

DISASTER COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK OF PHILADELPHIA

**A PROGRAM OF THE MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
OF SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA**

Program Description Developed By:

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Recovery Mission

The Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania is dedicated to the development, implementation, and dissemination of programs and activities that promote recovery at the individual and community levels among people with mental illnesses and those experiencing psychological distress. Recovery refers to living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life regardless of the constraints associated with an illness or life circumstance. The Disaster Community Support Network is an example of a program that facilitates recovery among individuals and communities affected by traumatic events that have a community impact. The meetings generated through this program provide opportunities for community members to make contributions to others through mutual support, and facilitate hopefulness and self-determination at the individual and community levels following a traumatic community-wide event.

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DISASTER COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK OF PHILADELPHIA

Mission

The Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia (DCSN) has been established by the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP) to create settings in which self-help and mutual aid can occur in response to a traumatic community-wide event. The mission of the DCSN is to establish the groundwork for community meetings to take place in the event of national, state, or local events that impact, either directly or indirectly, Philadelphians and their communities.

The Disaster Community Support Network extends the current array of services that generally target individuals following disasters, and recognizes that disasters impact whole communities as well as individual community members. Disasters disrupt stability and structure by altering normal community economic and social activities. Disasters are associated with a collective sense of loss, grief, depression, and potential change (positive or negative) in community narratives and how people think about the place in which they live.

Community meetings attempt to promote *community* recovery following a disaster by performing two critical tasks¹. Community members are first offered opportunities to fully acknowledge and discuss the event. Second, community members are given an opportunity to restore community equilibrium, including experiencing group loss, making meaning out of the event, and responding to the event in some positive way. The approach for implementing the intervention is based on an empowerment orientation and the notion of “competent community,” in which community members, rather than professionals, lead the intervention. This implementation approach is based on the following principles²: 1) The community is expert in its life and has the ability to determine its best healing approach; 2) The community is viewed as burdened, rather than damaged or broken, by the event; 3) Interventions seek to build on community strengths and resources; 4) The goal is to enhance a community sense of competency and control; and 5) The best outcome is to help the community regain stability and equilibrium.

Community meetings provide opportunities for mutual aid to occur among community members who come together in reaction to similar experiences or circumstances and to address collective grief, fear, sadness, sense of loss; and provide opportunities for healing and empowerment through community action. Community meetings will be scheduled in public, accessible places throughout Philadelphia County. These meetings are expected to involve discussions among community members in which they have the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about the event or events that bring them together, listen to the experiences and reactions of others, and share

¹ Williams, M.B., Zinner, E.S., & Ellis, R.R. (1999). The connection between grief and trauma: An overview. In E.S. Zinner and M.B. Williams (eds.), When a community weeps: Case studies in group survivorship (pp. 3-17). Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel.

² Van den Eynde, J., & Veno, A. (1999). Coping with disastrous events: An empowerment model of community healing. In R. M. Gist & B. Lubin (Eds.) Response to disaster: Psychosocial, community, and ecological approaches (pp. 167-192). Taylor & Francis.

information that may be helpful to others. The meetings could evolve into community organization (e.g., efforts to organize a fund for persons affected by a disaster) or advocacy efforts (e.g., attempts to change laws or policies that they feel could have prevented the disaster or help the community better cope with the disaster). The direction the meeting takes depends on how those in attendance are motivated.

Mutual aid is based on the notion of resilience and community strength. Benefits associated with mutual aid include catharsis (i.e., emotional processing of distressing thoughts and feelings), social support (i.e., emotional support, informational support, feedback, validation, instrumental support), self-confidence and self-esteem from assisting others, and individual and community empowerment from organizing and advocacy efforts that might result from the community gatherings. These community meetings are not “therapy” or a service that specifically focuses on mental health issues. However, information about mental health services will be readily available.

Community meetings are meant to replicate and extend the natural support processes that are omnipresent and become particularly well recognized in response to significant community crisis events. “Community meetings” oftentimes naturally occur after disasters or other community crisis events. These meetings have generally taken the form of prayer meetings or remembrances that are sponsored by religious groups, or “vigils” sponsored by schools or universities. The justification for organizing community meetings facilitated by the DCSN is based on two factors. First, community meetings do not systematically occur after all significant disaster or crisis events. Second, some community members may not feel welcome at these events for various reasons (e.g., do not belong to the particular church, are not students or staff at a particular university or school). The mission of the DCSN is to systematically develop a structure to provide communities with opportunities to meet quickly following an event and to ensure that *all* localities and residents in Philadelphia have an opportunity to participate in a locally run community meeting. The intention is to establish meetings where all community members feel welcome. Multiple meetings will be scheduled throughout Philadelphia and it is anticipated that between 30 and 150 people could be in attendance at any one meeting.

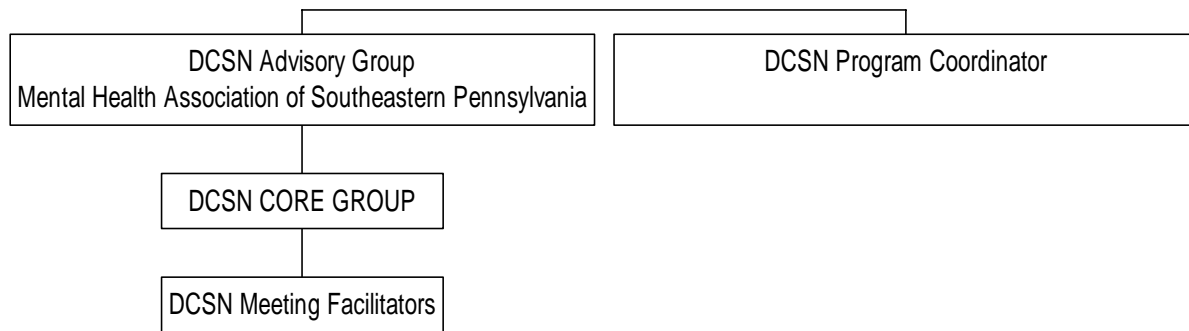
Purpose of this Document

This document describes a community-focused self-help and mutual-aid model that has been developed in Philadelphia to expand the array of programs that are implemented in response to disasters or traumatic events that affect a community. A description of steps taken to implement this program is provided to assist others who might be interested in replicating it elsewhere. For those interested in community-based strategies, this document provides a model for addressing the needs of communities affected by disasters, and procedures for establishing community support networks.

DCSN Structure and Roles

The DCSN is a network of individuals who are prepared to coordinate and facilitate community meetings following a disaster. As can be seen in Figure 1, the DCSN consists of an Advisory Group, Program Coordinator, Core Group, and Meeting Facilitators.

Figure 1: DCSN Structure



DCSN Advisory Group

The DCSN Advisory Group, consisting primarily of MHASP staff, Dr. Salzer, and Susan Edwards, oversaw the development of the program and is responsible for maintaining the vision of the program, providing direction to the DCSN Program Coordinator, and making the decision about when to implement the DCSN in response to an event. The DCSN will meet at least once per year to review and discuss the program. The DCSN Advisory Group will also meet upon request of any team member or the Program Director to discuss urgent issues pertaining to the program or the implementation of the network in response to an event.

DCSN Program Coordinator

The DCSN Program Coordinator is responsible for overseeing and maintaining the network, including the following tasks:

- 1) Schedule and coordinate the yearly meeting of the DCSN Advisory Group;
- 2) Maintain a computerized list of Core Group members;
- 3) Recruit new Core Group members as needed to maintain racial/ethnic and geographic balance in order to ensure that as many local communities are represented as possible;
- 4) Schedule and coordinate the yearly meeting of the Core Group;
- 5) Maintain the Core Group through periodic mailings and other communications;
- 6) Maintain a computerized list of Meeting Facilitators submitted by the Core Group;
- 7) Maintain a computerized list of meeting locations submitted by the Core Group;
- 8) Collect materials that may be distributed at community meetings that are relevant to community needs and the specific disaster or crisis event;
- 9) Contact the Core Group in the event that the network will be activated;
- 10) Schedule and coordinate the training of Meeting Facilitators when needed;
- 11) Assist the Core Group and Meeting Facilitators in tasks associated with making sure the community meetings occur and are successful. For example, provide suggestions for publicizing the meetings, getting space for meetings, etc.

