



## **Disaster Behavioral Health: Providing Calm in the Midst of a Storm**

Dr. Jeanne LeBlanc, Director of ACTS Behavioral Health Team

*Psalms 107:28-30 "Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble,  
and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm,  
so that the waves thereof are still.*

### **Who We Are:**

ACTS (Active Community Team Services) has provided assistance to nearly 3.2 million people through its 59,000 volunteers since 2004. Through a nationwide network of Health Care Professionals, ACTS has assembled teams to provide medical and behavioral health care in a number of disaster settings. Now ACTS also collaborates with the Department of Health-ESF-8, in providing initial needs assessments.

### **What We Do:**

ACTS Behavioral Health team:

- ◆ Is comprised of licensed mental health professionals with specialized training in disaster response with support from well-trained volunteers.
- ◆ Provides general behavioural health support to individuals and disaster responders within the community served.

Behavioral Health Volunteers may perform duties such as:

- ◆ being embedded within various ACTS response teams to help with identification of and basic assistance with survivor disaster-related issues and concerns;
- ◆ working closely with the medical team to aid in identification and assistance with stress-related issues;
- ◆ triage and referral to community mental health supports when needed, and
- ◆ provision of ongoing psychosocial education and support to volunteer disaster responders\*.

***Interested in Volunteering as a Behavioral Health Responder? This training is for you!***



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\* ACTS Behavioral Health does not provide *ongoing* psychological counselling or intervention services, and will refer individuals with more intensive mental health needs to the appropriate community supports).

## **ACTS Disaster Behavioural Health Training: Goals and Objectives**

### ***Basic Training (Day 1): (For mental health and spiritual professionals, and interested community volunteers)***

Through an interactive format of lecture and role-playing, this workshop will provide specialized training in the unique challenges of disaster behavioural health, including:

1. Understanding of the different phases of disaster response.
2. Practical tools for promoting the safety and emotional well-being of survivors of disasters
3. Awareness of how people respond to disasters – emotionally and physically.
4. Resiliency during disasters.
5. Self-care for responders.
6. Basic ethical considerations for responders.
7. Knowledge of how these skills will be utilized by ACTS World Relief during a deployment.

Completion of Basic Training will allow the volunteer to assist professional and fully trained volunteers in a variety of behavioral health duties at a disaster site. *(Unlicensed volunteers who have completed training will assist under the leadership of those who are licensed professionals and have completed the Advanced Training)*

### ***Advanced Training (Day 2): (For licensed mental health or spiritual providers)***

Day 2 of training will focus on specialized aspects of Disaster Behavioral Health for professional mental health or spiritual volunteers. *(Completion of Advanced Training will allow the volunteer to potentially provide behavioral health leadership at a disaster site, and participate in a broad variety of duties, according to the needs determined by the Director of Behavioral Health.)*

Goals of Advanced Training include an understanding of the following:

1. Mental Health Interventions during disaster: How and why referral is essential.
2. Triaging difficult situations in the field
3. Assisting fellow responders.
4. Advanced ethical considerations
5. Self-care, revisited.
6. Special Topics: Working alongside a medical team and with those with physical challenges.

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Dr. LeBlanc is a clinical neuropsychologist, with Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, and a Diplomate in Rehabilitation Psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology. In addition to her private practice, she is the Director of the Disaster Response Network for the British Columbia Psychological Association and is a provincial representative for Disaster Response for the American Psychological Association. She serves on a Provincial interdisciplinary mental health panel under the Ministry of Health, providing emergency disaster responders for British Columbia, and assisting with development of an online-training curriculum for mental health professionals providing response. She is a clinical supervisor for Simon Fraser University, and has taught undergraduate and graduate courses on stress management, health behaviors, and neuropsychology. She was recently asked to provide training seminars to behavioral health professionals in Chengdu, China, following the 2008 earthquake.