

# Rich Archbold column: TIP volunteers help survivors of tragedies

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Jessica Thomson, TIP program director, received an award from Long Beach Police Chief Wally Hebeish. (Photos courtesy of TIP)

An elderly woman is incapacitated after waking to find her husband of 50 years dead. The parents of a boy who drowns in their pool while they are partying are in shock. A driver who accidentally hits and kills a girl on a bike is devastated and in pain. The victims of a home invasion robbery are stunned and frightened.

These people are examples of survivors of tragedies helped by volunteers of Trauma Intervention Programs, Inc., a nonprofit started in San Diego in 1985 with 15 regional affiliates serving about 250 communities, including Long Beach, nationwide.

TIP volunteers provide emotional first aid to survivors of tragedy to ease their immediate suffering and help their healing and long-term recovery,” said Jessica Thomson, TIP’s program director in Long Beach which started its program in 2021.

She said survivors of tragic events have “a tremendous need for compassionate support and emergency responders don’t have the time to care for those who are emotionally injured.”

TIP volunteers work with first responders, like the Long Beach Police and Fire Departments, before seeing people struck by tragedy. TIP was recognized in November by the Long Beach Police Department at its annual police awards ceremony.

Gladys Hansen-Guerra, LBPD’s administrator for youth and community engagement, said TIP deserved commendation for its work in providing immediate emotional support, follow-up services, and referrals to individuals and communities affected by trauma.

“TIP’s dedication to training volunteers and collaborating with emergency response teams makes it an invaluable resource in times of crisis for the city,” she said.

Thomson said volunteers are intensely trained to be compassionate listeners, provide information, and connect survivors to counseling services, medical assistance, or community support networks. Applicants must complete eight training sessions and a three-month field training program before being accepted as a volunteer.

Charlotte Hart, operations & development director, said her work with survivors has been heart-wrenching but satisfying.

“I’ve made phone calls to arrange for cremation, held a sobbing sister, searched files for a sibling’s last wishes, cried with a driver who hit a bicyclist, listened to a man describe his daughter’s troubled life, played with the children of a young couple when Mom didn’t wake up, and coordinated food for youngsters after they observed a parent commit an assault,” she said.

“No matter what part of Long Beach I’ve been called out to, the same thing is true: someone needs another human being with empathetic eyes just to be with them as they adjust to the new reality of their life.”

She added: “When I arrive at a site where someone has passed away and the family allows me to join its circle, I feel so honored. These people gift me with the honor of being able to be with

them in a raw way. Often, I leave overwhelmed by how wonderful they are, especially in difficult times. I think of TIP as a framework to hang my own kindness on. We learn specific ‘to dos,’ but who we are as people makes our clients feel comforted and cared about.”



*TIP volunteers attended the 52nd LBPD Annual Awards Ceremony*

Hart said she also has been impressed by the kindness of Long Beach police officers who ask for a TIP volunteer to be sent to a scene of tragedy.

“I think it’s something people don’t recognize about the Long Beach Police Department,” she said. “They are faced with grieving families, spouses/siblings of suicide attempts, immigrants who find themselves surviving the tragedy around a family member, victims of gang violence, people who don’t have the funds to process remains, and lots more. These are often convoluted situations that wrench their hearts, but which require them to remain dispassionate and objective.”

She added: “The police officers I have interacted with are caring, sensitive people. They want to help, and they know that calling out TIP volunteers is some of the best help they can give.” Hart said TIP is looking for more volunteers. If you would like to know more about being a TIP volunteer, call 562-270-1246 or email [info@TIPoflongbeach.org](mailto:info@TIPoflongbeach.org).