

TAKING CARE

EMOTIONAL RESCUE

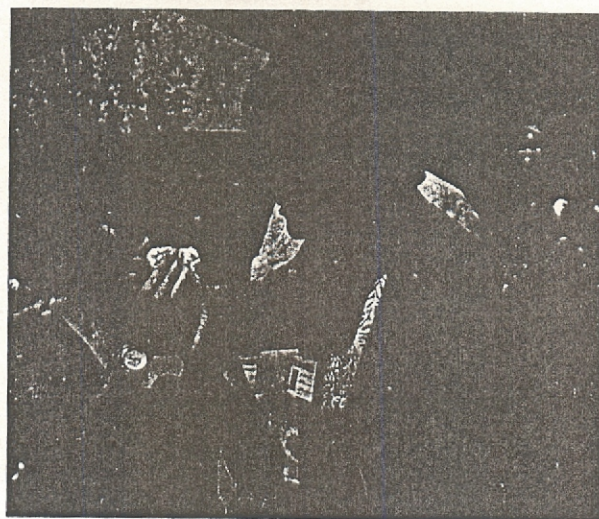
WHEN a Southern California man returned home from work and found his wife, son, and brother-in-law gagged, bound, and stabbed to death, Karen Krauthamer, a Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) volunteer, was there to help. She held his hand, listened, and talked him through the initial jolts of pain and horror.

Police, firefighters, and paramedics, who have other priorities, are only perfunctorily trained to work with surviving victims of tragedy. In seventy-five cities across the United States, emergency responders page TIP volunteers instead. These volunteers promise to be on site within twenty minutes, any time of day, 365 days a year. Wayne Fortin, a marriage and family counselor who started the first TIP chapter in Oceanside, California, in 1985, calls the service 'emotional first aid.' "We want to offer it to the general public like the Red Cross offers CPR. We want everybody to have these skills," he says.

Frequently the grieving are children. An eleven-year-old whose mother has died wants to know "Who are all these people? Where are they taking my mother?" TIP volunteers provide the answers. They arrange for food or shelter, notify family, call the mortuary in case

of death. Most importantly, they offer compassion. "Sometimes you break down and cry right along with the victims," says TIP volunteer Alex Altieri. "You put your arm around them, they put their arm around you, and you cry."

Starting a TIP chapter requires one local organizer



A TIP volunteer provides emotional first aid at an emergency scene.

who will take the initiative, find a sponsoring organization like the Police or Fire Department, and raise local funds for training expenses. Fortin's TIP chapter has people available to train new groups around the country; training takes about fifty-five hours and covers all the basics, from what to say, to what *not* to say, to how to

stay safe on an emergency scene. The volunteers can be anybody, and are rarely professional mental health workers. "You're not there for psychotherapy or to engage in fancy techniques," Fortin explains. "You're there to care." Fortin says the best TIP volunteers combine toughness and com-

passion. "To get up at two A.M. and drive in the dark to some godforsaken place where you don't know what you'll find takes courage and street smarts as well as sensitivity."

Volunteers at the Oceanside chapter include Altieri, who is a seventy-three-year-old retired machine shop worker, and LeAnn Castle-

**"You're not there
for psychotherapy or to
engage in fancy techniques.
You're there to care."**

ton, a forty-seven-year-old mother of four who works for an asset management company. Often TIP volunteers have never been exposed to the kind of trauma they see on calls. "My mother died about seven years ago," Castleton says, "but that was old age, not a traumatic death. It was the only death I had seen."

Now she helps fire and police personnel cope. "I've seen some very compassionate emergency responders, but they're not really trained in emotional first aid. They want to give more, but they really can't. So they love to have us there." She recalls the death of a four-year-old boy in a train accident. The attending police officer agonized over telling the mother. "I just put my arm around her and said, 'I'm so sorry.' There are no words really."

"Usually on my way home in the car, I'll break down," admits Oceanside volunteer Judy Williams. "I'll just cry and go, 'Lord, why do people have to be exposed to something like that?' But I don't cry for long. I'm very grateful I was able to be there and help."

—David Howard

For more information:
Trauma Intervention
Program (TIP)
1420 Phillips Street
Vista, CA 92083

Find HOPE on line at www.hopemag.com