The efforts of a Program Coordinator can be considerable at startup depending on the ease with which Core Group members can be recruited and the oversight needed to ensure that the Core Group fulfills their commitments. Approximately 10-15 hours per week are needed over 3-4 months at startup. Most of the remaining work involves maintenance of 2 hours per week on average unless the network needs to respond to a crisis. The majority of these hours will be spent staying in touch with Core Group members and putting together the yearly meeting.

DCSN Core Group

The DCSN Core Group consists of individuals from throughout the city who have agreed to play major roles in the development of the network. The Core Group is responsible for:

- 1) Identifying places in the community where meetings can be held at no cost;
- 2) Recruiting 3-5 local community members who have agreed to help organize and facilitate groups when needed;
- 3) Working with the Program Coordinator to accomplish their tasks;
- 4) Attending a yearly meeting in which they will review the goal of the DCSN and discuss issues associated with developing and maintaining the network;
- 5) Contacting Facilitators, coordinating meeting locations, and assisting in publicizing the meetings in their communities should the network be activated in response to an event.

The effort of a Core Group member will also be heavier at startup than at any other time depending on how familiar they are with individuals in their community who are willing to volunteer to be Facilitators and how successful they are in getting these individuals to agree to sign on to the network. Approximately 2-10 hours may be needed for them to accomplish their startup tasks and attend a Core Group member meeting. Up to 4 hours per year will be needed for them to fulfill their obligations over time unless the network needs to respond to a crisis.

It is believed that at least 10 Core Group members would be needed for the DCSN to be successful and stable over time (i.e., some members may drop out and new additions will be needed). There is likely no maximum number of Core Group members that could be recruited.

DCSN Meeting Facilitators

The DCSN Meeting Facilitators are local community members who have been identified as having the skills and ability necessary to organize and facilitate community meetings. However, no special clinical skills or training are required. These individuals are not providing mental health treatment; their primary role is to assist in scheduling meetings and providing some initial direction and a formal ending to the meetings. Their responsibilities are:

- 1) To maintain contact with the Core Group member who got them involved at least once per year;
- 2) To be available to attend a training session on how to organize and facilitate community meetings in response to disasters when it appears that a community meeting is needed;

- 3) To work closely with their Core Group member to schedule and facilitate local community meetings when called upon.

The Meeting Facilitators will not be required to expend any effort unless the network is activated in response to a crisis. We have chosen not to offer training to the Facilitators proactively for a number of reasons. First, we expect some degree of turnover that would require repeated training over the years. Such continuous training would be time-consuming. Second, it is expected that there will be infrequent need for the network and that if training were provided it might not be recalled for use when meetings actually occur. Third, not offering training decreases the time burden that may inhibit some individuals from volunteering.

DCSN Community Meetings

Activating the Network and Initiating Community Meetings

The DCSN will be activated following the occurrence of a distressing event that impacts a community. The event could be at the national, state, city or local level (e.g., an event that impacts a specific community in Philadelphia). The decision to activate the network will be made by the DCSN Advisory Team. The criteria for making this decision include the belief that the event has had an extreme impact on the community as a whole and that the community meetings will have a positive impact on the community. The network can be activated citywide or in local neighborhoods. Core Group members can contact the DCSN Program Coordinator if they think that community meetings are needed. Core Group members are more likely to be aware of local events and local needs that may benefit from the initiation of community meetings.

The Program Coordinator is responsible for contacting Core Group members if the network is being activated. He or she will inform them of the date, time, and place of the Facilitator training and instruct them to:

- A) Begin contacting the Facilitators;
- B) Secure space for the meetings;
- C) Work with the Facilitators and Program Coordinator to publicize the community meetings.

It is anticipated that it will take between 1 and 3 weeks to activate the network, schedule community meetings, train Facilitators, and hold the community meetings. This is appropriate given that this program is not intended to address the acute stress associated with disasters. Instead the goal is to facilitate community healing and potential action that may not be possible immediately following an event.

Facilitator Training

All Meeting Facilitators will attend a training in which they will be oriented to the mission of the DCSN and purpose of the community meetings. They will also receive training in basic group skills and potential strategies for how to deal with problematic situations that may arise, as well as a description of the community meeting agenda and suggested instructions to be read at the beginning and end of the meetings. The training manual for Meeting Facilitators can be found in Appendix A. It is anticipated

that the training, led by the Program Coordinator, will occur within 2 weeks of the activation of the network and that the community meetings will occur between 1 and 3 weeks afterwards.

Target Group

Community meetings will be open to all age groups, the only stipulation being that participants cannot be disruptive. Adolescents and children are not expected to attend these meetings in high numbers. However, the attendance of adolescents and children should not be discouraged. They are also members of the community and can learn about how to express and deal with potentially strong emotions from the adults in attendance and participate in generating ideas for community action. It is also assumed that children under 14 will likely attend with an adult who can provide the necessary support and guidance.

Meeting Space

It is recommended that the meetings be held in a well-recognized community meeting space such as a local church, library or school. The space should be accessible by public transportation and have ample parking. Also, safety issues should be considered, such as adequate streetlights in the area surrounding the venue. Meeting spaces that are accessible to persons with physical disabilities should be identified. The space should be large enough for at least 30 people. It is unclear how many people may attend the community meetings. Facilitators must be aware of the room occupancy designated by local fire officials and will be given suggestions for how to deal with situations when the room capacity may not be enough to handle the interest. The DCSN is seeking spaces that are free for public use. However, it is plausible that some paid space may be made available without charge following a disaster.

Publicizing Meetings

During the startup phase the Program Coordinator will have developed a list of media outlets and information for publicizing events. The Core Group members will also provide a list of local papers for a particular community. Sample announcements and flyers will also be developed. The Core Group may make changes to local flyers to make them most appropriate for their specific community. The Program Coordinator will provide the resources for duplication and will be responsible for submitting the announcements to the previously identified media outlets. Coordination may be needed with governmental agencies and the American Red Cross. Lists of newspapers and other media sources as well as contact information can be found in Appendix B.

Community Meeting Structure and Process

The Facilitator's primary role is to start and end the meeting. Facilitators will also be encouraged to facilitate group process as needed. However, it is anticipated that the meeting will take on a "life of its own" following a potentially awkward start in which there will likely be a long period of silence following the statement made by the Facilitator. At this point the community members in attendance will take over responsibility for the group and take the meeting in the direction that they feel meets

their needs. The theory underlying this approach is that communities and community members are acknowledged to have many strengths, to be resilient, to have implicit and explicit knowledge about the needs of their particular community, and to have naturally developed (as opposed to professionally developed) mutual aid behaviors.

The community meetings are not intended to be a structured or manualized intervention with prescribed activities. Instead, the attempt is to create an environment that allows the community members in attendance to take the meeting in a direction that best suits their particular needs. However, some structure may be helpful to assist community members in having a positive and productive meeting.

It is recommended that the community meetings be segmented into three parts to provide:

- 1) An opportunity for community members to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences – Some community members may feel the need to express themselves publicly and obtain support and validation. Others may attend just to listen to other people and to provide support, as well as possibly to validate their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences without having to speak publicly.
- 2) An opportunity for community dialogue and support in reaction to the comments made by others – This part of the meeting provides opportunities for dialogue and mutual aid in direct response to others or to the community.
- 3) An opportunity to propose community action in response to the disaster and its impact on the community – Community members may desire an outlet for actively responding to events that may enhance their sense of empowerment as well as the opportunity to provide instrumental (i.e., goods, services, resources) support.

It is recognized that some community members in attendance may express extremely strong emotions or show evidence of psychological distress. Materials will be provided at each meeting about free mental health services available in the community. The Meeting Facilitators will also be offered suggestions for constructively dealing with intense emotions and how they might be expressed. Community meetings are not mental health treatment and are not meant to replace mental health services or serve a “crisis intervention” function in response to disasters.

Facilitator Role in the Meeting

Community meetings will be scheduled at times that are most accessible to a broad range of people. Facilitators should arrive early to ensure that the meeting space is open and accessible, to place materials and information that community members may desire in an easy-to-reach place, and to greet individuals. A Facilitator plays an important role right from the start by greeting people in a warm and friendly way as they arrive. This immediate connection helps people feel welcome, and, it is hoped, comfortable participating. Facilitators can model good listening by maintaining eye contact with each speaker, remembering to be appreciative of anyone who speaks, and occasionally thanking people for sharing their thoughts. The Facilitator will read an initial statement welcoming people to the community meeting, informing them about the structure and purpose of the meeting, and setting ground rules for behavior.

