

TRANSCRIPT — Helping Victims of Mass Violence and Terrorism: Recovery

Mary Vail Ware, Director, Programs and Outreach, Virginia Attorney General's Office: After a mass casualty crime incident, it's really important to think about the population that you have, what their needs might be. Everybody progresses through recovery or towards resilience at their own pace.

Herman Millholland, Former Director, Crime Victim Services Division, Texas Office of the Attorney General: Recovery really is about the longer-term needs over time. But the emotional and the psychological aspect of it, that takes far longer to heal. And in some cases, some people never heal.

Krista Flannigan, Adjunct Professor, College of Criminal Justice, Florida State University: These incidents are life-altering. People will never be what they were prior to the tragedy. They have to redefine themselves—a new normal.

Harpreet Singh Saini, Victim of Mass Violence: As you all know, on Sunday, August 5, 2012, a white supremacist fueled by hatred walked into our local gurdwara with a loaded gun. He killed my mother while she prayed. He shot and killed five more men. All of them were fathers, and all of them had a turban like me.

Jasjit Singh, Executive Director, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund: August 5, 2012, was the greatest attack on a place of worship in America in 50 years at that time.

Pardeep Kaleka, Founder and Director, Serve2Unite: Most people that go through this are never really healed. It's always there. Their life is never the same again.

Puni Kalra, Clinical Psychologist, Founder, Sikh Healing Collective: Our community doesn't respond to traditional forms of mental health or to therapy. We had to take healing into our own hands. The Sikh Healing Collective was truly a collective effort. Mental health professionals came together. They were south Asians, they were non-south Asians, they were Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus. They spoke the language, they understood the culture. They became integrated into the community here in Oak Creek, and people no longer saw them as strangers.

Pardeep Kaleka: It's tough to heal on your own. It's possible, sure. But when you heal as a community, it's a lot more effective, and it's lasting and it's genuine, and that's exactly what happened after August 5th.

Puni Kalra: On Sunday nights, I would check in with the mental health folks that were here on site—“What are you hearing as you're speaking one-on-one with the community members; what are they telling you? Are they experiencing intrusive thoughts, PTSD, insomnia, survivor guilt?” We created the psycho-educational materials according to the community's needs week to week. About 300 copies would be made, so you'd have a single document, English on one side, Punjabi on the other side, ready for disbursement on the following Sunday. So it was a way to introduce mental health in a softer, kinder way without the stigma attached to it.

Pardeep Kaleka: We saw the importance of being able to give people a voice and have them share their stories of survival.

Rajdeep Singh Jolly, Pro Bono Counsel, The Sikh Coalition: One of the orphans of Oak Creek, Harpreet

Singh Saini, who lost his mother in the massacre, testified before the Senate and asked that his mother be given the dignity of being a statistic. And it was absolutely powerful, poignant, compelling testimony.

Harpreet Singh Saini: I'm here because my mother was murdered in an act of hate 45 days ago. I'm here on behalf of all the children who lost parents or grandparents during the massacre in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. This was not supposed to be our American story, this was not my mother's dream.

Rajdeep Singh Jolly: As a result, the Hate Crimes Statistics Program includes recognition of anti-Sikh hate crimes. This is going to lead to more awareness and less ignorance about the Sikh American community.

Puni Kalra: Ultimately that's what people want is they want to be seen, they want to be heard, they want to feel that they do matter.

Herman Millholland: Newtown, it's a small town—28,000 people. That entire community was affected in very, very profound ways.

Patricia Llodra, First Selectwoman, Town of Newtown: This happened, of course, in December just before Christmas. 20 young, beautiful first-graders—the extraordinary depth of grief over that—I mean, it almost makes it impossible even now for me to talk about it.

Deborah Delvecchio-Scully, Clinical Recovery Leader/Trauma Specialist, Newtown Recovery & Resiliency Team: The ability to just function is deeply impaired when a trauma is as deeply wounding as ours was. Trauma memories don't get stored in the brain in the same way that any of our other memories are. That memory is almost behind a wall and can't be retrieved by just trying to force yourself to retrieve it. On any scale, trauma does not heal itself.

Patricia Llodra: It's important to understand that not one approach will work. So, the Recovery and Resiliency Team is the big umbrella. They provide intake, assessment, referral.

Catherine: Newtown Recovery and Resiliency Team. This is Catherine. Can I help you?

Patricia Llodra: They're an absolutely key component to our recovery.

Melissa Glaser, Community Outreach Liaison, Newtown Recovery & Resiliency Team: Our care coordinators do match with every individual that is looking for some kind of support. The support may be in the form of matching to a behavioral health provider. It might mean looking for reimbursement to help with their mental health or wellness. It may mean that they're just looking for some short-term emotional support.

Patricia Llodra: We did some research about trauma and how other municipalities had responded and the lessons that other municipalities learned. We applied that to our circumstance here and then wrote a whole protocol around how that team would work and what they would do, and created a governance structure for them.

Melissa Glaser: Our team really encompassed community recovery on a large scale. And it is the place now where people know they can go if they're looking for, where can I get support on the anniversary of the shooting? Or if my child needs a therapeutic summer camp, where can I go? So it's long-term,

several more years to come, before I think we can say the majority of impacted individuals are really in a more resilient place.

Patricia Llodra: We are inexorably changed because of this horrible thing. I think it will always be with us. I want it always to be with us, because I wouldn't want any of those children or those educators to ever be forgotten. It's critically important we carry it with us.

Herman Millholland: Healing means something very different to each individual. The key to healing is ensuring that when you're working with victims, you ask them what it is that they need.

Patricia Llodra: I see more and more people reaching that point of comfort where they're again confident in the future. They see that bright light on the horizon and that the world is a good and kind place.

Puni Kalra: Our resilience is what really speaks out in these tragedies. We persevere, we get through, we become stronger.