



My View

TIP IS 30 YEARS OLD!

On July 1, 1985 the first TIP Program went "live" in Oceanside, CA. Twelve brave TIP Volunteers enthusiastically filled the July TIP schedule, even if it meant doing more than they had bargained for.

The most frequent comment I receive when talking to others about the founding of TIP is *"what a great idea you had"*. I silently accept the kind words, but I'm always left thinking: *"It wasn't the idea that led to the founding of TIP. I've had lots of what I thought were good ideas that never materialized."*

So what were the factors which brought TIP from a good idea to a real program? There are 4.....

1. **A Strong Relationship:** They say it's "all about relationships". And in the founding of TIP that turned out to be so true. Over a five year period before TIP was established, I developed a strong relationship with Sgt. Steve Scarano of the Oceanside Police Department. I was the mental health liaison to the police department, and Steve was the police department's liaison to the mental health center.

Over the five years before TIP, Steve and I developed many collaborative programs and taught many classes together. Also, Steve introduced me to many of his coworkers in the police department and soon it seemed I was spending more time there than at the county mental health center where I worked. So when I brought the idea of TIP to the police department I was bringing it to people I had established relationships with. I believe the Oceanside Police Department would have rejected the idea of TIP (like many departments do) without an existing foundation of strong relationships.

2. **County Mental Health:** In the early 1980's the mental health community was very much interested in prevention and community programs. I was able to show my bosses that TIP was a preventive mental health program, and they embraced it. That provided TIP not only with a home in a mental health center, but also gave the program credibility. There was a lot of resistance back then to sending "just" volunteers to help in crisis situations. The fact that a mental health center backed the TIP Program overcame much of that resistance.

3. **The Early TIP Pioneers:** The first group of TIP Volunteers was instrumental in bringing TIP from an idea to a reality. They were willing to respond to TIP calls with very little training (after all, we didn't really know what to expect on TIP Calls back then). The first training manual was only about 10 pages. To my amazement the founding volunteers were willing to actually operate the program. They did everything from volunteer recruitment to fundraising. One thing we forgot in planning the program...who is going to run it? I had a full time job at the mental health center, and I couldn't give the fledgling TIP Program the time it needed. Fortunately the small band of TIP Volunteers stepped up and became the TIP staff.

4. **The Big Dispatcher In The Sky:** Those of us who have been in TIP for awhile have seen the hand of the Big Dispatcher in The Sky at work. Most of us recognize the Big Dispatcher's help when we see over and over again that exactly the right volunteer is matched with the perfect call for her. You can call this phenomenon The Big Dispatcher in the Sky; or call it Luck; or call it Happy Coincidence. Whatever you call it we had lots of good fortune in the early days of TIP.

Examples of our good fortune include: 1) The fact that the police department and county mental health were across the street from one another. Steve Scarano and I agree there would be no TIP if we had to travel miles to meet with one another; 2) I know that if I didn't have the good fortune to meet Steve who may have been the only police officer at the time receptive to working with county mental health...no TIP; 3) I know that without "perfect timing" i.e. the mental health system wanting to offer preventive programs...no TIP.

As I look back today with the knowledge of how difficult it is to establish TIP Programs, I realize that through no particular skill or effort on the founders' part all the pieces just fell into place. It's almost like TIP was meant to be, and those of us who were there at the founding just needed to walk through the doors which were opening.

The reality of TIP could easily have fallen back into "it was just a good idea" stage at any time in the last 30 years. The fact that TIP is still alive and well is a tribute to the actions all of you take on TIP's behalf on a day to day basis. Thank you!

Wayne would like to hear your thoughts.
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