Beginning Meetings

We recommend starting meetings with the following statement:

*The Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia will result in dozens of community meetings like this one taking place throughout the city in order to help communities and individuals react and respond to recent events. These meetings are an opportunity for the people of Philadelphia to come together in our own neighborhoods to **share our thoughts and feelings**. A community coming together in the face of a crisis reminds us that we are strong enough to face the most difficult tests. We can also share information we have to offer. We can dispel rumors, let others know about resources we are aware of, etc. This meeting also provides an opportunity for our community to respond to recent events together. Everyone here, or a subgroup, could consider concrete ways to help, or to speak out as a community about issues we feel strongly about. There are many ways we could act.*

*Here are some important ground rules if this meeting is to serve its purpose. Each one of us needs to **speak respectfully**, even to people we disagree strongly with. We need to **listen carefully** to one another. Everyone has reasons they think the way they do, so we should seek to understand, not to judge. And, most important, we need to all **observe confidentiality**. That means that nothing that is said at this meeting should be repeated anywhere else unless you get the speaker's permission to do so. That will make it possible for people to speak freely and get the most benefit from being here.*

The meeting will begin with an opportunity for community members to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Some community members may feel the need to express themselves publicly and obtain support and validation. Others may want to just listen to other people. During this part of the meeting I will discourage explicit reactions to comments made by another; I will also discourage any interactions between or among participants.

Once it appears that everyone has had an opportunity to speak I will move us to the next phase of the meeting, during which community members can react to what others have said and provide support in reaction to the comments made by others. Finally, the last phase of the meeting will be an opportunity for community members to join together in proposing community action in response to the disaster and its impact on the community.

This meeting can go until ___ o'clock. But if there are those who want to meet again to talk or take some action, we will need to end this meeting about 20 minutes before that. That way, those who are interested can agree upon when and where to get together again, and exchange names and numbers. So keep that in mind. I will check in at 30 minutes before our end time to see if there are some of you who want to do that.

Bathrooms can be found at _____.

The introductory statement made by the Facilitator is strongly recommended, as it provides structure for the meeting and lays out some important ground rules about meeting conduct. However, we appreciate that every situation will differ depending on the Facilitator's style, community makeup, size of the group, etc. Clearly, if there are over 20 people present, a Facilitator may decide not to have introductions, but ask people to identify themselves by name and where they live when they speak. If there are fewer people in attendance, participants can be invited to introduce themselves. If there are not too many participants, a Facilitator could add something to the introductions, such as "something that gives you hope right now." If people arrive late, a Facilitator might stop and ask them to introduce themselves at a point when it won't interrupt the flow of the meeting too much. It is helpful if the Facilitator can remember the names of those present and call on them by name. This will help others to learn each other's names too. One aid is to jot down people's names in their positions in the room, if the group is not too large.

Ending Meetings

Approximately 30 minutes before the scheduled end of the meeting, remember to ask whether any people in the group would like to meet again. (You might ask someone at the beginning to watch the time for you and alert you when 30 minutes remain.) If there is an interest in meeting again, close the meeting with the statement below and release those who are not staying to plan another meeting. If there is no interest in meeting again, let the meeting continue until almost the end time. Then you can close the meeting with a statement such as:

I am reluctant to step in, but our time is up. I want to thank everyone who has participated, whether or not you have chosen to speak. Your presence here has been part of helping us all feel less alone. A crisis like this can take so much out of us; it can make us feel frightened and powerless. But just by coming out here tonight, we have seen that together we can cope with this. We have a strength we may not have known we had. There are information sheets available that tell you where you can access other resources, such as free or low-cost counseling as well as other services. Please help yourself to these. Remember to keep in close touch with your neighbors and friends as we all go through this together.

Establishing the DCSN

The DCSN emerged out of the initial efforts of MHASP staff who recognized the utility of self-help in response to disasters. These individuals responded to a request for proposals from the United Way for programs to assist communities in their preparation for responding to disasters. The proposal submitted by MHASP was funded and MHASP staff began their preparations to implement a program by consulting with various community members, including Dr. Mark Salzer, a clinical psychologist and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Salzer conducts research and provides technical assistance in the area of peer

support services and has a particular interest in the role of peer support interventions in response to disasters³.

After further collaborative development of the DCSN model, MHASP subcontracted with Dr. Salzer to establish the DCSN and generate documentation and training information. Dr. Salzer hired a temporary Program Coordinator, Susan Edwards, who has significant experience as a community organizer. Ms. Edwards was responsible for recruiting Core Group members, ensuring that they accomplished their tasks, and assisting in the development of the training manual for Meeting Facilitators (Appendix A).

Efforts to develop the DCSN began in September 2002. We used a snowball approach to recruit Core Group members. One contact often led to another and that to another. It is useful to begin with recommendations from people. We started with names and contact information provided by the DCSN Advisory Group and then requested additional names from those who were contacted as well as identifying other potential Core Group sources (e.g., churches, community groups). We then added some “cold calls” to organizations that we found on the Internet. We searched on the Web for *community development corporations, civic associations, community councils, block captains’ organizations, neighborhood associations*, and similar phrases, which produced many prospects. We also contacted city government and other agencies that might have an interest in our efforts, such as the Commission on Human Relations and community relations officials in local police districts. We talked to people at other organizations in the disaster response field, such as the American Red Cross or Salvation Army or hospitals, to alert them to what was being established and suggest that the network be included in their comprehensive plans.

We found that those most interested in joining this effort had some of the following characteristics:

- Active in the mental health field (particularly in the self-help movement);
- Active in community organizations and advocacy groups;
- Work in the helping professions, such as social workers;
- Work with citywide volunteer organizations such as senior citizen advocates;
- Immigrant rights activists and ethnic group advocates (these may also provide connections to bilingual facilitators);
- Pastors, rabbis, imams, and other leaders of religious congregations;
- Involved in (or staff of) citywide faith organizations, including interfaith groups and religiously based social service organizations.
- Work with women’s and children’s issues and family service centers
- University or college departments of social work or service learning offices

We also recruited Core Group members by attempting to get the DCSN mentioned in newsletters (including online newsletters) of any of the above organizations and listing it in Web sites designed to link volunteers with volunteer opportunities.

³ Salzer, M. S., & Bickman, L. (1999). The short- and long-term psychological impact of disasters: Implications for mental health interventions and policy. In R. M. Gist & B. Lubin (Eds.) Response to disaster: Psychosocial, community, and ecological approaches (pp. 63-82). Taylor & Francis.

In three months Ms. Edwards contacted almost 150 individuals/organizations in the Philadelphia area, made over 350 phone calls, and sent out 90 written summaries describing the program and Core Group member responsibilities. Twenty-four people agreed to serve as Core Group members. This outcome was well over and above the expectation of 10-15 and is likely a testament to the DCSN concept as well as Ms. Edwards' excellent abilities in carrying out her duties. Ms. Edwards' most important skills were her enthusiasm for the DCSN, positive attitude, perseverance, ability to communicate verbally with a wide range of people, and easygoing yet tenacious personality. These skills and characteristics may be helpful to others who want to implement a similar program.

Ms. Edwards then worked closely with the Core Group members to ensure that they were fulfilling their responsibilities. These efforts included follow-up phone calls and reminder letters, as well as being available to discuss strategies for accomplishing their tasks. An Excel database was created to keep track of Core Group members and Meeting Facilitator information as well as the details about potential meeting spaces. Miscellaneous materials, including a brochure, letters to Core Group members, and other correspondence, are included in Appendix C.

Appendix A

MEETING FACILITATORS' TRAINING CURRICULUM

by Susan C. Edwards and Mark Salzer, Ph.D.

For the Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia (DCSN)

Overview of Manual

This manual is designed for a trainer to use in preparing community volunteers (“trainees”) to be Facilitators of community meetings following a disaster. The plan is for this training to take place as soon as possible after a disaster or crisis that causes the DCSN Advisory Group to activate the network. Within a week or two of being trained, the trainees will lead the community meetings that will take place in a number of neighborhoods in Philadelphia under the auspices of the Disaster Community Support Network.

