

THE BROWARD COUNTY LEAGUE OF CITIES'
SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PUBLIC SAFETY
TASK FORCE

INITIAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Exhibit #25

How A New Organization Is Connecting Parkland Shooting Survivors To The Right Therapists

By CAITIE SWITALSKI · APR 30, 2018

"We are the long-term people." That's how Dr. Judith Aronson-Ramos, a member of the Advisory Board of Parkland Cares, describes the mission of the organization.

Born in the aftermath of the deadly shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High, Parkland Cares helps connect people who were affected by the violent incident to long-term counseling resources, both immediately and for the next few decades. It verifies and funds trained trauma therapists and therapy groups for people to get the counseling they need at little to no cost.

Ramos, a developmental-behavioral pediatrician who has lived in Parkland for 25 years, jumped in to help the nonprofit organization get off the ground after Howard Dvorkin, chairman of Debt.com, started it with donations. She now verifies trauma therapists that Parkland Cares will support, as well as tries to direct patients to the right type of therapist for them.

WLRN sat down with Ramos to talk about how Parkland Cares aims to be a long-term resource for people in the area, and what some options available are.

WLRN: Parkland Cares is a very new organization, with the goal to provide services to anyone who needs them for as long as they need

them. What does that mean, and who exactly is eligible for this counseling?

RAMOS: The idea of Parkland Cares is to create this umbrella to bring organizations that provide the therapy. One of them I'm a part of is called Professionals United for Parkland that's doing direct immediate services to families.

There are some people who are so seriously acutely affected that they need some very specific intensive trauma therapies that we are able to connect them up to. That gets them functional and it gets them functional quickly. That's a form of therapy called EMDR.

Then, there's long-term traumatic grief counseling and there they go hand in hand. But there are different approaches and just like any disaster or any medical issue, you have to give the patient what they need at that moment.

How many years out do you expect to be able to provide counselors?

Decades. We're long-term people. You know, they say you need sprinters and marathoners - and we're the marathoners because we recognize that the community is going to be dealing with this forever. It's never going to go away. If you look at the history of Littleton, Colorado, where Columbine is located, or even Virginia Tech, or in Newtown, Connecticut, these were defining events.

How do you look decades ahead to provide this care?

Unfortunately, we have lessons and we have people out there that are skilled and trained in mass shootings. So there's real data and there's many places and people that have been through this before. We are not the first, sadly.

But something is different in Parkland now, and a lot of it may be tied to how the students have embraced the momentum of change and it's given people hope.

Parents, students and teachers - what different needs are you seeing for each of these three groups?

Grief is different for each individual. Some people are going to be acutely traumatized for months. And some people are going to be ready to move on more quickly. There were teachers present in the building where the event happened. That's the inner circle of traumatized individuals and they have one experience.

Then you have teachers that were in buildings close by, or teachers that were far away, or even some that were not even on campus. There were some people who were hiding in closets, maybe a building away, but they didn't know if their life was threatened or not.

Then you have parents who were all anxious and everyone thought, 'Oh my God, the greatest loss of my life is going to happen to me.' Of course those who lost who paid the ultimate price, they have their own path to grieving. The same is for the students: Proximity to the event is one thing, but then there are people who are psychologically close to the event. They lost a friend; they lost a teacher.

It's not about we're going to move on and forget about it. It's how we work through it, and how it becomes a part of our life, and how we reconstruct our lives after this event.

Contact Parkland Cares:

email: contact@parklandcares.org