

9-11 Lives On

BY ROBERTA GOULD, PH.D.

On Sunday, September 9, 2018, I attended the 17th symposium of "Voices of September 11th: Healing Families and Communities After Tragedy." Held at the New York Marriott Downtown, near the sight of the Twin Towers, it was a day of presentations from leading researchers and clinicians, working in the field of trauma.

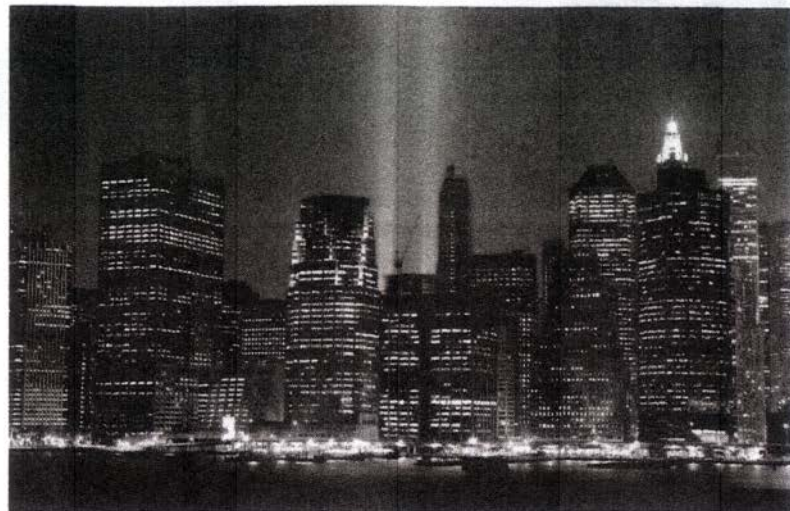
Research and new techniques in the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and anxiety was discussed, giving voice to victims' families, and support for children, families and communities following tragedy. It was also a day to remember all those who are gone.

Since 9-11, more than 2,000 people have died of related illnesses, and there are more than 4,000 survivors and responders, who are currently in treatment for serious medical and mental health conditions. Despite all the challenges, the

9-11 community has found strength and resilience in the journey together and reached out to survivors of violence in today's world.

A mother of a six-year-old girl, who was killed at Sandy Hook, held up her picture. I saw firsthand how the gun violence of today is causing such extreme suffering for parents, families, first responders and communities. Seventeen years later, the endless cycle continues with the traumatization of so many. Research shows 35% do not get better and 50% are somewhat better.

As a psychologist, I volunteered at 9-11 and worked with some of the survivors, families of the victims and first responders. Every year since 9-11, I've kept up contact with Vera, a single mother of 6 children, who was administering hearing tests on the 62nd floor when the plane struck the building. She ran down the steps, and with clothing all singed and in a state of shock, was taken by ambulance



to a nearby hospital. Refusing to be admitted, because she needed to get home to her children, the nurses loaned her pieces of their clothing, and Vera walked across the Brooklyn Bridge. There, many volunteers were waiting, ready to drive the survivors to their homes.

I was assigned to take her to the New York office to register for medical, psychological and financial help. Unfortunately, she is still suffering from severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and has lost many jobs because of the problem. She lost her house and takes turns

living with different relatives. The panic attacks, flashbacks, difficulty to take public transportation, fear of enclosed places and many more symptoms get in the way.

Vera met me at the conference and together we attended some meetings. After lunch, she was in touch with some of the leaders, who will try to get her on track again with more services. I'm hoping our reunion, the sessions and speaking to other survivors will motivate her to try again. Maybe the experience will lift some of the depression, at least for a little while.