

CARING FOR THE CARERS

Workshops for Grenfell Tower Disaster Support Organizations

The Grenfell Tower fire, in June 2017, caused at least 80 deaths and over 70 injuries, and left more than 1,000 people homeless. The fire occurred at the 24-storey Grenfell Tower block of public housing apartments in North Kensington, London. Individuals and community groups and organizations in the surrounding area, and from across London, rallied to organize speedy help for the hundreds of victims. Temporary shelter was provided in local churches, mosques, and a sports hall, and donations of money, food, water, clothes and toys were received in enormous quantities. Local organizations were flooded by volunteers, wanting to assist regular staff to coordinate assistance and distribute relief supplies. The relief effort involved hundreds of people working round the clock for several weeks. While the action of firefighters, ambulance crews and police responding to the disaster was universally praised, the immediate support organized by the local council was wholly inadequate, and undoubtedly compounded the anguish and misery of the surviving victims.

Having talked to several local organizations by telephone, GIST-T has offered to hold short workshops tailored to the needs of staff and volunteers. Held in collaboration with local groups, these workshops—‘Caring for the Carers’, and ‘Psychological First Aid’—will be informal, flexible and cutting edge, with opportunities for participants to both listen and talk. A maximum of 15 participants can be accepted for each 2½-hour workshop. The local mosque, about 10 minutes’ walk from Grenfell, has already agreed to host these workshops in either October or November 2017. This mosque had itself over 100 volunteers working on assistance to Grenfell survivors for several weeks, and the leadership readily acknowledges the need for psychosocial support to be offered to staff and volunteers. Other local groups will be invited to join.

‘Caring for the Carers’ Workshop: this will help participants understand the basic principles of psychological trauma, with specific consideration to self-care. Participants will learn and practice simple and effective self-care techniques with a view to not only being able to use these techniques themselves, but also to teach others about them.

‘Psychological First Aid (PFA)’ Workshop: participants will learn the key features of psychological trauma and how this affects individuals, families and the community. The core principles of PFA will be discussed and participants will learn how to interact with people impacted by the effects of trauma. They will consider what interventions are more helpful than others in post-trauma situations.