To the greatest extent possible, the learning model used in this curriculum is learner based rather than leader driven. It is based upon the belief that learners attain the highest understanding when they are active participants in developing new knowledge. The length of time spent on each section is only an estimate; actual time may vary depending on the group being trained and the trainer.

The training will consist of four sections. Section 1 will focus on the philosophy and purpose of the DCSN. Section 2 will provide an experiential learning experience in which the Facilitators-in-training are asked to draw from their own experience and share what they think community members will need following a disaster. The leader will respond by suggesting, and asking participants to suggest, how this project might meet those needs. As the participants contribute their knowledge and experience, it is hoped that they will take ownership of the understanding rather than being passive recipients.

The trainees will then participate in an actual community meeting similar to what will take place in the community. They will not only be learning by doing, but will also begin to process their own experiences. In addition, the group experience will be used to discuss facilitation skills and strategies and group process.

Section 3 of the training first offers a brief summary of what is known about the experience of trauma and people’s responses to it. The trainees’ observations should be solicited to add to what is presented to them. Self-help group principles will then be laid out. Following that, the proposed structure of the community meetings will be described.

Section 4 is devoted to working on facilitation skills, from greeting people as they arrive through handling a variety of situations to ending the meeting on a positive note. Wherever appropriate, the leader will use role-play to simulate various situations that may be encountered, such as responding to a dominant speaker or interruptions.

Section 1: GOALS AND INTRODUCTIONS [15 minutes]

Note to trainer: The intent is to strive for inclusion of trainees' understanding and experiences along with presenting information. It is hoped that trainees will come away with the realization that the community meetings will play an important role in the healing of the community, and that what seems like a simple act of listening to one another is a powerful step towards community healing and empowerment.

Introduction to DCSN

Welcome! The Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia (DCSN) grew from the observation that talk and emotional connection among community members who are going through similar circumstances is in itself beneficial. The very act of opening up and sharing thoughts and feelings with other human beings has a healing effect. In fact, it has been observed that people are often able to think more clearly about what they need to do once they have had an opportunity to talk about their experiences and feelings. In the case of a major crisis, many people will want to speak with others, and others will want to listen to others, to validate their own thoughts and feelings. So it is fitting that there be a framework in place to assist people in coming together. The role of Facilitators is to see that these groups function well and that participants feel safe and supported and are encouraged to communicate with one another in an atmosphere of empathic listening.

Goals of Training

This training has three parts. (1) Facilitators will take part in a model meeting: a chance to share their experiences among a group of their peers; (2) There will be information presented on the emotional impact of crises, people's needs following trauma, and self-help principles; (3) Facilitators will acquire and practice skills to prepare them to lead a community meeting.

Introductions

The DCSN was set up to meet in as many Philadelphia neighborhoods as possible. There should be Facilitators here from Center City, North Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, Northwest Philadelphia, the Northeast, and other areas of the city. Check by a show of hands what areas of the city people are from.

At this point, the Facilitators (and Core Group members, if any) are asked to give their names and where they live. The trainer may choose to add other information to the introductions to make them more personal.

Section 2: COMMUNITY NEEDS FOLLOWING A DISASTER

Note to trainer: In this part of the training, it is intended that trainees will consider community needs following a disaster, including needs related to collective fear, grief, anger, and loss.

Community Needs Following a Disaster [½ hour]

The trainees will brainstorm together about what communities need when there has been a tragedy of major proportions. These can be recorded on a flipchart at the front of the room. This list might include such things as opportunities to share feelings, to connect, to counter isolation, to get accurate information, to come up with ways to take

action that will alleviate problems, etc. The leader and participants will then consider ways that the DCSN might meet some of those needs.

Model Community Meeting [1 – 1 ½ hours]

Note to trainer: In the model meeting, it is important to welcome all forms of expression and to encourage participants to offer support to one another as needed. They will experience together the power of attentive listening, which the trainer will seek to exemplify.

Trainees will then be introduced to the structure and purpose of the community meeting. The Facilitators will be told that their primary role is to start and end the meeting. They will also be encouraged to facilitate group process as needed. However, it is anticipated that the meeting will take on a “life of its own” following a potentially awkward start in which there will likely be a long period of silence following the statement made by the Facilitator. At this point the community members in attendance assume responsibility for the group and take it in the direction that they feel meets their needs. The theory underlying this approach is that communities and community members are acknowledged to have many strengths, to be resilient, to have implicit and explicit knowledge about the needs of their particular community, and to have naturally developed (as opposed to professionally developed) mutual aid behaviors.

The community meetings are not intended to be a structured or manualized intervention with prescribed activities. Instead, the attempt is to create an environment that allows those community members in attendance to take the meeting in a direction that best suits their particular needs. However, some structure may be helpful to assist community members in having a positive and productive meeting. It is recommended that the community meetings be segmented into three parts to provide:

- 1) An opportunity for community members to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences – Some community members may feel the need to express themselves publicly and obtain support and validation. Others may attend just to listen to others and to provide support, as well as possibly validate their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences without having to speak publicly.
- 2) An opportunity for community dialogue and support in reaction to the comments made by others – This part of the meeting provides opportunities for dialogue and mutual aid in direct response to others or to the community.
- 3) An opportunity to propose community action in response to the disaster and its impact on the community – Community members may desire an outlet for actively responding to events that may enhance their sense of empowerment as well as the opportunity to provide instrumental (i.e., goods, services, resources) support.

A community meeting will then take place. The trainer will read the initial statement welcoming participants to the community meeting, informing them about the structure and purpose of the meeting, and setting ground rules for behavior. The initial opening statement will include the following points:

- Everything that is said is completely confidential.
- Participants should refrain from monopolizing time.
- The first part of the meeting will not involve responses by others to an individual's thoughts.

- Community members should listen attentively without interruptions, comments, or advice.
- Community members should strive not to be judgmental.

We recommend starting meetings with the following statement:

*The Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia will result in dozens of community meetings like this one taking place throughout the city in order to help communities and individuals react and respond to recent events. These meetings are an opportunity for the people of Philadelphia to come together in our own neighborhoods to **share our thoughts and feelings**. A community coming together in the face of a crisis reminds us that we are strong enough to face the most difficult tests. We can also share information we have to offer. We can dispel rumors, let others know about resources we are aware of, etc. This meeting also provides an opportunity for our community to respond to recent events together. Everyone here, or a subgroup, could consider concrete ways to help, or to speak out as a community about issues we feel strongly about. There are many ways we could act.*

*Here are some important ground rules if this meeting is to serve its purpose. Each one of us needs to **speak respectfully**, even to people we disagree strongly with. We need to **listen carefully** to one another. Everyone has reasons they think the way they do, so we should seek to understand, not to judge. And, most important, we need to all **observe confidentiality**. That means that nothing that is said at this meeting should be repeated anywhere else unless you get the speaker's permission to do so. That will make it possible for people to speak freely and get the most benefit from being here.*

The meeting will begin with an opportunity for community members to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Some community members may feel the need to express themselves publicly and obtain support and validation. Others may want to just listen. During this part of the meeting I will discourage explicit reactions to comments made by another or to generate interactions.

Once it appears that everyone has had an opportunity to speak I will move us to the next phase of the meeting, during which community members can react to what others have said and provide support in reaction to the comments made by others. Finally, the last phase of the meeting will be an opportunity for community members to join together in proposing community action in response to the disaster and its impact on the community.

This meeting can go until ___ o'clock. But if there are those who want to meet again to talk or take some action, we will need to end this meeting about 20 minutes before that. That way, those who are interested can agree when and where to get together again, and exchange names and numbers. So keep that in mind. I will check in at 30 minutes before our end time to see if there are some of you who want to do that.

Bathrooms can be found at _____.

The trainees will form a circle (if they are not already in one) and each person will have an opportunity to share his or her story, experiences and fears as well as hopes and knowledge. The leader should also take a turn, perhaps leading off as an example of what is intended. Once the leader has checked that everyone who would like to has had a chance to speak, s/he will indicate that the meeting is opened up for dialogue, with the proviso that no one person or two-way exchange should dominate the conversation. Participants can react or respond to what has been said, and the leader will remind anyone who might need reminding about the ground rules.

