

TRANSCRIPT — Helping Victims of Mass Violence and Terrorism: Partnerships and Planning

Sandy Phillips, Victim Advocate: Unfortunately, our ranks of victims and survivors are growing every day. My daughter, Jessie, she was just in a theater watching a movie. Those Sandy Hook kids were just in their kindergarten and first-grade classes. Sikh Temple—they just went to church. Tucson—they just went to the store. Yeah. This can happen anywhere, anytime, to anyone.

Krista Flannigan, Adjunct Professor, College of Criminal Justice, Florida State University: An incident of mass violence impacts the whole community. But what we have learned is probably one of the most essential components to a response is being able to plan and prepare.

Robin Finegan, Regional Volunteer Services Officer, American Red Cross: Planning is an art.

Kent Burbank, Former Director, Victim Services Division, Pima County Attorney's Office: Every community needs to look at its existing resources, figure out ways in which they can increase their collaborations, and, particularly across jurisdictions, make sure that there are plans in place to be able to respond.

Robin Finegan: And that includes people that are nontraditional responders—clergy, and school systems, and teachers, and counselors, and nonprofit agencies, and bilingual support systems. That's the key to the success.

Herman Millholland, Former Director, Crime Victim Services Division, Texas Office of the Attorney General: Tucson, Arizona, had a wonderful emergency management plan that incorporated a victim assistance plan, so, therefore, the response to that shooting was very, very effective.

Michelle Ziemba, Former Director, Trauma and Emergency Services, University of Arizona Medical Center: The University of Arizona Medical Center created relationships and friendships with agencies and people with agencies to know the importance of preparedness and drilling and training and learning from others.

Rosanna Cortez, Victim Advocate, Pima County Attorney's Office: We didn't have to establish who we were, our credibility, the quality of our services. That was already built into the equation because of the partnership that we have.

Vanessa Helms, Victim Advocate, Pima County Attorney's Office: There was really no confusion or question about who are you and what are you doing here. Because of that we were able to get advocates working with families right away.

Kent Burbank: Relationship building is a long-term process. We've had the advantage of doing this in Tucson for over 40 years. That means we've had time to build relationships over literally generations.

Captain Jesus Lopez, Criminal Investigations, Pima County Sheriff's Office: One of the efforts that we're doing is that we're collaborating with the County Attorney's Office, the mental health services out there, and we work as a team.

Rosanna Cortez: Law enforcement may decide that they want to deliver the news to a family, their loved one has died, and they want us there for emotional support, to pick up the emotional pieces.

Kent Burbank: Having those working relationships so that every law enforcement agency already knows who we are, already has worked with our advocates on scene. They know and trust that we're going to be able to respond appropriately on scene, that we're not going to overstep our bounds. Those trusted relationships are really a big piece of what makes this work.

Herman Millholland: Something that often happens in communities is spontaneous volunteers—people who want to help, who want to give of themselves. And it's important that those roles and responsibilities are clearly laid out early on in the process.

Kent Burbank: I think it's one of our areas of expertise, is how to train community members from all walks of life and all ages to become proficient in crisis intervention skills.

Rosanna Cortez: When a volunteer signs up, there's an understanding that they're available for whatever comes in, and we want to make sure that volunteers have the emotional capacity to assist those in their most desperate and tragic time.

Mary Vail Ware, Director, Programs and Outreach, Virginia Attorney General's Office: It is important to understand that mass tragedies, while they're unique in their community, the aftermath follows a fairly predictable pattern.

Kent Burbank: There was a lot of work in pulling the community together around a victim fund that was seen by the victims and by the community as being open, honest, and direct. So what it meant for the victims was a clear source of where to go when there were needs, clear transparency, because they knew very quickly there were established parameters that were sent out about how the funds would be used and would be distributed.

Mary Vail Ware: It's really important to think about the future needs of the community if a flood of funding is coming into your community, because there will be future needs. There'll be future mental health needs. There'll be future recovery needs. So it's great if you can plan in advance how funding would be managed.

Herman Millholland: And in most instances the donations are not just financial. When you start to receive thousands and thousands of toys, teddy bears, bicycles, how do you manage that? This, again, requires having those nontraditional partnerships, ensuring that you are meeting the needs of the community-at-large.

Lawrence Hincker, Associate Vice President, Virginia Tech University: We learned so much about what happens to the human psyche when you're a victim of a violent crime. And, of course, the power of symbolism and public grieving.

Deborah Day, Associate Vice President for Alumni Relations, Virginia Tech University: We plan the April 16th memorial service. We call it "A Day of Remembrance." We do some things for the families, we bring them back, we have a lunch with university administrators, and they're part of the university-wide commemoration.

Lawrence Hincker: That's an important action of leadership is that not only do you deal with the crisis at hand, but you also get the organization back on track for the future. Our university really has taken emergency planning seriously. That is now part of our culture. We were one of the first to use

emergency alert systems. These emergency notification systems that we now see that are rather commonplace were not commonplace in 2007.

Deborah Day: One of the important points for us is that every single student who was injured graduated from Virginia Tech. The president realized that we needed to have an office to help with some of these needs. An assistant director in the Office of Recovery and Support every month hosted a dinner in their home for all of the injured students and the staff. It continued on until the last student graduated.

Lawrence Hincker: You will now find universities around the country like my university, that has really bolstered its emergency planning organization, because you just never know when it's going to happen. Anything might happen.

Kent Burbank: Victims' advocates have no margin for error. We have to make sure that they are providing absolutely the best services possible to those victims, and that they're able to do it in ways that they are adapting to the individual needs of that victim, their background, their experiences, as well as the type of crime and the situation that they're facing. And I think it's important that we make sure, as victim service providers, that we're at the table, that we're continually raising those issues, and that we're doing our work to make sure that we're ready.