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# MAC Members TIP the Scales Toward Human Connection

Trauma Intervention Program volunteers help citizens in times of crisis

By Jake Ten Pas

Laura Krum and Jocelyn Libby have been on the scene at some of the highest-profile local tragedies in recent memory. As citizen volunteers for the Trauma Intervention Program (TIP), one or both of the MAC members have been present in the aftermath of: the 2012 Clackamas Town Center shooting, the 2014 Reynolds High School shooting, the 2015 Umpqua Community College shooting in Roseburg, the 2016 explosion and fire on NW 23rd Ave., and this year's Oregon Culinary Institute shooting.

While those events are more publicly visible due to the media exposure they've received, they're only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the work Krum and Libby do. Traumatic events take place every day, and each one feels like a tragedy to those involved.

TIP's most common calls are natural, unexpected deaths. For example, a woman wakes up in the morning to find that her husband died in his sleep. After dialing 911, she has no idea what to do next. Fortunately, as part of the 911 process in Portland and Southwest Washington, TIP has already been notified by a dispatcher, and a volunteer is on the way.

That person might be Krum or Libby. Regardless of who it is, all TIP volunteers are trained to offer emotional support and practical suggestions to help the survivor process the next steps of living and shield them, if possible, from anything that might exacerbate their suffering.



*Jocelyn Libby and Laura Krum*

"When a bad thing happens, people lose a sense of control, and one of our jobs is to not come in and take over, but rather to help them regain their sense of control," Krum says.

"There is nothing to say that is going to fix it for somebody," Libby says. "What we teach is listening skills. It's how to reach out, how to be with somebody who's just gotten some very bad news or is in the middle of a tragedy. To reach out and just be there."

## Twenty Years of Trauma Intervention

Between them, Krum and Libby have volunteered with TIP for 20 years. That's a long time when one considers that TIP on-call shifts last at least 12 hours, and volunteers sign up for three a month. That's 12 hours of being ready for anything at any hour. If a call comes in 11 hours and 55 minutes into a shift, they need to be ready to keep on comforting.

"We may send them out on a call at 8 at night, and they might get home at 11," Libby explains. "We might send them out again at 1 a.m., and they get home at 4 a.m. And we might send them out again."

While both Krum and Libby have professional backgrounds that lend them to this kind of work — Krum in juvenile corrections and Libby as a nurse and counselor — they quickly point out that is not the norm for TIP volunteers.

"The vast majority of our volunteers have no background in social services or health services. Any citizen, regardless of their background, is invited to our TIP Training Academy, where we

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teach the necessary skills to respond to people following a crisis,” Libby says. “Those of us who come in with the professional background often have to unlearn some things because how we are (with TIP) is very different than we were in our careers.”

Background doesn’t dictate who can be a TIP volunteer, but it’s hard not to think of Krum’s as she recounts the moment she first was inspired to get involved. After working in juvenile corrections for 10 years, she took time off to raise her kids. Eventually, she reached a point in her life when she was ready to directly serve young people other than her own, but was struggling to find the right opportunity. With eyes wide open, she came across a newspaper article about a shooting at an under-21 nightclub in downtown Portland called The Zone.

“It was an interview with TIP director June Vining, and it was this whole story about the program serving behind the scenes,” she says. Curiosity piqued, she reached out, got her name on a list, and prepared herself for the 50 hours of training required of TIP volunteers.

“When I got there and got going on it, I realized that there were going to be dead bodies 99.9 percent of the time. I do delinquents, you know, not dead bodies. I don’t know if I’m going to be able to do this,” she remembers thinking. “Then, I just thought, ‘Well, I’ll keep going until I get a sign that I’m not the right girl for the job, and it all worked out.’”

## **A History of Caring**

The first TIP was founded in 1985 in the San Diego area by Wayne Fortin, a licensed mental health professional whose patients reported feeling alone, abandoned or ignored during and after emotional traumas. In 1992, Portland was picked as a city to replicate the program, and it now dispatches citizen volunteers to traumatic events 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

“When something bad happens, people don’t know what to do, and they just need somebody to be with them,” Libby explains of TIP’s role in such events. “There are a lot of other people there: first responders, police, paramedics and others with jobs to do. Our job, and our only job, is to be there for the survivor. We call them survivors for a reason. They are surviving.”



This includes what Krum and Libby refer to as “preventing second injuries,” or lessening the chance that ensuing events will compound the effects of the initial trauma. That means not only shielding survivors from well-intentioned, but potentially inflammatory, condolences and “words of wisdom,” but also helping them formulate actionable plans for moving beyond the initial shock of the event.

“We walk into a room after a man has died, and his wife is there and she’s saying, ‘Oh my god, I don’t know what to do! How am I going to tell my son?’ What we hear is that she’s got a son, and he’s important to her,” Libby says. “So, we say, ‘Let’s talk about where he is and how we help get him here for you.’”

