MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS RECRUITMENT INFORMATION
For American Red Cross
Flood and Tornado Disaster Relief Operations in Louisiana and Texas
March 17, 2016

What is the Red Cross doing and what does it need?

The Red Cross has been providing shelter, feeding, health and mental health support to thousands affected by the floods in the Gulf States. Many more DMH workers are needed to support clients and responders who continue to struggle to cope with significant losses. Please consider going to the operation and volunteering as a local event-based volunteer.

As you read the DMH recruitment information below, keep in mind that disaster relief operations are fluid and staff needs change daily. At the time that prospective volunteers read this message, the needs may have changed. Additionally, our chapters are currently very busy processing large numbers of questions and offers to help. Those interested in volunteering as a DMH volunteer should be prepared that it may take some time before you are assigned to a service site as a DMH volunteer.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

Opportunities for Mental Health Professionals to Become Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Volunteers

Are you eligible?
Red Cross DMH Volunteers must be:
- Independently-licensed, master’s level (or higher) mental health professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, professional counselors),
- State-licensed or state-certified school counselors and school psychologists, or
- RNs with a certification for psychiatric and mental health nursing to include RN-BC, PMHNP-BC or PMHCNS-BC.
- Licensed in the state in which you live

If you are not eligible, don’t worry. There are many volunteer opportunities within Red Cross that are equally important and rewarding. Please contact your chapter to explore activities such as Client Casework or Mass Care. Your chapter may recommend a good volunteer fit for you.

Why does it take so long to get deployed? Why is there so much paperwork?
- Essential information and background checks are needed to ensure the safety and welfare of Red Cross clients, volunteers and partners. Preparing disaster relief workers to respond in the aftermath of disaster can be extremely challenging. Chapter staff is often overworked and are often volunteers themselves.
- The Red Cross places high value in getting the right people, to the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time. Sometimes that means taking more time before deployment in order to save time moving people later.
- Local Red Cross chapters are managing large amounts of requests from the community and from prospective volunteers.
What is different about volunteering with the Red Cross?

- **Be patient and flexible.** Situations in disaster change rapidly and service delivery needs are fluid. You may be asked to work at one site providing one type of service and then be switched to another site within a short period of time.
- **Our co-workers are also our clients.** 90% of Red Cross staff are volunteers just like you. They need your support.
- **You won’t have an office.** Most mental health work done in disaster is done in non-traditional settings, like shelters and service centers. You may be providing support as you’re going for a walk or sitting under a tree.
- **Provide non-traditional mental health services.**
  - Psychological first aid, triage, crisis intervention, assessment and basic support
  - Early intervention is primarily focused on assisting disaster survivors and response workers in meeting their most basic needs.
    - Helping people feel safe and secure
    - Obtaining food and water
    - Addressing physical health needs (e.g., first aid, medications)
    - Connecting to family, friends, and other social support networks.
  - Psychotherapy is not appropriate.
- **The work is very rewarding …. And very frustrating.** You’re working with people who have immediate needs for emotional support, food, shelter and other basics. The most crucial need is information, which often you don’t have because the situation is constantly changing. We do the best we can with the limited resources we have.

What if I’m already a trauma specialist – why do I need special training?

- The Red Cross has a specific role in disaster response which is different from the regular work of most mental health professionals. Training is needed to understand that role.
- In order to minimize frustration, you need to understand the disaster response system and organization of the Red Cross.
- Most trauma interventions are not appropriate in the early aftermath of disaster, but your specialized training can be helpful in identifying those who are at risk for longer-term complications.

Steps to Become a Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Volunteer: (if you choose to remain with the Red Cross after this disaster response)

- All volunteer work with the American Red Cross begins at the local chapter
- Enter your zip code under “Find your local Red Cross” at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) to find the chapter closest to you.
- Register as a volunteer with the chapter.
  - Fill out a health status record
  - Complete a background check
  - Take Disaster Mental Health Fundamentals and Disaster Services: An Overview
  - Fulfill any other training or paperwork that your chapter may require
  - While you are waiting for a course or to be approved to deploy, any support you can provide to your local community and Red Cross chapter will be of great value.
- Psychological First Aid is also a required course for DMH volunteers. You may be able to take it after you have registered as a volunteer. Discuss this possibility with your chapter.