

INTRODUCTION

MENTAL HEALTH APPROACHES TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS OF NATURAL DISASTERS

SECOND RESPONSE AND PLAYSHOPS

When natural disasters strike, emergency organizations leap into action to address immediate need. First responders attend to the essential restoration of safety, shelter, food, and water. Media attention often focuses on the dead and injured while financial resources are allocated for the repair of the external landscape and infrastructure.

But little attention is paid to the inner landscape of victims of natural disasters. Besides seeing their communities chaotically destroyed, victims, especially children, are also traumatized by fear, grief, helplessness and other debilitating emotions.

During these times of disaster response, mental health is often marginalized; moreover, few psychologically oriented preventative measures have emerged with the potential to prepare communities for the overwhelming psychological impact of large-scale disasters.

Since its inception in the mid 1990's, the Fortunate Blessings Foundation has conducted seminars, workshops and conferences aimed at helping individuals adopt simple lifestyle practices to maintain health and reduce the incidence of preventable disease.

In 2004, following the massive tsunami in Indonesia, FBF launched Second Response, an initiative created specifically to address the post traumatic stress of victims of disasters. At the invitation of medical schools, government officials, health ministers and various educational organizations throughout disaster stricken areas, Second Response facilitators have deployed around the world, wherever disaster strikes, both working with children and building local capacity.

Our teams of trained mental health professionals enter the areas most severely impacted in order to help kids safely release the stress, anxiety, and fear pent up after a traumatizing event, and gets them back into safe relationships with their friends and the environment. To date, Second Response has reached more than 100,000 children and conducted training in communities around the world from the Fukushima disaster in Japan to the coastal villages of Indonesia and the Philippines, and throughout the USA.

In the years that follow a disaster, most communities are burdened with the needs of victims of PTSD, one of the more serious repercussions of trauma. The number of these cases could have been reduced through effective interventions; however, more research is needed to demonstrate the efficacy of Second Response's approach and the enormous economic benefit preventative interventions like this can provide to affected communities.

What follows is a White Paper outlining various mental health approaches to disaster-related trauma and, in particular, the unique perspective of Second Response and PLAYshops.