“We’re trained in slowing down the action and doing a lot of reassuring,” Krum says. “We come prepared with information to help them get through the practical side of things, too.”

Reminding survivors to drink water and avoid driving if at all possible, and aiding them in writing lists of next steps also can be incredibly powerful tools for calming the mind and moving from overwhelming emotion to tangible next steps. Whether it’s calling family members or a funeral home, or cancelling a credit card or upcoming plans, putting it down on paper can create the feeling of order among chaos. “At the end, we say, ‘Okay, here’s your list. What do you think you need to do next?’ We’re empowering them, and giving them back the control,” Libby says.

## **From Devastation to Inspiration**

The nature of TIP’s mission means being on the frontlines of some truly unpleasant situations. Still, Krum and Libby point out that the connections they make with the people they help, and the

feedback they receive afterward, leaves them feeling truly inspired.

“When I walk in the door, I’m a complete stranger meeting complete strangers,” Krum says. “But somehow, there is this beautiful bridge that gets built, and it happens by just really being there and being together and listening and supporting.”

To illustrate, she recounts an experience when, after responding to a call, she found herself walking into a room where she was an outsider. In the midst of turmoil and feeling like an interloper, she proceeded to practice the principles that she’d learned through the organization. “It began as a very chaotic scene around death, and at the end, I was invited into their tradition of a prayer circle, and it was very powerful.”

Follow up is a key component of the TIP program, and its volunteers commonly reach out in the aftermath of interactions to check in with the survivors and see how they’re doing. Occasionally, though, survivors also follow up with TIP. “Sometimes our previous clients, who we have served as volunteers, enroll in training for the program themselves,” Libby says. “They say, ‘Oh my gosh, I was at a loss, and I had no idea what to do. The TIP volunteer came and it made all the difference in the world, and now I want to give back.’”

## **Resources in the Hours of Need**

In addition to support for the grieving, TIP serves as a valuable resource in other ways. For police and fellow immediate responders, comforting the survivor at a crime scene or during a death notification is an important job, but one that must be done efficiently to accommodate other duties. That’s where TIP steps in.

“The death notification is a very heart-wrenching experience 100 percent of the time, and we typically remain with the clients. That allows an officer, who’s had to do this very hard thing to leave, knowing that these parties are continuing to receive support. We do a lot of that,” Krum says.

Libby points out, though, that it isn’t just law enforcement that makes use of TIP’s services. “Businesses will initiate a call to us, and schools will, too. Any party can; it’s just a matter of knowing we’re

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available.” She’s also let MAC leadership know that TIP is a resource in the event of a crisis, and is interested not only in educating her fellow members about the service, but perhaps getting them on board.

“I think there’s three ways people can get involved,” Libby says. “They can — and I would do this by directing them to our website — be involved by going through the training and becoming a volunteer. They can make a financial contribution, and they can be involved by spreading the word about our program.”

### Person to Person

“In our culture, where things are getting so one-, maybe two-dimensional, this person-to-person contact is really powerful stuff,” Krum says. “One phrase I learned the value of in training is ‘you’re right.’ Whatever my client’s feelings are, this is a way for me to validate them. The other one is ‘you’re doing great.’ You can’t believe the impact it has. I meet a lot of people during my TIP interactions who appear not to have been affirmed or encouraged in recent memory.”

Likewise, the TIP program provides a safety net for its own volunteers, to ensure that they continue to have the emotional bandwidth to lend. The program’s training emphasizes self-care, and after a volunteer goes out on a call, a support team member calls them to check in and see how it went, and if they need any additional resources.

At the end of the day, it’s all about the survivor. “We’re not saying that we stay unemotional. Sometimes we see such tragedy, and it may bring up some emotion in us,” Libby says. “So, we have this phrase that we teach our volunteers: ‘It’s okay to cry; you just can’t cry longer or louder than the client.’ Because it’s their tragedy. It’s not yours.”

“I have an inherent belief that people are resilient,” Libby adds. “But I think that because we show up on scene, rather than the person, down the road, remembering just the bad thing, they remember something good, too. ‘You know, my dad died, but can you believe that at two in the morning, this person showed up? It was like an angel.’ They pair the bad thing with something that was actually helpful. It provides them with some comfort.” *WM*

► To learn more about the Trauma Intervention Program, donate or volunteer, visit [tipnw.org](http://tipnw.org), or call 503-823-3937.

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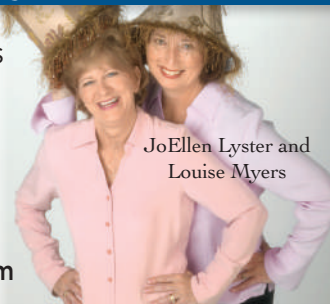
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