When the time available for the model community meeting has been used up or when the leader senses that the dialogue has come to a natural ending point, s/he will ask for participants' observations about his or her facilitation. This is a time for the trainees to notice what the leader did to keep the conversation on track and to follow the stated expectations. They might add questions or comments on how to handle any situations that might come up when they are facilitating.

[BREAK for 15 mins.]

Section 3: PHILOSOPHY OF THE DISASTER COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK
[½ hour]

Note to trainer: In this section, it is hoped that the trainees will gain a deeper understanding of how people respond to trauma. It is important to encourage questions and discussion.

Understanding Trauma

Although the community meetings are not intended to be a mental health treatment, it is important for facilitators to understand psychological and community responses following a disaster.

A disaster might be defined as “the occurrence or immediate threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property resulting from any natural cause or cause of human origin.” Human-caused disasters are likely to have more complex and long-lasting effects than natural ones. Perhaps this is because they shake the very foundations not just of our feelings of safety but, even more disturbing, our sense of how we hope and expect humans will act. It is distressing to be faced with human beings committing horrific acts against other human beings.

At the individual level, traumatic stress reactions can include intense fear and a sense of helplessness and horror. People may experience psychological numbness, insomnia, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, sexual dysfunction, flashbacks, hyper-arousal, debilitating anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and even psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations.

Such negative responses are all the more likely if certain factors are present. These include other stressors such as fatigue, cold, hunger, or continuing fear of danger; lack of ongoing emotional and social support; lack of information; and interference with self-determination. It should also be noted that those who have previously encountered

trauma in their lives, such as abuse, might experience a relapse in their psychological health even though they had made progress in treating the earlier hurts.

Positive factors that mitigate negative responses include social support, successful mastery of past disasters, and information about the emergency and the reasons for actions that are taken. It helps people to cope if they come up with ways, however, small, to participate in rebuilding or to help others. Keeping in touch with friends, returning to routines, keeping things simple for a while, and taking part in ceremonies that pay tribute and bring people together are also therapeutic. It is important that people not pretend that things are okay when they are not and that they accept that all of their feelings are normal and fine. People may need to be reminded that expressing all of their range of feelings is part of the healing process.

It also helps to notice that disasters are also associated with positive responses. Many people respond by rising to great heights of altruism and heroism — almost as if they are trying to balance with goodness the magnitude of the evil they have experienced or witnessed. Disasters can bring a community together and can bring out degrees of resilience and strength that no one knew were possible.

The Disaster Community Support Network recognizes that disasters also impact the community as a whole. Disasters disrupt stability and structure by altering normal community economic and social activities and are associated with a collective sense of loss, grief, depression, and potential change (positive or negative) in community narratives and how people think about the place in which they live.

Community meetings attempt to promote community recovery following a disaster by performing two tasks: First, community members are offered opportunities to fully acknowledge and discuss the event. Second, community members are given an opportunity to restore community equilibrium, including experiencing group loss, making meaning out of the event, and responding to the event in some positive way. The approach for implementing the intervention is based on an empowerment orientation and the notion of the “competent community,” in which community members lead the intervention. This implementation approach is based on the following principles: 1) The community is expert in its life and has the ability to determine its best healing approach; 2) The community is viewed as oppressed, rather than damaged or broken, by the event; 3) Interventions seek to build on community strengths and resources; 4) the goal is to enhance a community sense of competency and control; and 5) The best outcome is to help the community regain-attain stability and equilibrium.

Community meetings provide opportunities for mutual aid to occur among community members who come together in reaction to similar experiences or circumstances; to address collective grief, fear, sadness, sense of loss; and to provide opportunities for healing and empowerment through community action. Community meetings will be scheduled in public, accessible places throughout Philadelphia County. These meetings are expected to involve discussions among community members in which they have the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about the event or events that bring them together, listen to the experiences and reactions of others, and share information that may be helpful to others. The meetings could evolve into community organization (for example, efforts to organize a fund for persons affected by a disaster)

or advocacy efforts (for example, attempts to change laws or policies that they feel could have prevented the disaster or help the community better cope with the disaster). The direction the meeting takes depends on how those in attendance are motivated.

Mutual aid is based on the notion of resilience and community strength. Benefits associated with mutual aid include catharsis (i.e., emotional processing of distressing thoughts and feelings), social support (i.e., emotional support, informational support, feedback, validation, instrumental support), self-confidence and self-esteem from assisting others, and individual and community empowerment from organizing and advocacy efforts that might result from the community gatherings. These community meetings are not “therapy” or a service that specifically focuses on mental health issues. However, information about mental health services will be readily available.

These community meetings are meant to replicate and extend the natural community support processes that are omnipresent and become particularly well recognized in response to significant community crisis events. Community meetings similar to what we propose have occurred frequently in the past after disasters or other community crisis events. These meetings have generally taken the form of prayer meetings or remembrances that are sponsored by religious groups, or “vigils” sponsored by schools or universities. Multiple meetings will be scheduled throughout Philadelphia and it is anticipated that between 30 and 150 people could be in attendance at any one meeting.

The justification for the community meetings sponsored by the DCSN is based on two factors: 1) Community meetings do not systematically occur after all significant disaster or crisis events; and 2) Some community members may not feel welcome at these events for various reasons (e.g., they do not belong to the particular church or are not students or staff at a particular university or school). The mission of the DCSN is to systematically develop a structure to provide communities with opportunities to meet quickly following an event and to ensure that all localities in Philadelphia have an opportunity to participate in a locally run community meeting. The intention is to establish meetings where all community members feel welcome.

UNDERSTANDING SELF-HELP [1/2 hour]

Note to trainer: In this section, the goal is to deepen the Facilitators’ understanding of how self-help groups can address people’s needs. There will also be an explanation of the logistics of network meetings. Participants’ ideas about how to maximize participation in the meetings are to be solicited.

Self-Help Group Principles

Self-help group members provide emotional support to one another, learn new ways to cope, discover strategies for improving their condition, and help others while helping themselves.

Why do people attend self-help groups? In self-help groups, members find other individuals much like themselves who are able to share feelings, which provides catharsis. It seems to help people to know that their reactions are similar to others’, and that their feelings are not unusual but are shared by others. People also gain practical insights from other people’s first-hand experience with the same situation. Members provide one another with resources such as information about where to go for specific

kinds of help. People gain self-esteem from helping others. It allows them to step outside of their own troubles and to feel useful. It is profoundly gratifying to be able to offer help to others.

By offering a resource to anyone in the community, self-help groups strengthen a whole community's ability to cope and to heal. Bringing people together offers the potential for group action or advocacy efforts, which empower both individuals and the community.

It is important that members know what they can expect from the group. Self-help groups focus upon providing comfort and emotional support, practical information, education and sometimes advocacy. This should be made clear to members. Facilitators should state clearly that, while the group may prove therapeutic, it does not offer, nor is it intended to be a substitute for, professional advice or treatment for individual reactions to the disaster.

Activating the Network and Community Meeting Structure

The DCSN will be activated in the event of the occurrence of a distressing event that impacts a community. The event could be at the national, state, city or local level (e.g., an event that impacts a specific community in Philadelphia). The decision to activate the network will be made by the DCSN Advisory Team. The criteria for making this decision include the belief that the event has had an extreme impact on the community as a whole and that the community meetings will have a positive impact on the community. The network can be activated throughout the city or locally. Core Group members can contact the DCSN Program Coordinator if they think that community meetings are needed. Core Group members are more likely to be aware of local events and local needs that may benefit from the initiation of community meetings.

The Program Coordinator is responsible for contacting Core Group members if the network is being activated. S/he will inform them of the date, time, and place of the Facilitator training and instruct them to:

- A) Begin contacting the Facilitators;
- B) Secure space for the meetings;
- C) Work with the Facilitators and Program Coordinator to publicize the community meetings.

