



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN ATLANTIC COUNTY

Special Edition Newsletter

The 10-Year Anniversary of Hurricane Sandy



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A look back at
Hope and Healing in
pictures

The case managers
of RPOST

Special thank you
to the leadership

BRIG STRONG

The Role of MHA Atlantic in Recovery Efforts After the Historic Storm

Our small, tight-knit office was called upon to help with recovery efforts following Superstorm Sandy. At the time the number of staff more than doubled when a team of Crisis Counselors was needed to work in the communities affected by the historic weather event on October 29, 2012.

We became part of an intensive, comprehensive program called New Jersey Hope and Healing. Led by Jaime Angelini, the team worked in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Disaster and Terrorism Branch, with funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

"Our goal was to help those living with extraordinary burdens and mental health challenges related to the trauma of the storm, being displaced from their homes, and financial worries," recalled Vicki Phillips, Executive Director of MHA Atlantic.

Under Jaime's leadership, there was one local team and another in Cape May County.

Trained Crisis Counselors walked door-to-door through the most impacted communities to seek out people in need. They also were positioned in shelters, coffee shops, libraries, grocery stores, community centers, and food banks -- anywhere to offer emotional support and share information and resources.

Some days counselors worked on sites of damaged homes with shovels and paint brushes in hand -- often learning new skills from project managers.

Several Crisis Counselors worked in children's outreaches at the Boys and Girls Club, recreation centers, and community events. Programming was based on the Sandy Wave Riders model and included playing, learning, and problem-solving activities that offered empowerment, encouragement, positivity, ongoing resiliency building, and stress reduction skills.

A regular, weekly support group meeting evolved in Brigantine. The meeting included information sharing, stress relief, and recovery update.

The projected length of time for the program was a few months, but was extended several times in order to support the large number of people impacted, especially in Brigantine,

(continued on page 2)



Ventnor, and Atlantic City. Some of our canvassing was also inland in the area of the Mullica River.

Over time a disaster case management program, Recovery Peer Outreach Support Team, or RPOST, was established to support vulnerable residents who needed intensive one-on-one help. The team of case managers worked with residents on their efforts to repair, rebuild, and raise their homes while navigating the systems in place.

The community partnerships we developed with LTRG REVIVE, Brig Strong, contractors, Catholic Charities, United Way of Atlantic County and Family Service Association proved to be helpful in assisting residents as they moved through the recovery process, which proved challenging with paperwork, documentation, and the constantly changing updates associated with government programs.

Through the experience, we met some people who were struggling with hoarding behaviors and unable to let go of their property that was water-soaked, which made for unsafe air quality issues in some situations.

When we looked for local support, we couldn't find any. That led us to search the country for best practices. Staff became trained to assist. We founded the local Hoarding Disorder and Too Much Stuff initiative in 2014.

Through the experience, our little office and little staff grew. We learned a ton; we gave what we had. At times we cried; other times we celebrated successes.

We are both humbled and proud to have stepped up and responded to the needs of our community and help secure resources to enable their recovery. On this milestone day, we pause to remember the people we served, the team we built, and the good work we did.

Hurricane Sandy

The storm arrived during a full moon phase. Compounding the situation was an ill-timed high tide and persistent northeasterly winds.

Sandy made landfall near Atlantic City around 8 pm on Monday, Oct. 29, 2012 with maximum sustained winds at around 75 miles per hour.

DID YOU KNOW?

Christine Miller organized the shelters in preparation for Hurricane Sandy. At the time she was serving as an active volunteer with the Atlantic County Office of Emergency Management. Christine is a former IFSS Coordinator and long-time employee at MHA Atlantic. She worked as a Crisis Counselor with Hope and Healing.

