

## Youth Count Column: March 2012: “We the People ...”

Much has been written about the impact of the March 2 tornados on our communities. The destruction was indiscriminate: age, gender, economic status, ethnicity ... none were immune from the impact and the aftermath.

So many children and youth experienced circumstances which would challenge and test the most experienced, stable adult. Yet what we've seen is We the People, who were spared damage and injury, rallying to help We the People who were in the midst of the destruction – yet even these individuals who have lost so much reach out to their friends and neighbors.

Some of the helpers are young people: Cody Brock who, along with his grandfather, pulled a mother and her children from her damaged home before a second tornado completely destroyed it. Silver Creek High School students who looked beyond themselves and submitted a video entry to have Lady Antebellum perform for a high school prom – not for Silver Creek HS but for Henryville High School, and in case you haven't heard, Lady Antebellum selected Henryville as the school for which they will perform.

Life altering event – no one who experienced the storms of that day will ever be quite the same; our children literally and figuratively had their foundations shaken. The help we give and get from each other can let us bounce back from a disaster faster and help our recovery.

Robin H. Gurwitch, PhD\*, a Professor at the University of Cincinnati Department of Pediatrics, is an expert - practically in our own backyard – who has devoted much time to understanding the impact of trauma and disaster on children and ways to increase resilience. She offers the following tips.

- Young people may experience changes in behavior, including trouble sleeping, problems at school and with friends, trouble concentrating and listening, and not finishing work or assignments. They may become more irritable, sad, angry, or worried as they think about what has happened,
- Be willing to listen and talk about the events of the tornado.
- Answer questions simply and honestly, clearing up confusion young people may have about what happened.
- Find ways for young people to feel helpful at home, at school, and in the community
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, but demonstrate how people can come together to an event cope with the disaster.
- Not all young people react the same and may need different amounts of time to cope and adjust.
- We can encourage our students to return to school, stay in school, to continue to learn, and to return to their school and daily life activities.

The circumstances of the weather disaster have provided us special opportunities to build assets for and with our young people – providing the safe environments, modeling positive behavior, showing that the community values them, giving them useful roles in the community, caring and many more. We the People continue to come together to offer help and reassurance during the recovery. It's amazing what we accomplish together to help our youth thrive..

\*Dr. Gurwitch has worked with children impacted by the bombing in Oklahoma City, 9/11 attack in NYC, and Hurricane Katrina. She has served on state and national committees and task forces focusing on trauma, disaster, terrorism, and resilience. Dr. Gurwitch has published numerous scientific articles and book chapters and developed materials on these issues.

For copies of her pamphlets on helping after disasters or to learn how to reach Dr. Gurwitch, email [barbara@youthcount.com](mailto:barbara@youthcount.com) or phone Youth Count at 812-923-1160.

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