The community meetings of the Disaster Community Support Network will be advertised as being open to anyone in the community who is looking for support and encouragement or who is feeling under stress due to the crisis. The Advisory Group will provide a template for announcements or flyers about the community meetings. These can be adjusted as needed by the Core Group members and/or Facilitators to suit a particular neighborhood (e.g., translating it into other languages if necessary). The announcements will have been finalized in advance except for time and place. The Program Coordinator will duplicate these announcements, and they will be posted in each neighborhood and, if there is time, submitted to local newspapers by that area's Core Group members and Facilitators. The Program Coordinator will also arrange for generalized announcements to be made, offering a phone number for people to call to find out where in their neighborhood a meeting will take place. Some of this publicity may be coordinated with the American Red Cross.

It is recommended that the meetings be held in a well-recognized community meeting space such as a local church, library or school. It should be accessible by public transportation and have ample parking. Also, safety issues should be considered, such as adequate streetlights in the area surrounding the venue. Meeting spaces that are accessible to persons with physical disabilities should be identified. The space should be large enough for at least 30 people. It is unclear how many people may attend the community meetings. Facilitators must be aware of the maximum room occupancy designated by local fire officials and will be given suggestions for how to deal with situations when the room capacity may not be enough to handle the interest. The DCSN is seeking spaces that are free for public use. However, it is plausible that some paid space may be made available without charge following a disaster.

Community meetings will be scheduled at times that are most accessible to a broad range of people. Facilitators should arrive early to ensure that the meeting space is open and accessible, to place materials and information that community members may desire in an easy-to-reach place, and to greet individuals.

The Facilitator will read an initial statement welcoming participants to the community meeting, informing them about the structure and purpose of the meeting, and setting ground rules for behavior. The Facilitator's primary role is to start and end the meeting. Facilitators will also be encouraged to facilitate group process as needed. However, it is anticipated that the meeting will take on a "life of its own" following a potentially awkward start in which there will likely be a long period of silence following the statement made by the Facilitator. At this point the community members in attendance take over responsibility for the group and take it in the direction that they feel meets their needs. The theory underlying this approach is that communities and community members are acknowledged to have many strengths, to be resilient, to have implicit and explicit knowledge about the needs of their particular community, and to have naturally (as opposed to professionally) developed mutual aid behaviors.

It is recognized that some community members in attendance may express extremely strong emotions or show evidence of psychological distress. Materials will be provided at each meeting about no-cost mental health services available in the community. The Meeting Facilitators will also be offered suggestions for constructively dealing with intense emotions and how they might be expressed. Community meetings are not mental health treatment and are not meant to replace mental health services or serve a "crisis intervention" function in response to disasters.

Section 4: FACILITATION SKILLS [1/2 hour]

Note to trainer: This section offers Facilitators specific tools they can use to help the meetings go well. The goal is to help them develop a sense of ease from anticipating and considering in advance how to respond to situations that may come up when they are responsible for a group. Role-plays and brainstorming are highly encouraged.

Getting started

A Facilitator plays an important role right from the start by greeting people in a warm and friendly way as they arrive. This immediate connection helps people feel welcome.

This may also be a time for getting contact information from participants, unless it is planned to do this at the end before they leave. It may also be decided to provide contact information for the Facilitator and Core Group member in case participants want to call them after the meeting.

The Facilitator starts the meeting as close as possible to the announced starting time. A good way to start is to describe the DCSN, state the purpose of the group, explain how long the meeting will last, indicate where bathrooms can be found, and give the ground rules — confidentiality, being nonjudgmental, and listening attentively. In order for a self-help group to be effective, members must feel comfortable about disclosing personal and sensitive information, so it is important to be clear about the expectations. The Facilitator can model good listening by maintaining eye contact with each speaker, keeping an appreciative expression, and occasionally thanking people for sharing their thoughts.

Participants are then invited to introduce themselves, giving their names and where they live. If people arrive late, stop and ask for their introductions at a point when it won't interrupt the flow of the meeting too much. It is helpful if the Facilitator can remember the names of those present and call on them by name. This will help others to learn each other's names, too. One aid in this is to jot down people's names in their positions in the room — if the group is not too large!

Guiding the meeting

We recommend starting meetings with the following statement:

*The Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia will result in dozens of community meetings like this one taking place throughout the city in order to help communities and individuals react and respond to recent events. These meetings are an opportunity for the people of Philadelphia to come together in our own neighborhoods to **share our thoughts and feelings**. A community coming together in the face of a crisis reminds us that we are strong enough to face the most difficult tests. We can also share information we have to offer. We can dispel rumors, let others know about resources we are aware of, etc. This meeting also provides an opportunity for our community to respond to recent events together. Everyone here, or a subgroup, could consider concrete ways to help, or to speak out as a community about issues we feel strongly about. There are many ways we could act.*

*Here are some important ground rules if this meeting is to serve its purpose. Each one of us needs to **speak respectfully**, even to people we disagree strongly with. We need to **listen carefully** to one another. Everyone has reasons they think the way they do, so we should seek to understand, not to judge. And, most important, we need to all **observe confidentiality**. That means that nothing that is said at this meeting should be repeated anywhere else unless you get the speaker's permission to do so. That will make it possible for people to speak freely and get the most benefit from being here.*

The meeting will begin with an opportunity for community members to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences – Some community members may feel the need to express themselves publicly and obtain support and validation. Others may want to just listen to other speakers. During this part of the meeting I will discourage explicit reactions to comments made by another; I will also discourage any interactions between or among participants.

Once it appears that everyone has had an opportunity to speak I will move us to the next phase of the meeting, during which community members can react to what others have said and provide support in reaction to the comments made by others. Finally, the last phase of the meeting will be an opportunity for community members to join together in proposing community action in response to the disaster and its impact on the community.

This meeting can go until ___ o'clock. But if there are those who want to meet again to talk or take some action, we will need to end this meeting about 20 minutes before that. That way, those who are interested can agree when and where to get together again, and exchange names and numbers. So keep that in mind. I will check in at 30 minutes before our end time to see if there are some of you who want to do that.

Bathrooms can be found at _____.

The introductory statement made by the Facilitator is strongly recommended as it provides structure for the meeting and lays out some important ground rules about meeting conduct. However, we appreciate that situations will differ depending on the Facilitator's style, community makeup, size of the group, etc. Clearly, if there are over 20 people present, you may decide not to have introductions, but ask people to identify themselves by name and where they live when they speak. If there are fewer people in attendance, participants can be invited to introduce themselves. If there are not too many participants, you could add something to the introductions, such as "something that gives you hope right now." If people arrive late, stop and ask for their introductions at a point when it won't interrupt the flow of the meeting too much. It is helpful if the Facilitator can remember the names of those present and call on them by name. This will help others to learn each other's names too. One aid in this is to jot down people's names in their positions in the room — again, if the group is not too large.

As with the model meeting for Facilitators, the network meetings will begin with sharing — an opportunity for each person to speak without interruption. In order to be sure that everyone can be listened to (and to prevent one or more members from dominating the group), it is useful to set a time limit on how long each speaker may share. If desired, a volunteer can be recruited to keep track of time.

After the sharing by individuals, the Facilitator will, as in the model meeting, open up a time for dialogue, with similar instructions about how to handle one-to-one talk, interruptions, or a dominant speaker. Some useful phrases a Facilitator might use to keep the discussion on track:

"Is there anyone who hasn't said much yet who would like to speak?"

"Thank you. What I heard you saying was, (rephrase)... Does anyone else have thoughts about what _____ has said?"

“Please remember that we are trying to express ourselves in a respectful manner.”

“Please let him/her finish what he/she was saying.”

“This conversation has been involving just two or three people for a little while now; I think it would be good for us to hear what other people think.”

It is important that the Facilitator make it clear from the beginning that he/she is not there to control the group but just to give it some direction and get it back on track if it strays off course. Members must be encouraged to actively take part in the group so that the direction the group goes in is determined by the group and not by the Facilitator or one or two members.

Making sure that each participant who wishes to speak has the opportunity to do so in a caring and supportive environment is critical to a successful meeting. Members who don't feel that they are being listened to and that their opinions or comments are valid will be less likely to open up to the group again. The Facilitator should make it clear that interrupting a speaker or carrying on another conversation while someone is sharing is not acceptable. However, some groups may feel that an encouraging comment, such as, “I understand” or “Hang in there,” is acceptable as it supports the speaker without completely interrupting him/her. This should be discussed with the group and the majority's decision should be adhered to.

