

## **NACCHO 2015 Challenge Award Winner**

### **Recruiting Professionals and Training Volunteers for MRC Functional Needs Response Teams - A Capacity Building Model**

#### **1. Project Description**

During multiple regional sheltering events, MRC functional shelter exercises, and other disaster related activities, MRC units in our region have documented significant gaps in their ability to work effectively with children, individuals with functional and access needs, and adults with behavioral health needs. Through this project, we will teach existing MRC members the specialized skills needed to provide these specific support services. More importantly, we will recruit professionals into MRC units who have already acquired valuable, relevant training and experience in addressing functional needs through their work in related fields. MRC Core Competency training, along with basic shelter and incident command training, will quickly enable us to affiliate a region full of dedicated teachers, childcare workers, mental health providers, physical therapists and mediators into the MRC. These volunteers will then be ready to provide specialized functional needs support services during emergencies. Specifically, we intend to recruit and retain members into the 17 western Massachusetts units with four types of specialized professional skills: children's services, behavioral health services, access and functional needs support skills, and mediation.

We will plan and conduct a four-county professional development training event that focuses on these areas of expertise. We will advertise and target the training to current MRC volunteers, as well as to people working in our target fields, emphasizing that the training will make their organizations and communities more resilient as well as enrich their work skills. The four regional MRC coordinators in western Massachusetts and western

Massachusetts MRC Advisory Group members will work together to create this regional training event. Overall project management will be the responsibility of the Berkshire MRC coordinator. Workshops will be led by reputable professionals in each field who teach proven methodologies to effectively address the identified capability and planning gaps.

## **2. Goals**

Most large scale emergencies will impact many individuals who require additional, specific services to survive and thrive during and after the disaster. Our first objective is to recruit and train at least 40 new members with specialized skills in our four target capabilities into the 17 MRC units in western Massachusetts.

Next we will work with the 17 MRC unit Leaders, existing volunteers and these new volunteers to form four or more regional MRC Functional Needs Response Teams consisting of volunteers who are focused on working with:

- children who have special needs during all emergencies, but particularly during decontamination, sheltering, mass evacuation, and other traumatic events
- adults with behavioral health issues, especially those who had special needs prior to the disaster or require assistance with dealing with their overwhelming losses
- individuals with functional and access needs who require specialized assistance with daily living activities or need extra language assistance

Our goal in forming specialized support teams that can provide expertise and leadership during large-scale emergencies, is to increase community resiliency, enhance our ability to recover swiftly as a region, and to prevent disaster related trauma from impacting the recovery and future health of those we serve. The role of these new specialized volunteers will include conducting needs assessments in shelters or other emergency

response facilities, providing Just-in-Time training to more traditional MRC volunteers in functional needs response, providing leadership during a response, and assisting with after action report activities to assess program impact and ensure program improvement.

These specialized teams will be similar to our existing Disaster Animal Response Teams (DART) which were formed to address the needs of animals and pet owners in disasters, and have been notably successful in doing so since 2009.

### **3. Target audience**

In addition to providing this training to current MRC volunteers who wish to improve their volunteer and personal skills, we will recruit professionals who already work with our target populations in their daily lives such as teachers, childcare workers, professional mediators, psychologists, pastoral counselors, personal care attendants, and physical therapists. Many of these professional groups in our region have expressed an interest in being part of the response, but are currently unaffiliated and don't have a clearly defined mechanism for becoming part of the response system. By making it clear that there is a level of engagement to fit every volunteer's needs and skillset, we expect to make this an attractive and beneficial vehicle for experts in their fields to become members of an MRC unit or one of our Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD) groups, and thereby become part of the local emergency response system. We expect this to become a recognized way for individuals to improve their professional skills and gain peer recognition for their accomplishments.

### **4. Impacts**

This initiative will bridge important regional gaps identified through a recent access and functional needs assessment ascertained by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Adding 40 specialized MRC

members to the region will be a significant enhancement in our response capability. Recruiting members with the skills we most need to support our diverse populations will make our response more effective for the 101 communities we serve. The new teams will be regional in nature, thereby increasing the efficiency of response in our geographically large, diverse, and mostly rural region.

