



## **Mann & Associates Crisis Communications**

### **Dealing with Disaster**

When the Northridge Earthquake struck at 4:30 a.m. on January 17, 1994, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health implemented its carefully crafted Disaster Plan. A hotline was staffed by 3 p.m. that day to handle calls for help from traumatized earthquake victims.

Mann & Associates got the word out – quickly and effectively – despite power and phone outages. Public service announcements informed the public about the hotline, which received more than 100 calls each hour in the weeks immediately following the earthquake.

The situation demanded more than publicity. We helped craft a comprehensive public information program that had, as its objectives, developing public awareness about free services, creating educational materials in several languages to help people cope with the emotional aftermath of disaster, and helping to create a climate of acceptance so that these free services could be used.

### **Strategy and Implementation**

The strategy was two-tier:

- one-on-one community outreach programs conducted by 47 agencies, supported by an active public information program;
- an integrated, multifaceted public awareness campaign with media, promotions/publicity and print materials components

Tactics and implementation programs were based on research, including a needs assessment, demographic data of LA County and geographically based social and economic indicators.

Mann & Associates created a comprehensive program that included the following elements:

- Media relations – press releases, media alerts, public service announcements, public affairs program placements and anniversary events;
- Community Outreach/Mass media – Speakers Bureau placements to civic organizations; donated billboards, bus posters, direct mail to strategic audiences; special events (including a Children’s Art Exhibit at a mall);
- Educational Materials – posters, brochures, flyers, information bulletins and a low-literacy campaign specifically for Hispanic audiences;

## **Target Audience**

The target audience was everyone in Los Angeles County who suffered emotional trauma as a result of the Northridge Earthquake. This target audience was segmented not only by geographic area but also by language and literacy levels. Some 40% of LAC's residents were determined to be foreign born, with half having moved to LA County during the past decade. Research mandated the production of materials in English and Spanish, with some materials created and test paneled in up to 12 languages.

## **Budget**

The buyouts budget was \$262,850. The agency accomplished its work with 1.5 professional staff assigned to the project declining to .3 in February 1995.

## **Results and Measurement Techniques**

This project did not employ sophisticated measurement techniques. It determined that the best measurement of any program's success would be the number of helpline calls handled and the counseling services provided. Hotline staffers dealt with 48,111 calls and contracted agencies provided counseling services to 1.8 million contacts, helping people with disaster fears, grief and loss, sadness, depression and stress.

To help produce that volume of calls and contacts, Mann & Associates worked to provide:

- 42 feature articles
- 30 interviews (including broadcast media)
- 33 speakers bureau placements
- 2,345,560 print pieces (in up to 12 languages)\*
- 102 billboards seen by 1.236 million people/day
- 937 bus posters seen by 14 million fares/month
- 88,00 Spanish language tabloids (with *La Opinion*)
- Children's Art Exhibit (involving 32 schools and 16 agencies)

\* Brochures, flyers, children's art calendars (to school teachers) and 250,000 POGs with hotline number

*M&A provided exemplary services to the Department of Mental Health and the citizens of the County of Los Angeles under its FEMA contracts in the aftermath of the Civil Unrest in 1992 and later the Northridge Earthquake. These large-scale public relations/public information programs required considerable management skills, professional expertise and flexibility. They performed admirably, often under stressful conditions and short time frames.*

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