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## **Vibrant Emotional Health Announces Response Crisis Center as a New Disaster Distress Helpline Center as It Expands Online Peer Support Offerings**

*The Disaster Distress Helpline launches Survivors and Responders of the COVID-19 Pandemic Online Peer Support Community to support individuals experiencing emotional distress*

**NEW YORK, NY (Friday, January 12, 2023)** – Vibrant Emotional Health is pleased to announce that **Response Crisis Center**, based in Setauket, New York, has been chosen to serve as the new Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) Online Peer Support Center. DDH has also announced that the new [Survivors and Responders of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) online peer community consolidates two former online peer support communities, [Healthcare Workers Impacted by COVID-19](#), [Parents, and Caregivers Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), the DDH is the only national hotline dedicated to providing year-round crisis counseling to individuals experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Anyone in the U.S. and territories can call or text 1-800-985-5990 to connect with a trained counselor. The 24/7, 365-day-a-year hotline is free and confidential. Spanish speakers can call the hotline and press “2” for 24/7 bilingual support, and callers to the hotline can also connect with counselors in over 100 other languages via third-party interpretation services. Deaf or hard-of-hearing American Sign Language users can contact the DDH through a videophone option via any videophone-enabled device and dialing 1-800-985-5990 or by selecting the “ASL Now” option on the DDH website at [disasterdistress.samhsa.gov](https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov).

The DDH was launched in 2012 to guarantee that everyone in the U.S. would have access to specialized crisis & emotional support immediately following major disaster events and during long-term recovery. For over ten years, the DDH has provided crisis counseling and support to thousands of survivors and responders in response to numerous natural disasters, tragic mass shooting events and throughout the historic COVID-19 pandemic.

The DDH Online Peer Support Communities comprise a national, peer-focused program that provides individuals who have experienced a natural or human-caused disaster opportunity to

come together for mutual aid, to share trusted resources, and to help one another continue to heal from the effects of a traumatic event. Beginning in January 2023, DDH now offers two communities—1) Survivors and Responders of the COVID-19 Pandemic Community and 2) Survivors of Mass Violence (including people who survived an incident of mass violence such as terrorism or mass shootings; emergency responders; loved ones of victims, and more).

Each DDH Online Peer Support Community is private, with screened member requests. The program is offered online via Facebook Groups. It is monitored 24/7/365 by a dedicated crisis center to support members who may be experiencing emotional distress and need additional support. Peers who fit the criteria for one of the two communities request membership through [the DDH Online Peer Support Communities Facebook page](#). Members of DDH Online Peer Support Communities can also connect with trained DDH Peer Supporters employed by Vibrant and who have lived experience in the targeted populations and can also access crisis support from DDH crisis center counselors through “Crisis Support Over Messenger,” an innovative feature of Facebook Messenger developed in partnership with Meta.

“We are excited to have Response Crisis Center joining in our efforts to support those who have experienced a natural or human-caused disaster in the DDH Online Peer Support Communities,” said Christian Burgess, Director of the Disaster Distress Helpline. “Our Online Peer Support Communities further our commitment to creating enhanced opportunities for survivors and responders of disaster to come together for mutual aid and emotional support during recovery.”

**Response Crisis Center** was selected to serve as a DDH Online Peer Support Community in December 2022 through a special funding opportunity released to the larger 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline network. Response Crisis Center was founded in the early 1970s, following a college student’s near suicide. After the incident, members of the community came together and considered what options this student and others feeling alone might have for finding help. It was clear that a crisis hotline with local referral information was needed, and it must be available day and night. They gathered professional staff and volunteers, and created a training program for them. From these humble roots, the Response C grew to serve all of Suffolk County, joined the Lifeline network when it launched in 2005, and is now a nationally accredited crisis center.

“We’re honored to have been chosen to support the Disaster Distress Helpline and join the wonderful Online Peer Support Community team,” said Meryl Cassidy, Executive Director of Response Crisis Center. “By joining in this national effort, we’re able to deepen our commitment to helping people lower anxiety and facilitate the coping skills they already have.”

To learn more about the DDH Online Peer Support Community program, visit [StrengthAfterDisaster.org/Peer-Support](https://StrengthAfterDisaster.org/Peer-Support).

Contact Hannah Collins at [hcollins@vibrant.org](mailto:hcollins@vibrant.org) to **request an interview with Christian Burgess, Director of the DDH**, or to learn more about [Vibrant Emotional Health](#) which

administers the hotline. For more information about the DDH, visit [disasterdistress.samhsa.gov](https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov) and [view a video about the history and impact of the DDH in the past ten years](#).

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### **About the Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH)**

The Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) is the nation's only hotline dedicated to year-round disaster crisis counseling. The DDH is free, confidential, and available 24/7 across the United States and territories. It is available to those in need of emotional support related to all natural- or human-caused disasters. Anyone experiencing distress or other disaster-related mental health concerns related to this severe weather can call or text 1-800-985-5990 to connect with a trained DDH counselor. Spanish speakers can call or text the hotline and press "2" for 24/7 bilingual support. The Disaster Distress Helpline is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health. Visit [disasterdistress.samhsa.gov](https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov) and [strengthafterdisaster.org](https://strengthafterdisaster.org). Follow the DDH on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

### **About Vibrant Emotional Health**

For 50 years, Vibrant Emotional Health has been at the forefront of promoting emotional well-being for all people. As leaders, advocates, educators, and innovators in mental health, we have been raising awareness and offering support to everyone who is struggling. We work every single day to help save lives and assist people to get care anytime, anywhere and in any way that works for them. We are unwavering in our belief that everyone can achieve emotional wellness with the right care and support. As part of our work, we administer the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, funded by SAMHSA, which provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in emotional distress across the United States. For more information, please visit [www.vibrant.org](https://www.vibrant.org).