## **5. Innovation**

We're proposing a twist on our typical recruiting and training strategy. Typically we do generic recruiting, welcoming all those who want to volunteer and providing them with the core MRC training, hoping that some will bring needed and specific skills to the table or be motivated to complete higher levels of training so they can serve in a specialized capacity. In this project, we are going to specifically target our recruiting efforts to individuals who already possess the skills we need, and then provide them with the MRC Core Competency training. We believe that forming regional specialty Functional Services Response Teams (FSRT), similar to our Disaster Animal Response Teams (DART) to support the general MRC unit volunteers, is an innovation that will greatly improve our regional response capacity and contribute to individual and community resiliency.

The concept of a collaborative, regional training event that targets specific professional groups will serve as a capacity building model for other geographically large and diverse regions served by multiple MRC units.

### **Work Plan**

Each of the four counties in western Massachusetts has a grant funded MRC county coordinator. The Berkshire MRC county coordinator will act as project manager with support from the other three MRC county coordinators and the four public health preparedness coalitions. The major tasks for the project are:

- a. Assess the advantages and challenges of a multi-day, multi-venue training series versus a full day, multi-track conference

- b. Identify roles and responsibilities for recruitment and training events
- c. Identify basic MRC Training modules and trainers
  - MRC 101 – County coordinators; MRC volunteers
  - Sheltering 101 – Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (WRHSAC) On-Line shelter training
  - Emergency Rest Centers – WRHSAC ERC trainers
  - Food in Emergencies – Berkshire County Boards of Health Association Temporary Food Event trainers
- d. Identify and schedule conference trainers/speakers and appropriate trainings in each target Capability:
  - Behavioral Health
    - Behavior Health Disaster Response (Massachusetts Department of Mental Health)
    - Psychological First Aid –
  - Children
    - Second Response (Children’s Training) Team
  - Functional and Access Needs
    - FAST (Functional Assessment Service Teams) – Massachusetts Department of Public Health
    - FNSS (Stavros Center for Independent Living)
    - Safety and Security – Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainers
    - Reunification
  - Mediation:
    - Massachusetts mediators associations
    - Massachusetts Attorney General’s training
- e. Develop the training agenda and schedule including workshops, list of speakers, venues, dates, and logistics.
- f. Complete contracts with trainers/speakers
- g. Develop recruitment and outreach materials

- h. Recruit trainees via media outlets, letters to professional offices, flyers, word of mouth, schools, and social media
  - i. Conduct training events and introduce the concept of the FSR Teams, discussing strategies that would make these teams attractive to professionals.
  - j. Follow up with trainees to retain them as members in their local MRC unit
  - k. Hold initial FSR Teams meetings to discuss development of a Concept of Operations, and Standard Operating Guide.
6. List your project timeline.
- a. 1/1/15 – 1/31/15 Establish training venue(s)
  - b. 1/1/15 – 5/31/15 Develop training agenda
  - c. 4/1/15 – 6/30/15 Contract with trainers
  - d. 5/1/15 – 6/30/15 Develop outreach materials
  - e. 6/1/15 – 9/30/15 Recruit trainees
  - f. 10/1/15 – 10/31/15 Produce training event(s)
  - g. 11/1/15 – 12/31/15 Establish teams and SOGS

### **Sustainability**

We expect this project to be very appealing to professionals in the region. As each new volunteer is trained and becomes a part of the response system, we will suggest that they promote their MRC affiliation to their peers. Word of mouth recruitment of new volunteers will enhance our team building initiatives on an ongoing basis. Additionally, we will promote the formation of these specialized teams in the media, and expect an influx of volunteers with interest in these distinct service opportunities. Based on what we know about the nuances of our region, as well as inquiries we have received from various professional organizations, this project will be a recruitment magnet for all 17 units in western MA.

We will form new partnerships and seek additional grants to provide equipment and ongoing customized training. Based on the needs our specialized MRC teams will fill, we expect to offer an attractive opportunity for new funding sources in our area.

## **Evaluation**

Training attendees, as well as those who express and interest in the trainings, will be asked to provide contact information and will answer questions about their specific expertise with children, individuals with access and functional needs, mediation or adults and children with behavioral health needs.

Training evaluations will be collected to assess how informative and impactful the trainers and materials were.

During the follow up phase of the project, we will track how many trainees registered with their local MRC unit. Retention of at least 50% of those who attended the training will be considered a success. We will collect and begin to process MRC applications at the end of the training, and monitor the MA Responds website for new volunteer applications.

Additionally the four MRC county coordinators will meet bi-monthly to discuss priorities and projects – including the success of the specialized volunteer teams. This will be regularly reviewed at monthly regional MRC Advisory Group meetings and at the quarterly Massachusetts Statewide MRC Steering Committee meetings.