



Southeast Florida TRN: Lightening Trauma's Many Burdens

EMDR clinicians Brian Gong and Larry Shrier, each had considered starting a local trauma recovery network in southeast Florida, but deferred, as Brian said, "it never seemed like anything bad would happen." When the mass shooting occurred at Stoneman Douglas High School, local mental health professionals quickly united to help victims. One organizer, familiar with the success of EMDR therapy in trauma treatment, connected Brian and Larry within days of the shooting, and they immediately sped into action.

Within five days, working with resources and guidance from TR/HAP, they launched the Southeast Florida Trauma Recovery Network, giving the community the ability to request treatment, learn more about the signs of trauma, links to other community resources and an area for member volunteers to enroll and collaborate. Through email, and a Trauma Recovery/HAP early intervention protocols workshop, they were able to enroll 14 EMDR-trained clinician and consultant volunteers to provide pro-bono mental health intervention to Parkland and surrounding communities. Their next task was to gain access to those suffering from this traumatic event.

Initially, working within the school district proved challenging. Since the newly formed TRN was not vetted by the high school, the school district would not allow direct referrals. However, a school social worker and local therapists with knowledge of the effectiveness of EMDR

therapy began connecting students, teachers, and families to the TRN. Currently, the TRN focuses exclusively on providing EMDR trauma therapy to those individuals directly impacted by the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, in pro-bono 90-minute sessions. This TRN team has come together from many areas of Florida, working nights and weekends in the Parkland community, to transform victim despair, stress and anger through house-to-house calls, and office space loaned by doctors and therapists and other venues.

Stunning Success

Brian Gong and Larry Shrier's efforts have resulted in many milestones and healing victories for the Parkland community:

- Over 70 patients, students, teachers, employees and family members treated to date
- One teacher reported feeling 50% better, after one 90-minute session, while others have remarked on getting their life back and regaining the ability to laugh
- 23 EMDR-trained clinicians and consultants have joined the TRN
- Approximately 50 local mental health professionals have now been trained in R-TEP/G-TEP since March
- The first G-TEP therapy session was held on June 10
- Referrals and direct inquiries continue to build through word of mouth and TRN exposure on a high school web page, and other social media sites and groups allied in helping with community trauma recovery.
- Weekly therapist group phone consultations have been established for TRN and other EMDR trained professionals

Lessons Learned

Brian shares these lessons from his experience being shocked into action by a tragic event, and the fulfilling work setting up the TRN has enabled:

- Do not wait to start or join a TRN. The Southeast Florida TRN mobilized quickly, but if we had been operational, we could have reached and helped more people immediately.
- Develop relationships with community mental health agencies, first responders, school districts and municipal officials. The school district bureaucracy prevented access to those afflicted in the first weeks following the shooting. If they had

known and vetted the TRN, work at crisis sites and direct referrals would have begun immediately.

- Use your passion for service and EMDR to power your persistence with mental health and community emergency response agencies, first responders, school districts and other organizations to be a fully functional part of the relief effort. Do not take no for an answer and keep pushing to open doors.