

Initial Meeting of CPNID
August 13, 2006, 9-9:50AM
New Orleans, Marriott Hotel
Division 17 Hospitality Suite
Meeting Minutes

People in Attendance: Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky, Ph.D, Cirecie West-Olatunji, Ph.D.,
Vanessa Partridge, Wendy Vincent, Sundy, Beatrice Tatum, Ph.D., Arpana Inman, Ph.D.,
Analiese Singh, University of Florida Counselor Education Team

Meeting Introduction: Provided by Dr. Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky and Dr. Cirecie West-Olatunji.

Gargi Roysircar informed all present that this was the first formal meeting of a new organization called Counselors and Psychologist for National and International Disasters (CPNID). Gargi said that in her own professional history disaster work was relatively new to her as she had started such work a year ago and a half ago. Gargi described the advent of her interest in disaster work by discussing her reaction to the tsunami and the work that she engaged in as a response to this disaster. Specifically, Gargi reported that she engaged in local volunteer work with a Massachusetts Hindu temple, attempted to volunteer with organizations such as the American Red Cross, Doctors without Borders and UNICEF, and decided to engage in her own, independent volunteer work with Antioch students. In July 2005, Gargi visited Tamilnadu, India, with three Antioch doctoral students in clinical psychology. She responded to a request from government officials in India to develop a packet of information on trauma as understood in the United States as well as the interventions that could be utilized to respond to disaster trauma, specifically. This information will be published in a book. Gargi commented that her trip on tsunami work raised her awareness to the need for provider self-care based upon her student volunteers' reports of the effects of the disaster outreach trip on them.

Gargi reported that she had continued her outreach work in New Orleans six months after Hurricane Katrina hit. She made a one-year anniversary trip in August 2006. Cirecie connected Gargi with local contacts and Gargi spent a week in New Orleans in March 2006 with 7 Antioch student volunteers and a week in August with two Antioch student volunteers. Gargi commented that these trips helped her realize that small, well-trained volunteer groups may be more effective. She also commented that she continued to realize that she needed to screen and prepare volunteers carefully as her student volunteers experienced strong stress reactions.

Gargi and the Antioch student volunteers journaled during the trip in an effort to raise self-awareness of the conditions of Katrina survivors and to bear witness to the narratives of individuals they worked with in New Orleans and Pass Christian (Mississippi). These journal entries can be accessed on www.multiculturalcenter.org under the Disaster Shakti link.

Based upon her experiences in India and New Orleans, Gargi developed an application form that required short notes and responses to questionnaires on cross-cultural adaptation and multicultural competencies to enhance screening procedures. She also decided to share her knowledge by writing a book with her student volunteers about disaster work. Finally, Gargi and

her student volunteers engaged in a self-assessment in an effort to assess the impact of short-term disaster work on their psychological functioning.

Aims of the Organization

Gargi commented that some of the issues that she would like to be considered in CPNID include the ethics of giving help, how to prepare licenses for work in other states, and legal issues. Gargi asked those present what they thought this organization should be like. She suggested that CPNID have a research arm, a policy arm, and a large training component.

Cirecie West-Olatunji described her professional background and commented that she had received her doctoral level degree at the University of New Orleans and taught at Xavier University for several years. She is president-elect of Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development and is interested in using her leadership position to increase involvement of professionals and AMCD in disaster work.

Cirecie reported that she engaged in Katrina work through SAMSHA. She worked with first responders and their family members living on a cruise ship. She found this work life altering and spiritual. Cirecie commented that she realized that she had prepared many of her Xavier students to do this type of work and, in fact, heard from others that her former Xavier students were in engaging in Katrina disaster relief.

Cirecie commented on some of the things she had learned through her SAMSHA work and reflected upon what needed to be changed. For example, she stressed the lack of cultural competence she observed and suggested that this is a skill in disaster counselors that needs to be improved. In addition, screening procedures need to be enhanced to eliminate individuals lacking multicultural competence. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration ability needs to be improved.

Cirecie reported that she had brought a team from the University of Florida to engage in volunteer and outreach work in a New Orleans charter school in the week prior to the meeting.

Beatrice Tatum then spoke about her own experience with Katrina work. She reported that she has found that her work at Mississippi State has profoundly changed post Katrina as 504 students were gravely impacted. These students brought their younger siblings to live in dorms with them. The university and especially the counseling center had to adapt to these changes. The counseling center expanded its population to include all impacted by Katrina. A lot of misunderstandings occurred among human service providers. She found that in institutional settings counselors and psychologists did not want to work outside of psychology.

Beatrice also agreed that cultural competence needs to be improved in this work as she has observed a lot of ignorance about the demographic makeup of Katrina survivors and a patronizing attitude on the part of some volunteers.

Arpana Inman reported that she had provided information to Gargi about tent cities in New Orleans. She described her own experience with disaster work which included post 9/11

advocacy work, tsunami advocacy (she created a listserv and website), and SAMSHA work in New Orleans. Arpana reported that she would shortly be engaging in disaster relief work in Mississippi with Beatrice and a team of 6 students and a faculty member. They will be developing mental health services in Ocean Springs and working with the elderly. Arpana commented her university is funding the entire trip. Arpana reported that she had prepared her students using several training methods and planned to utilize self-care and debriefing.

Sundy reported on her professional background. She holds a masters degree from University of New Orleans and is working on her doctorate in counselor education. She had her previous job 29.5 years but was let go after Katrina. She is currently working at Nelson Charter School as a social worker and will be dealing with students, teachers, and families. Her job includes outreach on Saturdays for the families.

Analeise reported that she has worked with Common Ground Collective since Katrina. She reported that her family is from St. Bernard Parish. Analeise agreed with the need for cultural competence and commented specifically on the need for LGBT competence as well as a realization regarding the intersection of identities.

Ana appreciates leadership and involvement with everyone in the room

Lynne reported that she practices and lives in England. She is planning on informing her colleagues about CPNID. She commented on her perception that the English do not have enough awareness of what is occurring outside of their own country. She would like to be a part of something outside of England. She has a health psychology background. Lynne asked if she could be useful without a trauma background and Gargi commented that she as a health psychologist could have a lot to inform about trauma reactions.

Conclusion:

The meeting was then adjourned due to time considerations. All attending shared their name and email addresses so they could be added to a contact list.

Respectfully submitted by:

Vanessa Partridge

Doctoral Candidate, Clinical Psychology

Disaster Shakti Team

Antioch University New England