

Writing for Wellness Healing After Natural Disasters A Workshop

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Abstract: Natural disasters are increasing in both frequency and cost. The emotional turmoil inflicted on disaster survivors cannot be estimated. It affects all aspects of a community and lengthens the recovery process. From Papua New Guinea to Guatemala, thousands of people lost their lives in 2018 to natural disasters. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods and heat waves wreaked havoc across the globe. South America has already recorded the first billion-dollar disaster in 2019.

In 2017, the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands were dazed and distraught after two hurricanes hit the islands within a two-week period. Businesses, homes, hospitals, post offices, and schools were destroyed. The economic and emotional loss felt by survivors, like that of disaster victims across the globe, can last for years. Intervention techniques, which incorporate writing, have been shown to improve the ability of disaster survivors to bounce back and regain control over their lives. This workshop provides participants with a writing program that can be implemented after basic needs have been met. Resources for early intervention strategies will be discussed and made available to participants, but are not the main focus of this workshop.

Writing helps heal the wounds and lessen the long term social impact that results following natural disasters. Libraries can encourage resilience in their communities by providing writing programs designed to enhance disaster victims' natural capacity to recover. Writing supports survivors efforts to begin the healing process and lessens negative behaviors, such as family violence and drug abuse, which often occur in the aftermath of disasters. Quite simply, writing stimulates recovery!

Participants can adapt the writing method presented in this workshop to meet the needs of both children and adults. A *Writing for Wellness Program* can be implemented at school, public and academic libraries. Writing allows authors of any age to express their feelings, concerns, misgivings, and doubts about what the future holds. It promotes healing and encourages participants to move forward with their lives. Additionally, it provides a venue for people to reconnect and avoid the negative consequences of social isolation.

The goal of this workshop is to provide participants with a pathway to support their communities in the event of a natural disaster. It provides the presenter with the opportunity to showcase the program and share the heartfelt stories of children who survived two Category 6 hurricanes. Participants will take part in activities and exercises designed to set-up and implement a post-disaster writing program. Live polling and crowdsourcing will be used to ensure that every participant contributes to the outcome. Small groups, through communication and cooperation, will create frameworks that can be adapted to their communities and libraries.

Libraries are more than books and banks of computers. Librarians take care of their patrons – unconditionally with kindness and impartiality. In the aftermath of a disaster, the value of libraries, and the support librarians provide to their communities, cannot be underestimated. Libraries help their communities begin the long process of recovery. Every disaster victim has a story and librarians can create programs to help them tell their story and begin the healing process.

Keywords: Intervention Techniques, Libraries, Librarians, Natural Disasters, Resilience, Storytelling, Wellness, Writing Programs

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| Target Audience: | Librarians – School, Public, and Academic |
| Time: | Approximately 1.5 hrs. |
| Number of Participants: | 25-30 |
| Special Equipment: | Smart Phone |