In these days of increased technology use, another thing to consider is to ask members to switch off cell phones and turn beepers to vibrate mode during meetings. The ringing of a telephone or beeper can be very disruptive to a speaker. These are just some examples of guidelines to be established for meetings, but each group should feel free to come up with its own set of guidelines that members feel comfortable with.

It is likely that some group members will let their feelings flow, whether in the form of tears or anger or some other emotion. If this happens, the Facilitator should be relaxed and communicate that the expression of feelings is welcome and part of the process of recovery. If someone next to the person wants to put an arm around his/her shoulder, it is likely to be a comfort, but they should be sensitive to how it is being received.

The Facilitator needs to use his or her judgment and sense of timing to determine when the meeting has gone on long enough. Approximately 30 minutes before the scheduled end of the meeting, remember to check whether any people in the group would like to meet again. (You might ask someone at the beginning to watch the time for you and alert you.) If there is an interest in meeting again, close the meeting with the statement below and release those who are not staying to plan another meeting. If there is no interest in meeting again, let the meeting continue until almost the end time. Then you can close the meeting with a statement such as:

I am reluctant to step in, but our time is up. I want to thank everyone who has participated, whether or not you have chosen to speak. Your presence here has been part of helping us all feel less alone. A crisis like this can take so much out of us; it can make us feel frightened and powerless. But just by coming out here tonight, we have seen that together we can cope with this. We have a strength we may not have known we had. There are information sheets available that tell

you where you can access other resources, such as free or low-cost counseling, as well as other services. Please help yourself to these. Remember to keep in close touch with your neighbors and friends as we all go through this together.

The Facilitator or Core Group member should have ascertained in advance whether the meeting site will be available in the future, and when. If a sufficient number of people would like to continue to meet, at least for one more time, the Facilitator can indicate his or her willingness to convene the group again.

It is good for members to show their investment in the group by being involved in various tasks. The tasks that can be shared among members include being the phone contact for the group, co-leading the meeting, welcoming new members, preparing coffee or any other snacks, distributing flyers to publicize the meeting, arranging speakers, etc. If the Facilitator does not involve others in leadership roles and share the various tasks from the very beginning, it will be much harder to get volunteers later as members will have become accustomed to one person's doing everything.

The group may decide to take action beyond its boundaries. Some possible follow-up activities might be helping with disaster relief, soliciting blood donations, supporting any groups that are the target of hate campaigns, or writing letters to the editor or public officials.

Dealing with Difficult Situations

Facilitators may need to address an individual who appears too emotionally distraught or disruptive in other ways. It is likely that other group members may know the person and attempt to assist him/her during such a crisis. However, if this does not occur, the Facilitator can gently say to a person they think is disrupting the intent of the meeting, "I don't think this group can serve you right now. It is not serving the group well for you to remain here." The Facilitator may stay with any such individuals for a few minutes to help them regain their composure and also provide them with materials about services that they may wish to utilize. Such individuals might choose to re-enter the room or depart from the meeting.

Facilitators may also need to deal with the presence of young children. While their presence is not necessarily inappropriate, infants and young children under the age of 10 may disturb meetings by crying, inability to sit still, and frequent talking. The Facilitator may need to address children who are disturbing the meeting, including potentially having to ask the parent and child to leave the meeting. However, we do recognize that children are also community members and can benefit from constructive and community-enhancing meetings.

The group should generate ideas about potentially disruptive situations and generate ideas for how to handle these situations.

Appendix B

List of Media, with Contact Information, for Use After a Disaster to inform the community about community meetings

Radio:

- KYW** Contact – Ms. Tracey Russell, News Director
Phone 215-238-4990 (24 hours) or
Fax 215-238-4657 or
E-mail <russell@kyw.com>
- WHYY** Contact – Ms. Elisabeth Perez-Luna, News Director
Phone 215-351-2056 or
E-mail <eluna@whyy.org>
- WDAS** Contact – Mr. Tamlin Henry
Phone 610-617-2586 or
Fax 610-617-2576 or
E-mail <tamlinhenry@clearchannel.com>
- WHAT** Contact – Ms. Benita Govens
Fax 215-581-5185
- WRTI** Contact – Terry Tillman
Fax 215-204-4870

Television:

- TV 6 – WPVI (ABC)**
- TV 10 – WCAU (NBC)** Contact – Ms. Camille Cwienkala, Newsdesk
Assignment Mgr.
Fax 610-668-3700
- TV 3 – KYW (CBS)** Contact – Ms. Jeanine Rutledge
Phone 215-238-4829 (office hours)
Phone 215-238-4800 (Newsroom, 24 hours)

Newspapers:

- Philadelphia Inquirer** Fax 215-854-5099 (City Desk)

Philadelphia Daily News Contact – Ms. Yvonne Dennis, Assis. City Editor
Phone 215-854-4766 (Sun. – Thu.)
E-mail <dennisy@phillynews.com>
or
Contact - Kurt Heine, City Editor
Phone 215-854-5941 (Mon. – Fri.)

Philadelphia Tribune Fax 215-893-5767 (News Desk)

City Paper Contact – Howard Altman
Cell Phone 215-805-0350 or
Pager 215-899-4350 or
E-mail <altman@citypaper.net>

Northeast Times
(weekly – Weds.) Contact - Fred Gusoff, Man. Editor
Phone 215-354-3040 or
Contact - John Scanlon, Editor
Phone 215-354-3030 or
E-mail <pronews@phillynews.com>

Olney Times
(weekly – Thurs.) Contact – David Henry
Fax 215-424-4082 (deadline Mon., 3 pm)

Germantown Courier
and
Mt. Airy Times Express
(weekly – Weds.) Contact - Karl Biemuller
Phone 215-248-7580, ext. 102

**South Philadelphia
Review**
(weekly – Thurs.) Contact - Sherry Brenner
Phone 215-336-2500, ext. 120 or
Contact - Sandra Pilla ext. 121

Chestnut Hill Local
(weekly – Weds.) Contact - Nancy Berger
Phone 215-248-8804
(deadline Fri., 5 pm, some flexibility)

City Suburban News Phone 610-667-6623
(weekly – Weds.) In emergency, e-mail info. in complete sentences,
with contact phone # to:
<citysuburbannews@mac.com>
(deadline Thurs.)

APPENDIX C

Script for Initial Phone Contact with Potential Core Group Member

[Introduce myself.] I'm coordinating a new project called the Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia, with funding from the United Way. You have been recommended (or identified) by _____ as someone who is concerned about your community and might be willing to volunteer a few hours to assist in the development of this network.

The goal of this project is to have the groundwork in place for community meetings to occur in the event of future disasters such as Sept. 11, Oklahoma City, or Columbine, in which community members can come together for comfort and support. Such meetings have taken place sporadically after these types of disasters; but our goal is to have a systematically developed network established to ensure that all sections of Philadelphia have an opportunity to participate in a locally run community meeting.

We are asking you to be part of a core group of leaders from around the city who would assist in the development of the network by identifying individuals who could facilitate such meetings in the event of a disaster and places in your community where these community meetings could take place. We do not anticipate that it will require a lot of your time, probably five to eight hours in a year.

Can I include you as someone who can help pull together this network?

[If YES, continue script below.]

Terrific. What I would like to do is get your address and I will send out additional information about this project. I will then call in a few weeks to discuss next steps.

[If NO, ask: cCan you think of others I might call who might be willing to get involved in this project by donating just a few hours of their time?]

Q: What am I specifically being asked to do?

A: You are being asked to volunteer a few hours to help identify three to four individuals in your community who are willing to help facilitate a community meeting in the event of a disaster. The Facilitators will only be called if a disaster occurs, at which time they will be asked to help us spread the word about the community meeting, work out arrangements at the meeting place, and open and close the actual meeting. You are also being asked to help us identify and obtain information about the use of various public meeting places (e.g., local schools and libraries) for meetings in the event of a disaster. Finally, you are being asked to participate in a two-hour meeting, probably between January and March 2003, to meet others like yourself who have volunteered to hear more about the Disaster Community Support Network and to be thanked for your efforts. Every attempt would be made to schedule this meeting at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Letter to prospective Core Group members, following up initial phone contact

December 3, 2002

Pastor xxxxxxxxx
Xxxxxxxx Church
1234 xxxxxx Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 191xx
Dear Pastor xxxxxxxxx:

Thank you for speaking with me on the phone today. I am sending you the attached summary of the Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia so you will have a sense of the scope of the project. The role we are seeking to fill is that of a member of the Core Group. The responsibilities are listed in the summary: identifying places and enlisting facilitators for community meetings, and participating in one annual meeting of the network. The responsibilities of the facilitators are outlined also, so you will know what potential facilitators will be asked to do.

