



Trauma Recovery for Puerto Rico

A large group of newly trained EMDR therapists will now be accessible to Puerto Ricans still struggling in the wreckage left by Hurricane Maria in September 2017. Through a collaboration with a determined Minneapolis psychotherapist, Trauma Recovery/HAP is bringing treatment and training to San Juan. In the hours following Maria, the Puerto Rican community of Minneapolis learned of the apocalyptic devastation from surviving family, friends and colleagues. A small, diverse group from the community rapidly united to form The Coalición de Boricuas en Minnesota to bring financial and material aid to the archipelago. Boricuas, a colonial-era term meaning “native Puerto Ricans”, conveys the heartfelt identification Minnesota’s Puerto Ricans have with island residents.

Therapist Vanessa Cintrón, MA, stepped forward to co-chair the groups’ Humanitarian committee. Though initially focused on supplying life-sustaining essentials like water filtration, medicine and food, Cintrón wanted to address survivors’ mental suffering as well. She knew the need was urgent when the Puerto Rico chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) announced that there had been 12 suicides in the first week following the storm. Personal experience with the therapeutic benefit of EMDR therapy compelled her to contact Trauma Recovery/HAP and explore bringing this trauma-informed therapy to Puerto Rico.

Grassroots Logistics

Planning the Puerto Rico training began six months ago in collaboration with NASW-Puerto Rico, Neriluz Maldonado, Ph.D, and the Interamerican University- Metropolitan Campus. On June 21, Trauma Recovery/HAP lead a Traumatology and Stabilization workshop at the University for over 100 Puerto Ricans. Trauma Recovery/HAP conducted an EMDR Basic Training Part I on June 22-24. An EMDR Basic Training Part 2 is scheduled for August 10-12. Over 60 clinicians enrolled for the first training. The workshops are nearly free of charge through Trauma Recovery/HAP, while sponsorship from The Coalición de Boricuas en Minnesota provided logistical support and community outreach. The goals for this initiative are:

- To increase awareness of the effects of trauma on children and adults,
- To increase access to trauma healing through EMDR therapy to as many as possible in the San Juan - metro area via the workshop and EMDR training,
- To connect with grassroots non-profits and churches, both those already working with the Coalición and others working in humanitarian relief, to get the word out about the therapy and replicate training to the interior and outlying islands of Puerto Rico in the months ahead, to support underserved communities,
- To establish a sustainable pool of local, trained EMDR clinicians to treat trauma on an on-going basis.

In addition, Cintrón will train with the group so that she can provide EMDR therapy to the many Puerto Rican families resettling in the Minneapolis area. Following training, Cintrón hopes to meet with Taller Salud and follow-up on contacts with Carlos Albizu University, Universidad de Puerto Rico, local churches, and non-profits organizations such as Puerto Rico Cambia, Vieques Love and Puerto Rico Youth at Risk. Vanessa’s passion for service and trauma-informed therapy inspired Cintrón to take action. With the generosity of individuals like Vanessa, these efforts will bring the hope of healing to many in Puerto Rico.