

The Role of Social Workers Before and After Emergencies and Disasters

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In this day and age of global terror attacks, natural disasters, man-made disasters, global warming and other unforeseen crises, there is no longer a question that social work has a crucial role to play in responding to mass casualty events. What is not as clear is the role of social work before these events happen. What is our role in preparing the population to deal with these crises and to help develop community resiliency? Social workers have unique skills that include working with community stakeholders to prepare the population and to mitigate the trauma for those victims caught up in these situations.

Israel, in general, and Jerusalem specifically, have years of experience dealing with the results of terror on the population as a whole as well as the victims and their families. Additionally, we have dealt with weather related emergencies and we are planning for a major earthquake sometime in the future. Over the past 20 years we have developed and refined our response plan which started as a loosely organized team of 20-30 responders and now encompasses virtually all of the 600 social workers in the department. Everyone undergoes training for specific roles to play in emergencies.

In this presentation, I will review the social services department's preparations including how we train all social workers to respond in emergencies and our pre-planned deployment of social work teams, depending on the type of emergency. In addition, I will review the work that community social workers are doing to prepare neighborhood groups to assist their populations to respond without waiting for city or governmental interventions during events that limit mobility (earthquake, snow, etc).