This project will not involve a great deal of a person's time, but will be important in helping the people of Philadelphia to respond to an emergency situation, should it occur, with a forum for recovering emotionally and socially.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions about the project. I will be calling you in the next week or so to discuss your participation. If there are others you think I should contact who might be interested, I will be glad to take their names when I call.

Sincerely,

Summary of DCSN sent out to prospective Core Group candidates

SUMMARY OF THE DISASTER COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK OF PHILADELPHIA

A Project of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania

The Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia (DCSN) is being established by the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP) to create settings in which self-help can occur to assist community members as they cope with crisis events. The goal is to have groundwork in place for community meetings to occur in the event of a future disaster similar to Sept. 11, Oklahoma City, or Columbine.

Self-help is based on the notion of mutual aid among persons who are dealing with similar experiences or circumstances. Community meetings will be scheduled in publicly accessible places. These meetings are expected to involve discussions among community members in which they share their thoughts and feelings about the disaster that brings them together. These meetings should not be thought of as "therapy" or a service that specifically focuses on mental health issues. The direction a meeting takes depends on how those in attendance are motivated. Meetings are expected to include the sharing of information that may be helpful to others in attendance and could evolve into community organization (for example, efforts to organize a fund for persons affected by a disaster) or advocacy efforts (for example, attempts to change laws or policies that they feel could have prevented the disaster or help the community better cope with the disaster).

The benefits associated with mutual aid include catharsis (i.e., emotional processing of distressing thoughts and feelings), social support (i.e., emotional support, informational support, feedback, validation, instrumental support), self-confidence and self-esteem from assisting others, and individual and community empowerment from organization and advocacy efforts that might result from the community gatherings.

Such meetings have taken place sporadically in the past after disasters, but our goal is to have a systematically developed network established to ensure that all sections of Philadelphia have an opportunity to participate in a locally run community meeting.

We are seeking individuals to be part of a Core Group of leaders from around the city who would assist in the development of the network. Besides the Core Group, the network will also include a larger, secondary group of individuals identified within each local community who will organize and facilitate the community meetings. MHASP will organize and maintain the network and provide training in how to facilitate the local community meetings.

Responsibilities of the Core Group. The Core Group is responsible for: 1) identifying places in which community meetings can be held at no cost; 2) recruiting local community members to help organize and facilitate groups when needed; and 3) attending a meeting every year in which they will review the goal of the disaster

network and discuss issues associated with developing their local disaster network. We anticipate this would require 5 to 8 hours of time per year.

Responsibilities of the community Meeting Facilitators. The community Meeting Facilitators will be local community members who have been identified as having the skills and ability necessary to organize and facilitate community meetings. Their responsibilities are: 1) maintaining contact with their Core Group member at least once per year; 2) attending a training session on how to organize and facilitate community meetings in response to disasters when it appears that a community meeting is needed; 3) working closely with their Core Group member to schedule and facilitate local community meetings.

Responsibilities of MHASP staff. An MHASP staff planning team will be responsible for the following: 1) identifying and recruiting Core Group members from six areas of the city; 2) planning a meeting for these individuals about the purpose and goals of the network and the process for organizing and facilitating community meetings, including identifying places to meet and local community Meeting Facilitators; 3) maintaining a database of Core Group members and local community meeting spaces; 4) maintaining contact with the Core Group to ensure that they have met their responsibilities (i.e., semi-annual phone calls or e-mail); 5) scheduling a yearly half-day meeting to maintain the network; 6) developing a curriculum on how to facilitate community meetings; 7) providing training on how to facilitate community meetings when a community meeting is deemed to be appropriate; 8) assisting in troubleshooting issues regarding the organization and facilitation of meetings; 9) making a determination, along with Core Group members and others, about the need for initiating local community meetings in response to a disaster or other crisis situation. *(Note: The meeting described in Responsibility #2 took place in February 2003.)*

For further information, contact:

Explanation of Facilities Needed, for Use by Core Group

DISASTER COMMUNITY SUPPORT NETWORK OF PHILADELPHIA

SUMMARY FOR FACILITIES

The Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia (DCSN) is being established by the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP) to create settings in which self-help can occur to assist community members as they cope with crisis events. The goal is to have groundwork in place for community meetings to take place in the event of a future disaster similar to Sept. 11, Oklahoma City, or Columbine.

The DCSN grew from the observation that talk and emotional connection (self-help) among community members affected by a disaster is beneficial. The very act of opening up and sharing thoughts and feelings with other human beings has a healing effect, if the climate of such sharing is one of respect and positive regard. Members provide one another with resources such as information about where to go for specific kinds of help, and people gain self-esteem from helping others. In the case of a major crisis, many people will have need of such resources. The DCSN creates a framework to assist people in coming together. By offering a resource to anyone in the community, self-help groups strengthen a whole community's ability to cope and to heal, empowering both individuals and the community. [Note: The meetings will be facilitated by community members who will receive several hours of training in this type of facilitation. They should not be thought of as "therapy."]

A one-time community meeting is planned, but further community activities could occur, depending upon how those in attendance are motivated. Any hosting facility that agrees to allow the DCSN to meet in its space is only committing to one meeting. Any further use of a building would need to be arranged by those in attendance at the initial meeting.

Such meetings have taken place sporadically in the past after disasters, but the goal of this project is to have a systematically developed network established to ensure that all sections of Philadelphia have an opportunity to participate in a locally run community meeting. The meetings of the Disaster Community Support Network will be advertised through public service announcements, local newspapers, and flyers posted in neighborhoods as being open to anyone in the community who is looking for support and encouragement or who is feeling under stress.

Facilities needed: Ideally, a building would be well lighted, with adequate parking, and accessible to public transportation. A room should be available that will hold up to 100 people, if possible, with seating. Since there is no funding available to pay for the facilities, we require a place that is free of charge for this emergency use.

For further information, contact DCSN Coordinator

Confirmation Letter to Individuals Committed to Core Group

Disaster Community Support Network of Philadelphia

November 2002

Dear Core Group Member:

I want to thank you very much for agreeing to help set up the Disaster Community Support Network in your neighborhood. We are delighted with the positive response we have been getting from community groups, religious leaders, social activists, and others. You are part of an excellent group of committed individuals. You should have received the summary, which explains the roles of the Core Group and the facilitators as well as the support offered by the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP).

We will be calling all of the Core Group members together for a two-hour meeting in early 2003. At that time we will update you on the progress that has been made in establishing the network, respond to any questions you may have, and hear your thoughts on how this support system can be made to work most effectively.

What we need you to do now:

1. Between now and January, we hope you will identify and get a commitment from three or four others you think will be good Facilitators for the self-help groups. These people should be good listeners who can remain calm under difficult circumstances, and who are assertive enough to keep the groups on track. They do not have to be experienced Facilitators, although this would be a plus. They will receive a half-day training in the event that they are needed following a disaster. (The decision about what constitutes a "disaster" will be made by the MHASP team, perhaps consulting with some of you.) Several copies of a one-page summary for Facilitators is enclosed, so they will be clear what you are asking of them.
2. You should also go ahead and make inquiries at local institutions that have meeting spaces. It is recommended that the meetings be held in a well-recognized neighborhood meeting space such as a local community center, library, school, or place of worship. The space should be accessible by public transport and have ample parking. Also, safety issues should be considered, such as adequate streetlights in the area surrounding the venue. Enclosed are several copies of a brief description of the network that you can share with potential meeting place staff. You need to ascertain whether or not they have a space that would hold up to 100 people, with chairs, that could be used free of charge on short notice after a disaster (approximately two weeks after) for one evening meeting. The space should also be accessible to people with physical disabilities.

I will call you in a few weeks to see how you are progressing on these two responsibilities. Meanwhile, if you have any questions, please feel free to call me at _____ and leave a message about the best time to return your call. Thanks again for your help!

Sincerely,

Disaster Community Support Network