



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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Time and Support Needed to Recover from Aftermath of NIU Shooting, LSSI Counselor Says

“It’s important to remember that grief can be a long-term process,” says Jackie Hovde, program director of the West/Northwest Suburban Counseling Center in Villa Park, a program of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). “Sometimes grief symptoms will strike later, and sometimes feelings associated with grief will occur in cycles. Grief symptoms don’t necessarily follow a linear pattern; they can come and go,” she adds, which is important for people still reeling from the February 14 shooting at the Northern Illinois University (NIU) campus in DeKalb to know.

Because so many NIU students and their families are from the Chicago area, Hovde says the center, which offers counseling in several communities, is making counseling available to those affected by the shootings, with the initial visit free. She adds that a delayed reaction to such an event is typical. “People think that because the initial stress is over, they have handled it, but that’s not always true,” she says. “People have to give themselves time to recover [from this kind of traumatic event].”

“It’s important for people to be aware of their feelings,” she says, noting that people can also suffer physical symptoms of stress in the aftermath of a traumatic event, such as problems with insomnia, muscular aches and pains, digestion and headaches.

One of the center’s part-time counselors, Mandy Semenik, was one of 700 counselors who went to the NIU campus on February 25 and 26 to help students, faculty and staff members affected by the shooting.

“Everyone on campus knew we were counselors,” Semenik says, adding that the counselors wore red wristbands to stand out on campus. “And they all wanted to talk on some level.” She notes that even the students who didn’t want to talk about Cole Hall told her they were glad to know that the university cares enough to have arranged for counselors.

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“On Monday and Tuesday, we went to the classrooms,” Semenik explains. “I would give a presentation at the beginning of class and facilitate any discussion afterwards.”

Then, it was up to the students if they wanted to continue talking about the shooting or have their regular class conducted. If the latter, Semenik left the classroom and sat outside in the hall, and students could come out and talk with her if they wished. She also met with faculty and staff members.

“It was a really positive experience, because students and university were so appreciative of [us counselors],” says Semenik, adding, “I appreciate life more, and [the experience] made me even more glad that I chose this profession of helping people.”

Hovde says that every university in Illinois sent a counselor to NIU, as did Virginia Tech, where a shooting took place in 2007. Other counselors came from as far as California to help. According to Hovde, approximately 1,200 people applied to help with counseling at NIU.

LSSI’s community-based counseling is available at several churches located in Berwyn, Des Plaines, Downers Grove, Elmhurst, Prospect Heights, Villa Park and Wheaton. For more information, call Hovde at 630/993-0100; or visit www.LSSI.org and search under “Counseling and Parent Support Services.”

Founded in October 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is celebrating its 140th anniversary, and is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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