

# Boca psychologist struggles to launch trauma-therapy center

Classes would train therapists to deal with man-made, natural disasters

By DALE M. KING  
STAFF WRITER

Dr. Sherrie Raz has seen trauma at its worst. The Boca Raton clinical psychologist was one of a handful of therapists who arrived at the World Trade Center site in New York City just two days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

She saw doctors doing their best to aid victims of severe

mental shock.

But she also saw health professionals unprepared for what they had to deal with and suddenly in need of treatment themselves.

Raz said she doesn't want that to happen again, so, in conjunction with Florida Atlantic University, she founded the Institute for Emergency Mental Health Services to train domestic and international students in crisis response.

Training, she said, will be available to people at three levels: to individuals concerned about their own lack of expertise in dealing with natural or man-made disasters; to paraprofessionals who may be first responders and to professionals such as police and fire-rescue units.

It will be the only institute of

its kind in the world offering six main tracks: humanitarian education, law, medicine, media, religion and finance.

But Raz herself is enduring some anxiety as she tries to get the institute off the ground. She needs to raise \$10,000 by Saturday or she could lose the services of a key player.

Peter Reynolds, IEMHS co-director, may have to leave if the money isn't available by the weekend. Reynolds, who has nearly 30 years of military, business and media experience in various parts of the world, has already overseen the construction of a similar trauma treatment learning facility.

Reynolds is also a lieutenant colonel with the Allied Supreme Powers.

Also working for the IEMHS is Dr. John LaPointe, a police psychologist formerly with the Broward County Sheriff's Department.

Raz said she needs the \$10,000 as seed money to open the institute; after that, course fees will keep the center running.

She said that her agreement to affiliate with FAU bars her from asking the university for money.

The IEMHS, Raz said, "will be a center to educate teachers in peace and humanitarian studies. The teachers will go back and teach children."

She said people from the University of Istanbul, Turkey, and the University of Manila in the Philippines are waiting to come to the United States and take the course.

Boca Raton itself is a unique spot to set up the center because it endured the impact of the nation's first bioterrorism incident following the Sept.



STAFF FILE PHOTO

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11 attacks.

"The institute intends to offer the local community the opportunity to attend courses," Raz said. "Boca Raton increased its worldwide reputation in the aftermath of the anthrax incident [at the American Media Building in October 2001], and this program can build on that. By attending this program consisting of 2 1/2 days of classes, everyone can address the challenges that will continue to affect us."

And in the post Sept. 11 era, she said, trauma can be found in many situations - from exploded buses in Israel to fears of sniper attacks in Washington, D.C. to destroyed night clubs in Bali.

According to Raz, "the institute is a self-funded organization and currently relies on donations to continue its work. A number of fund-raising events have been planned and organized over the next few months, but immediate gifts are welcome."

## How you can help

The Institute for Emergency Mental Health Services is seeking donations to begin teaching classes in humanitarian and crisis response careers in mental health. Donations for IEMHS can be sent to: 951 N.W. 13th St., Boca Raton, FL 33486.