



Trauma Recovery and Resilience for Separated Immigrant Families in Texas

Trauma recovery and resilience has been building at the Texas border for years. In 2008-2009, long time mental health clinician Fabiola Ekleberry, LPC-S, NCC and Cathy Gaytan, EMDR therapist and Director of the EL Paso Child Guidance Center, recognized a desperate need for informed trauma treatment in the El Paso community. El Paso is home to Fort Bliss, the largest installation of US Army Forces Command, and a short walk across the Rio Grande from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, a drug cartel battleground at the time. In the mid-2000s, need for PTSD and trauma treatment was intense for thousands of returning soldiers, citizens and immigrant workers caught in the crossfire of the brutal gang war. The trauma and treatment need has escalated exponentially at the Border, with immigrant family-child separations, and detentions resulting from the United States new Zero Tolerance immigration policy.

Ekleberry trained in EMDR with Trauma Recovery, EMDR Humanitarian Assistance Programs (HAP) in 2009. She recognized the need for trauma-informed therapy within this underserved community. Training and connecting with Trauma Recovery/HAP volunteers like Peggy Moore and fellow trainees inspired Ekleberry. As president of Professional Counselors of El Paso (PCEP), she envisioned an annual conference bringing together research, treatment and humanitarian agencies in workshops to learn and strategize on trauma treatment and resilience

problems. The first Annual Trauma and Resilience in the Borderland Conference was held in 2017.

Network Focused on Trauma Recovery and Resilience

Ekleberry's client work, role in PCEP and on-going relationship with Trauma Recovery/HAP opened connections to like-minded Trauma Recovery/HAP and EMDR-trained mental health professionals, Dee Blinka and Temperance Johnson, as well as academic leaders at the University of Texas, El Paso (UTEP) and senior advocates at border humanitarian relief agencies - Hope Border Institute and Catholic Charities. In collaboration, they have produced two internationally recognized conferences on trauma and resilience, igniting interest in EMDR in the region. This group is the local nucleus spearheading grassroots initiatives to address the family separation/detention crisis.

Milestones and Next Steps

Major milestones and success include being part of the committee planning a recent day-long symposium bringing together mental health professionals, academia, and humanitarian leaders to focus on family separation and detention challenges and responses. While they have not been allowed to see families or children yet, they have achieved significant successes and a means to their goals.

- **Therapist Preparation:** Trauma Recovery/HAP EMDR Therapy Basic Training Part 1 will be held in mid-November for over 50 therapists with the Part 2 scheduled for January. In November, Trauma Recovery/HAP will also provide a Traumatology and Stabilization training, which is open to clinicians and non-clinicians alike. EMDR RTEP/GTEP training refresher will be held in December 2018, to prepare a large body of therapists to treat children and families, thanks to the support of Bishop Mark Seitz of the Catholic Diocese of El Paso where all of the trainings will be hosted.
- **Organizing response:** Mental health and humanitarian aid agencies have united into a cohesive body with on-going communication, collaboration and united response efforts, including access to immigration attorneys, aid organizations providing shelter and food, and demonstrations and marches. Every interaction has led to additional connections to additional assistance leaders and politicians engaged in resolving the crisis.

- **Work with immigration attorneys serving detainees:** a two-pronged effort, bilingual therapists will help attorneys deal with and diffuse the trauma of the children and families they are working with to prepare their cases, rather than further traumatize them through reiteration of their stories. The second prong will train attorneys in self-care to better deal with the exhaustion they are experiencing.
- **Future treatment:** It is believed that working with and through the immigration attorneys at the border will eventually provide direct access to the children in border detention camps.

Trauma Recovery, EMDR Humanitarian Assistance Programs is proud to be working with these inspired mental health leaders, and wish them success and energy as they bring hope to the detainees.