



My View

AN ODE TO AMATEUR HELPERS

Twenty eight years ago, my mental health colleagues and I began discussing the pros and cons of a crisis intervention program using citizen volunteers as the responders. While we all agreed that helping survivors of tragedy immediately on scene was a good idea, we couldn't agree that using "regular" citizens as the interventionists made sense. We argued for hours about whether citizen volunteers could be effective in crisis situations. After all, said my colleagues, citizen volunteers have limited training, most don't have advanced degrees and none are licensed to practice mental health. I remember one of my colleagues blurting out *"we can't send AMATEURS to these situations!"*

Well, 28 years later there is no question about the effectiveness of citizen volunteers as crisis interventionists. Day in, day out...year in, year out...our TIP Volunteers have demonstrated their competence.

It didn't take me long to realize that our "amateur helpers" (TIP Volunteers) are not just competent. They are amazing, courageous, humble, adventurous, funny.....

A few years after starting the TIP program, I decided that I wanted to spend my career with "amateur" helpers and not within the professional mental health community. I have lots of respect for professional mental health professionals, but my heart is with the amateur helpers we call TIP Volunteers. Here are a few of the things I cherish about our amateur helpers...

- They take their work seriously but not themselves. They do not believe as do some mental health professionals that advanced degrees somehow make them special human beings and the only ones capable of helping others.
- They "just do it." When they are called to help someone in crisis they just go (no planning meeting...no review of a client's chart), do what they can to help and return home to their normal lives. No fuss...No fanfare...
- They are quick to laugh at themselves and with each other when the inevitable gaffes and slips of tongue happen on TIP Calls.
- They go where others (including professionals) fear to tread. They jump into emotionally fiery situations without question or complaint.
- They respond to challenging situations without the authority conveyed by a uniform, without a title and without a familiar professional role. They drop into people's lives from out of nowhere prompting the person(s) being helped to wonder *"Who ARE you?"*
- They are willing and able to work on others' turf without the comfort and safety of a professional office. They are willing to reach out to those who need help rather than waiting for those who are hurting to come to them.
- They are innovators. Although their training helps, each TIP Call requires that they improvise and use their own life experience and street smarts.
- They do not have the comfortable predictability of working by appointment. They don't know when or even if a call for service will come.

Because of these good natured, courageous, irreverent, innovative, generous and "no nonsense" Amateur Helpers my TIP career has been an adventure and a joy.

Thank you, Amateurs!

Wayne Fortin, Founder
Trauma Intervention Programs, Inc.

TiplncCeo@aol.com

714-314-0744

See all of Wayne's *My Views* at www.tipnational.org