor myself (although our family and property were unharmed). I was aware that some of my anticipatory anxiety was due to my experience volunteering in the shelter and hearing other's stories, which highlights the importance of being aware of the effects of trauma work on volunteers and workers and the importance of workers being able to tell their own stories and share their experiences either formally or informally. My story is definitely not unique, but it certainly goes to prove that you can never predict when and where the next disaster will hit and when you will be needed.

Our feature article for this edition is titled "Disaster Services: Making a Difference" and is written by Dr. Eric Klingensmith who is the Coordinator of Crisis Intervention Services at Grand Valley State University. Eric is an expert in disaster psychology and writes about his disaster mental health work and ways to get involved with disaster response on a global level.

I know our campus, along with hundreds of others across the country, has taken on students from hurricane affected schools on the gulf coast, and the question arises about what kinds of services and programming to offer for these students, many of whom have been significantly affected by this disaster. We have compiled a list of ideas for disaster interventions on campus that you may find useful. In addition to these direct intervention ideas, it is important for us to also find ways to support the ways students might want to be involved (directly or indirectly) in relief efforts, as these efforts may be their only way to feel that they are helping and can experience some sense of control. Also included in this edition of the newsletter you will find a column from our chair, Stacey Pearson. Thank you to David Gilles-Thomas for uploading this newsletter and posting it on our website.



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From the Chair



Hello and Happy Fall. It is hard to believe that we are turning the corner on the fall semester but it is true. Here at the University of Michigan we have an increase in the request for services along with an increase in the complexity of issues. I have heard from many of you from around the country that this fall has also provided unique opportunities for service provision in your agency as well. So, if you are feeling overwhelmed and puzzled by the demand, please know you are not alone and that as professionals we are up to the task. As a matter of fact, the increased demand is a clear indication of both our efficacy and value. University counseling center professionals are truly making a difference in the lives of students!

There are lots of things going on in the commission to benefit you. First, it is time to elect new members to the directorate body for CCAPS. We have a dynamic slate of individuals who are committed to the field and to the work of the commission. Be sure to participate in the process and vote between Dec 5 and Dec. 16. We have also been working to implement some of the feedback from the Strategic Plan Taskforce including keeping all eight of our roundtables and sponsoring a luncheon for counseling center directors to connect and fellowship during convention.

In addition, I attended the ACPA's summer leadership meeting in Indianapolis where one of our tasks was to preview the convention; and from all signs Indy is a live and vibrant city and the convention is sure to be a great and enriching time. If you are still ambivalent about attending this year's conference, I believe you will miss a treat if you don't go.

Lastly, the directorate body is feverishly working to make our [convention in Indianapolis](#) good for you. We are planning to offer a theme track around suicide treatment, prevention and assessment. In addition, we will sponsor our annual networking luncheon, and a special treat to try and jump-start our mentoring program.

So, as always, thank you for your membership in the commission. If you have any questions or comments feel free to contact me via [email](#).

Sincerely,

Stacey M. Pearson, Ph.D.
Chair, Commission for Counseling and Psychological Services
American College Personnel Association

Off-campus disasters, On-campus responses



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This fall's series of hurricanes have again challenged the ways in which colleges and universities support their students during large-scale disasters. We solicited counseling center folks to share some of their situation-specific and ongoing efforts to care for students facing devastating events. The following are some approaches described.

"We undertook several steps to provide assistance to both our native students who hailed from the affected states or students who transferred in as part of impacted institution's plans to care for their students and faculty. These include:

- The Dean of Students office provided the equivalent of a transfer orientation for the visiting students which included presentations by campus resources. The Counseling Center was included in this program and provided time to speak about the short and long term challenges of the transition.
- The Department of Housing and Residence Education got the addresses to all the native and visiting students and sent letters outlining services on the campus
- The Counseling Center offered a Support Group for the native and visiting students affected by the hurricanes.
- Information on the Counseling Center's Support Group and general counseling services for the visiting students was provided academic advisors
- The Counseling Center ran a banner on its web site with links to supportive information
- Counseling Center faculty provided consultation to relocated faculty from institutions and provided community referrals for ongoing support
- Updated information on provision of services was shared by the Counseling Center and Student Mental Health Services to coordinate overall care
- The Counseling Center's liaison with the Department of Housing and Residence Life and Education provided information to DHRE staff on the potential short and long term stress points and reactions of affected students, e.g., adjustment to academic culture, upcoming holidays, impeded communication with family, displacement from friends, altered experiences such as graduation, internships, etc.
- The university's Trauma Response Team discussed ways to address quality of life issues for the visiting students and ways to facilitate access of these students to community and campus resources."

"We put a temporary informational section related to the gulf coast hurricanes on our counseling center website (and a link to our site on the main university website), including information on coping with trauma and an advertisement for a student support group for those affected by the hurricanes."

"Counseling Center leaders are included in our Incident Control System - style campus crisis management program, along with other campus leaders, police, etc."