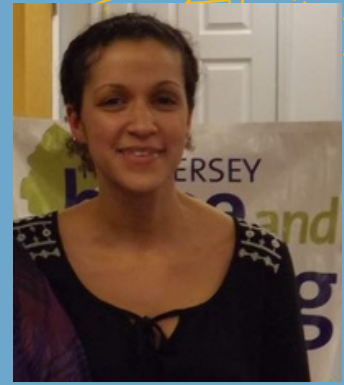


*We recognize and thank the
team leaders of
Hope and Healing
as well as the
Recovery Peer
Outreach Team.*

*With your
guidance, dedication, and
example,
we made a difference
in our community*



Vicki Phillips
Jaime Angelini
Jordan Brunette
Meghan (Cusack) Co
Meg Schweer
Valerie Watson





The Cape May County Team



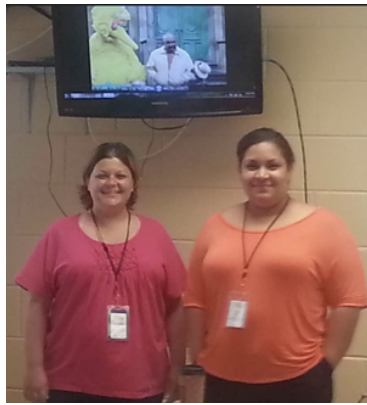
Many of Crisis Counselors on the Atlantic County Team



Little Sandy Survivors



Above: Meteorologist Dan Skeldon presented at one of our workshops.



Participating in the Hope and Healing project was life-changing for me for different reasons. I was honored to be able to support Sandy Survivors. I met lifetime friends working on Team Atlantic, those memories and experiences I would not trade them for anything. It was incredible to see real progress occur through Hope and Healing, for the people that deserved so much more than what happened to them during that storm. It provided me the chance to also help children and adolescents that were also Sandy Survivors.


-Jennifer Cella-Roe



As a clinician, the work I did with Hope and Healing certainly shaped the way that I view trauma. It broadened my perspective and lens on traumatic experiences. I truly loved the work we did with various schools, the boys and girls club of Atlantic City and the Recreation Department of Pleasantville.

-Lucy Allen





The work surrounding Sandy was a life-changing experience. Between sheltering with OEM, being VP of the Long-Term Recovery Group and the Hope and Healing team...the experience taught me so much. The stories will forever be in my soul ...and I will never forget how our communities and individuals came together.

-Christine Miller

I had worked hurricanes in other communities, but Sandy brought disaster work home. Partnering with municipal, nonprofit leaders and funders allowed us to reach out and help our most vulnerable residents while still providing emotional support and concrete information that assisted all families in their recovery.

Personally, I made lifelong friends while walking neighborhoods during my work with Sandy.

-Vicki Phillips

I learned how many of our vulnerable citizens, especially seniors, do not have any support -- no one to be "their person" to provide an extra set of eyes and ears and to make sure they are not being taken advantage of. Our work gave them assistance by helping them with forms, construction meetings, doctors appts and household items. I feel blessed I had the opportunity to support them during a very difficult time in their lives. I would definitely do it again in a heartbeat.

~Dena Ferone



Reflecting back on the impact of Superstorm Sandy and the emotional support provided by the Mental Health Association of Atlantic County, to the community of Brigantine and its Brig Strong recovery team. This emotional support group provided "stress relief," "current recovery information," and "Caseworker Assistance" Post Sandy for over three years.

In the chaos that followed the landfall of Sandy, many residents did not know where to turn for assistance and current/verifiable information on Federal, State and Local government programs, offering recovery assistance, was scarce.

The stress level was high in large part because there was an abundance of information, but it seemed to change daily. The Emotional Support Group met weekly and provided a place to get up to date recovery information, share experiences, find stress relief and, as the community recovery unfolded, a Caseworker to help them apply for and navigate government assistance for grants like RREM (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Elevation and Mitigation Program). Impacted individuals found they did not have to do it all on their own. They found timely help and support. What at first seemed overwhelming became doable as impacted residents found out that they were not alone.

-Charlie Miller, BrigStrong



Recovery Peer Outreach Support Team

