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# The New York Times

Late Edition  
New York: Today, partly cloudy,  
warmer. High 64. Tonight, partly fog.  
Low 46. Tomorrow, some sun, rather  
warm. High 64. Thursday, light drizzle,  
low 37. Details are on page C14.

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## 'Program Offers Quick Comfort to Trauma Victims'

Special to The New York Times

CARLSBAD, Calif. — A girl, 11 years old, sat in a San Diego County Sheriff's station bent over a coloring book, refusing to look up or to speak, Sgt. Manuel J. Perez recalls. Having seen too much, she refused to see any more.

Her mother, a drug addict, had kidnapped the girl from her grandmother, who had legal custody, and led deputies on a car chase before being captured, Sergeant Perez said. Afterward, as she waited for her grandmother to come and take her home, the child withdrew, frustrating the efforts of deputies who wanted to comfort her.

"We were giving her toys and hats and coloring books to make her feel better, and it just wasn't working," Sergeant Perez said. "She had her nose about an inch away from a coloring book. She wouldn't look up or talk to us."

Sergeant Perez made a telephone call to Trauma Intervention Program Inc., and Barbra L. Mirolla arrived a few minutes later. By the time the girl's grandmother reached the station, he said, Ms. Mirolla had coaxed the child into discussing her ordeal.

"Really, all I was was her friend," Ms. Mirolla said of the recent incident. "I just gave her someone to talk to who wasn't in a uniform."

Sergeant Perez said, "The girl walked out of here smiling, just as happy as can be."

Like many other law enforcement officers and firefighters in the suburbs north of San Diego, Sergeant Perez has come to rely on TIP, a private nonprofit group that takes an aggressive approach to counseling people who have endured traumatic stress. In September, the Ford Foundation and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University named the program one of 10 winners of their annual Innovations in State and Local Government Awards.

While many government and private

agencies provide some form of support for victims of psychological trauma, nearly all rely on the victim's seeking help. TIP is summoned by police officers, firefighters and hospital emergency room staffs whenever they see a need, and the program is geared toward acting immediately after an incident. On average, volunteers in the program respond to calls in under 30 minutes. It also differs from traditional programs in that it relies on volunteers who undergo extensive training, but who generally have no professional background in psychology.

The kind of quick aid provided by the program is crucial to a victim's emotional recovery, said Jeffrey T. Mitchell, a psychologist, clinical associate

professor of emergency health services at the University of Maryland Balti-

more County, and president of the American Critical Incident Stress Foundation, based in Ellicott City, Md.

"If you have wet concrete, while it's wet, you can shape it and mold it and even wash it away," Mr. Mitchell explained. "But if you let it dry, you have to chip it away, and it's a lot more difficult and it takes a lot longer. You have to avert people from withdrawing. That seems to be a fairly natural way to react, but it's not the right way. You have to get them to talk, and get them to talk immediately."

A handful of cities in California and Oregon are trying to duplicate the program, and Wayne Fortin, the executive director, plans to use the \$100,000 Innovations prize to spread the concept still farther.

TIP began in 1985 as a service of the San Diego County Mental Health Department but fell victim to budget cuts three years later. Mr. Fortin, determined not to let the program die, turned it into a private concern. With contributions from seven small cities and grants from private foundations, the program survived and expanded. Working with about 60 volunteers on an annual budget of \$60,000, it serves an area with 500,000 residents, answering about 2,000 calls a year.

"Every area could afford to do this," Mr. Fortin said. "I think it's just a matter of getting the word out." The primary obstacle, he said, is resistance from professional emergency crews.

Sergeant Perez acknowledged that when he first encountered TIP volunteers, he dismissed them as "a bunch of do-gooders who were in the way, but now, I wouldn't be without them."