

## **Greenville Mental Health Center Assists Communities in Aftermath of Two Traumatic Events**

Greenville Mental Health Center's Disaster Team joined two other Upstate mental health disaster teams in providing much needed crisis assistance and disaster response in both South and North Carolina. They provided support September 29, September 30 and October 6 to Townville Elementary School staff, children and families in the aftermath of a school shooting in Anderson County, SC. Team members also joined North Carolina disaster teams to help victims of Hurricane Matthew for several days in Lumberton, North Carolina in early October.



### **Townville Elementary School**

At Townville Elementary School, six year old Jacob Hall died of a gunshot wound and two other individuals were injured, including a teacher and another student on September 28. The shooter, a 14 year old boy, allegedly shot and killed his father before driving to the school where he opened fire at children on the school playground. Children, parents and teachers were traumatized by these terrible acts of violence which deeply affected this small and close-knit rural community.

Members of **Greenville's** and **Spartanburg's** mental health disaster teams were invited to assist the **Anderson Oconee Pickens Mental Health Center's** team response to school

staff, parents and Townville residents in dealing with the emotional aftermath of the shooting on September 29. They mobilized again for a community support event hosted by the leadership of Oakdale Baptist Church on Friday, September 30. The church provided opportunities for children and parents to talk to mental health workers, victim advocates, and social workers and provided a safe and nurturing place for children to express their thoughts and fears about their experiences through art and play. Teams returned to Townville and the elementary school to help students and staff on the first day of the students' return to school Thursday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, the day following Jacob's funeral.

Townville Elementary staff and parents have continued to emphasize their support of each other and the victims with a "Townville Strong" and superhero theme that began on the days following the shooting. **Anderson, Oconee, Pickens Mental Health Center** has continued to provide support to the school and community and hosted a mental health response debriefing for responding Center staff Friday, November 18 at the Center.

### **Townville Elementary - Moving from Hurt to Healing**

By Chris Haines, M.S.

School-Based Program Coordinator and School-Based Therapist  
Greenville Mental Health Center/West Greenville School

I recently had the honor of being on Greenville Mental Health Center's team that was called to assist after the school shooting at Townville Elementary in Anderson. I was amazed at the response from our community! Students, families, and staff were able to get counseling and have access to a one-stop shop where they could be linked to all the resources they needed. When school began, we spent time in each classroom and setting in the school. Every child got to talk with therapists in class, process their feelings, and begin to recover. The children were amazing! I was impressed with their courage as they returned to school, shared their thoughts and feelings openly, and began to heal. By the end of the first school day, every child in attendance had been able to resume their classes, play on the playground, and shed their anxieties. These children and families were tightly wrapped with the care of counselors, the incredible

school staff, and a loving community. I left Townville feeling so encouraged that our community could pull together, begin the healing process, and ensure that children could again be happy and healthy in their neighborhood school. The experience was a lesson in how much love can overcome even the worst experiences, and I was grateful to have been a part of the process!

## **Personal Reflections of the Hurricane Matthew Disaster Experience**

By Leo Newman, LPC, Greenville Mental Health Center

Disaster strikes us all at some point in our lives...sometimes on a personal scale, and other times on a much larger scale within our community. No matter how we are visited by disaster, there's no way one can truly prepare for its aftermath. It's in those times, when the world around us seems dark, that it matters most to know that help is there. Perhaps that's why I'm drawn to serving on our disaster response team; there's something truly humbling and beautiful about walking with someone on their journey toward healing. This was my experience during our team's most recent response in Lumberton, NC to those impacted by Hurricane Matthew.



The support provided by our team took a different form each day. Some days we handed out water alongside law enforcement. Some days we provided crisis counseling

for first responders and shelter residents. There were moments when what was needed most was to simply lend a listening ear. Perhaps one of my favorite moments from this particular deployment was looking into the eyes of a Red Cross responder and seeing what she did not have the words to say...she needed a hug. She needed someone to understand how the devastation around her had drained her physical and emotional resources. In simply giving her a space to feel all that she was feeling without judgment, I saw her smile return along with a new quickness in her step.



I loved playing football with kids from the shelter who were hungry for an activity that resembled normal life. In an act as simple as throwing a football, these children were able to forget that they lost their home, and their mother was able to take advantage of gathering clothing donations without worrying about the safety of her children. That is what is so amazing about being a part of our disaster response team...anyone can do it because the needs we're meeting are common to us all. Our experiences in Lumberton were truly rewarding, and I'm thankful that we were able to be a part of the community's healing journey.



### **Helpful trauma-related handouts available to communities!**

Handouts and resources provided to parents, teachers and administrators can be found on the Greenville Mental Health Center's website at:

[http://www.greenvillementalhealth.org/community\\_resources/default.html](http://www.greenvillementalhealth.org/community_resources/default.html)

Look for the **Tip Sheets** on trauma!