



**First Responders - Corona**

## **Two TRNs® – First Responder Focus**

America has been stricken coast to coast with pandemic infection and death, urban protest and violence, fires and hurricanes. First responders, speeding to aid citizens and protect property, are among those hardest hit emotionally, witnessing a kaleidoscope of traumas. But health-care providers, fire safety and law enforcement officers rarely seek help for their mental well-being. Most feel there is a stigma associated with acknowledging emotional issues stemming from job-related anxiety,

burnout, PTSD and thoughts of suicide. Two Trauma Recovery/HAP Trauma Recovery Networks® have made it part of their mission to educate first responders on trauma and bring them EMDR trauma treatment.

The **Twin Cities Trauma Recovery Network®**, in Minnesota, was formed in May 2020, as a means to expand and organize trauma treatment beyond the efforts of one clinician working with the Minneapolis South Metro SWAT team and other local police departments. Today the TC TRN has 25 volunteers providing 6 to 10 hours of pro bono EMDR therapy to law enforcement and other front-line workers.

The **New York City EMDR Trauma Recovery Network®** formed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The team of 95 therapists is currently offering 6 to 10 hours of free trauma therapy to health care professionals and first responders dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, they have formed a new partnership with the New York Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services Union.

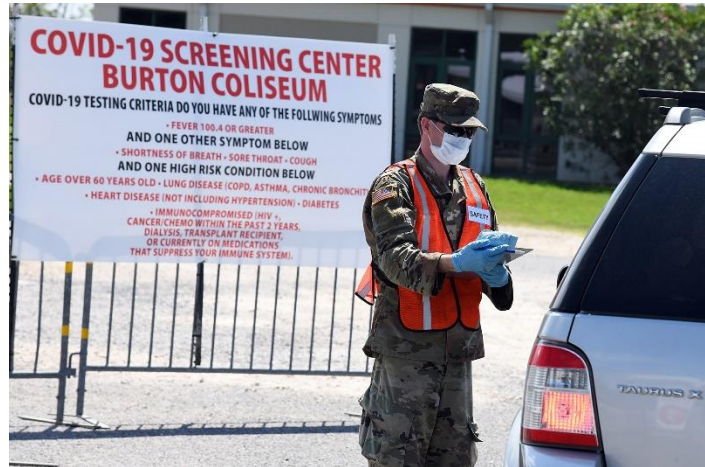
## **Twin Cities - Need, Inspiration, Action**

Sitting in a session of the **Global Summit – Breaking the Cycle of Violence**, Hector Matascattillo, MSW, LICSW, LSSW, knew he had to act. Don deGraffenried, LCSW, Trauma Recovery's senior trainer, had presented his TRN's EMDR successes with local homicide survivors, then explained how easy it was to start a TRN to treat community trauma. Having long worked to "create programs to get as close to trauma as possible to treat trauma as quickly as possible," Matascattillo, knew a TRN was the means to expand local EMDR treatment broadly to first responders and community members beyond his initiatives. Before the presentation concluded, he had texted and obtained approval from his boss at Life Development Resources, PA to start a TRN in his agency.

## TC TRN – Agency Home Base Treats the Walking Wounded

As a mental health clinician and Director of Life Development Resources, Matascattillo has been treating clients and training clinicians in EMDR since the mid-2000. He, like many of his colleagues, realized early in the pandemic that first responders in law enforcement, health care, EMTs and fire departments were being exposed to acute trauma which could quickly lead to burnout, substance abuse, PTSD and suicide. With TRN co-coordinator,

Cheryl Lerfald, MA, LMFT he recruited a team of 25 volunteer clinicians from within and outside his agency, to offer 6 to 10 hours of EMDR therapy. Their concept created a clinic within a clinic, using "**Procentive**", a HIPPA-compliant scheduling and client tracking application in use at his agency, and generously donated to the TRN by Life Development Resources' owners.



Screening

The TRN wants to express their gratitude to all of their volunteers and in particular, to Michelle Frauenshus, MA, LMFT, and Roselyn Busscher, PsyD., LP, cofounders of Life Development Resources, for their unwavering support of the TRN and its mission.

## New York – Overwhelmed With Death

The coronavirus crisis brought a level of trauma unlike anything New York City's most experienced emergency responders had ever dealt with before. For months, EMS and FDNY workers endured long shifts as the number of daily calls doubled and a quarter of their own workforce came down with the virus. At the height of infections in the April – May 2020 timeframe, first responders witnessed an enormous amount of death, from Covid-19 and medical emergencies like heart attacks where the call for help was delayed by fear of contracting the virus. Lt. Anthony Almojera, Vice President of the NY EMS union says, "unprecedented crisis meant an equally unprecedented level of post-traumatic stress to a workforce already plagued with mental health struggles."

**Linda Kocieniewski**, LCSW, the **New York TRN coordinator**, says her group was "ramped up and ready to go" in March, but at first hospitals and EMS units were so overwhelmed that they couldn't even get through. Today, the TRN provides 6 to 10 sessions of pro bono EMDR therapy for trauma and stress-related symptoms to health care professionals and first responders. In addition, the New York TRN has entered into a partnership with the [EMS FDNY Help Fund](#) to reach firefighters and EMS workers with a new option to obtain critical mental health support.

## **New York - Recovery for the Front Line**

Rates of burnout, substance abuse, PTSD, and suicide were already high among health care providers before the pandemic hit, but the suicide of Lorna Breen, MD, chair of emergency medicine at the New York Presbyterian Allen Hospital, in April 2020, was a clarion call for improving the mental health and wellness of physicians and other front-line workers.

Kocieniewski hopes there will be more preventive efforts going forward. She says, "When I've talked to hospitals about offering services, I recommend offering interventions to a whole group, not just individuals who reach out because they are struggling. This gives young doctors the impression that we all need help and prevention is important, and takes away the stigma."

## **Challenges and Successes**

Outreach and technology are two challenges the TRNs face. Both TRNs are working diligently to increase awareness of their trauma treatment capabilities among front-line workers. During the pandemic, intake and treatment sessions are often virtual, with the exception of acute trauma. Mastering the technology to make the virtual sessions as seamless as possible is an on-going struggle.

In the Twin Cities, Matascatillo is well known to law enforcement groups as a speaker, trainer and therapist through work with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and local police departments. News of the TRNs' services spread quickly by word of mouth among law enforcement, and Matascatillo says the Minneapolis riots following the death of George Floyd nearly overwhelmed the TRN with requests for treatment. To reach the health care community the TRN is working with the Minneapolis Metro Emergency Services Board and its eleven county managers, to educate their corresponding public health directors and medical directors on the TRNs services. In addition, the TRN hopes to meet with municipal union leadership to help advocate for EMDR treatment for first responders, much like the New York City initiative.

Ms. Kocieniewski, in New York, has found word of mouth and local press coverage has helped get word out about the NYC TRNs' services, and the partnership with [EMS FDNY Help Fund](#). But it remains difficult getting medical clinicians to seek help because of the stigma surrounding mental health. "Some people are so guarded that they don't even want to give us their last name or the hospital they work at, so we only ask the bare minimum questions," she said. Ms. Kocieniewski urges hospitals, health systems, and emergency departments she contacts to be proactive about managing their clinicians' stress during the pandemic.

Both teams use event scales to measure client progress, but their greatest yardsticks have been clients reporting they are healing and that they can go back to work.