



*My View*

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## **PAYING IT FORWARD**

In the TIP Volunteer Training Academy, we talk at length about how important it is to give survivors of tragedy immediate support. We talk about how survivors remember the help/lack of help they receive for years to come. We talk about how everything that is said and done for survivors in the immediate aftermath becomes part of their memory tapes. And in the last few years, scientific research has confirmed that in fact the chemistry in our brains is activated when we are in crisis, making our memories more receptive to recording what is happening around us.

However, I have always believed that the impact we have on survivors goes beyond influencing their memories of the event. I believe that in some instances those we help actually change their behaviors as a result of being cared for by TIP Volunteers. They pay forward to others what they were given by TIP Volunteers. In other words, some TIP interventions create a ripple affect...those we help go on to help others.... who go on to help others.

I am unaware of any research that confirms this "paying it forward" belief, and I can't say how often we impact a person's life so deeply that they change their behavior as a result. But I have had enough conversations over the years with those we've helped to know that TIP Volunteers not only help survivors of tragedy immediately on emergency scenes, but in some instances volunteers have such an impact that these survivors go on to become effective lifelong helpers themselves.

The most recent "proof" of someone a TIP Volunteer helped becoming a more resolute and effective helper, comes from a pediatric nurse at a trauma center served by TIP. This nurse pulled a TIP Volunteer aside while the volunteer was on a TIP call in the Trauma Center and asked "*do you know TIP Volunteer Tracy*"? The Volunteer replied "*yes, she is a volunteer in our Chapter.*" The nurse went on to relate that her brother had died in the Trauma Center a few years before, and that Tracy was there to be with her. The nurse went on to say that the care and the "hug" Tracy gave her at the time changed her nursing behavior. She says she now is more "*present*" to her patients and provides them more "*hugs of comfort*" than she did before she encountered Tracy.

WOW! I am very impressed that the nurse was so touched by Tracy that she has changed the way she deals with her patients and their families. Tracy's helping of one person whose brother had died has resulted in hundreds of people being cared for and "hugged" by a nurse in a perfect position to "pay it forward."

I think it's important to note that it was only a coincidence that this nurse encountered a TIP Volunteer where she worked and was able to express her experience with Tracy to a TIP Volunteer she happened to encounter. But for this chance encounter, we would not know the difference Tracy's simple hug made in the nurse's life and work.

I believe that there are many people (including doctors, nurses and emergency responders) in the world who we have helped and who are "paying it forward." Unfortunately, we will never know for sure the extent of the caring "ripple effect" our TIP Volunteers create when they respond to TIP Calls. Chance encounters like the one mentioned above between the nurse and Tracy are rare.

I for one believe that for every person we know for sure is paying a TIP Volunteer's care forward, there are hundreds if not thousands of others who are doing likewise. I have no doubt that as I write this, there is someone out there (maybe the nurse Tracy hugged) who is helping someone because of a previous TIP encounter.