"At our Counseling Center we actually have developed a Critical Incident Response Team comprising of clinical and non-clinical staff. Our Center actually has its own disaster plan as part of our crisis protocols. The plan covers preparedness, response, and continuity of operations. Our plan is actually often talked about because its one of the few that exist for a department on the campus. Several of our staff also have gone through the Red Cross National Disaster Mental Health Training and all of our incoming pre-doctoral interns go through an intense and on-going crisis and disaster mental health training component during their year here including simulations and seminars."

"The UCD campus is the temporary home of some Katrina displaced students, somewhere around 30 if I recall

correctly. CAPS has invited all of them to a program on stress/transition issues, and we will offer a support group for those who are interested. We also invited each of them individually to use our counseling services."

"Related to disaster response in general, over the years we have had a couple of different trainings on disaster response. We have developed a comprehensive Crisis Resource Manual for our staff (everyone keeps a copy at home, on a CD and also in hard copy), to assist us in developing a plan to deal with a variety of potential disasters. This was developed after 9/11. Thankfully, we have not had to use it, but we feel a little better prepared to respond if needed."

"We did a special orientation for Katrina students where they received personal invitation. Mostly this consisted of presentation on student services (with counseling center being especially emphasized and the director talking about recovery from disasters) and an informal lunch where several counseling members could interact with students to help determine the need for a support group or other services."

Disaster Services: Making a Difference

By Eric Klingensmith, Psy.D., P.E.M.



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My name is Eric Klingensmith and I am a doctoral level counselor at Grand Valley State University's [Counseling Center](#), and the Crisis Coordinator in a joint position with the Counseling Center and Residence Life Office. When not at [GVSU](#), I am actively involved with several volunteer crisis and disaster response organizations including the [American Red Cross](#) and the [Michigan-1 Disaster Medical Assistance Team](#) (DMAT). In my roles with these organizations I train, practice, and learn how to provide disaster assistance and disaster mental health services and management. I would like to share with you my experiences with the Red Cross response to Hurricane Katrina in September, and also offer suggestions for those who may wish to provide disaster aid in the future.

I deployed to Mobile, AL on Sept 8, where I began a 10 day tour of duty with the American Red Cross's National Disaster Relief Response to Hurricane Katrina. I found myself on a plane with several other relief workers including a social worker and counselor who were on their first disaster relief operation and their first day involved with the Red Cross. Once in Mobile, I was assigned to a shelter in Citronelle, AL where I replaced an outgoing mental health staff member. The staff consisted of two shelter workers and two nurses. There were about 50 families at the shelter from a wide range of cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, ages, disabilities, and psychological stability.

The next 10 days at this shelter reinforced the Red Cross Disaster Worker philosophy of flexibility. My four years of training with the Red Cross prepared me for this difficult assignment and the variety of tasks I would become involved in. by the time I was demobilized I had served in not only my role as mental health worker but as shelter manager, mediator, chef, child care worker, case manager, housekeeper, internet trainer, shower monitor, and advocate.

One of the most challenging aspects of my experience was learning to work with such a wide range of diversity and cultural issues in an artificial, closed, and emotionally charged environment. I soon became aware of many of the unique differences and conflicts that can arise between cultures and sub-cultures of those who are displaced. The experience was an intense introduction to working with diverse populations and the need to recognize and support personal dignity.

Many people may ask, "How can I help?" The easiest answer is to get involved with an organization like the Red Cross or other professional disaster relief agency. The last thing one should do is "self-deploy" to any type of a crisis or disaster, whether it is local or national. When someone takes it upon themselves to just show up to help, they are often more hindrance than help.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita necessitated waiving many training and prep classes for volunteers to enable them to be on-scene as quickly as possible. However, training and involvement before a disaster in an organization such as the Red Cross is one way to avoid the pitfalls and struggles of lack of experience. Volunteers in the mental health professions should be preparing themselves now to aid in future disasters.

For those of you who may have also responded, I encourage you to remain committed to your desire to help. If you haven't already done so, walk into your local Red Cross and stay connected. Keep in mind that your talents and skills can be used locally in the everyday "disasters" that the Red Cross responds to, including house and apartment fires, severe weather, or community disaster drills. All of these are valuable experiences to skills and knowledge for the next large disaster.

If you are interested in providing disaster mental health services and aid an important step is to be personally prepared. This might include creating your own personal and family plan and kit and to helping your own office and counseling center to be ready for a disaster. For those who one day may be deployed on a national disaster bring yourself prepared to be flexible, patient, and prepared to work in difficult situations, stressful environments, and possibly dealing overwhelming issues. Also, work ahead of time with your University and Department to

determine the extent you can help with a national disaster; it is better to have this discussion early to determine future support and process to allow you to go out on an assignment.

Feel free to contact me via [email](#) for more information on how to get involved with the American Red Cross or other disaster relief organizations that are looking to use our professional skills.

