HOPE
Animal-Assisted Crisis Response

“Comfort in times of crisis”
Mission of HOPE AACR

To provide comfort and encouragement through animal-assisted support to individuals affected by crises and disasters.
Who We Are

• HOPE AACR is a national, all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

• Nationwide, we have 260+ certified crisis response teams in 26 states. We have expanded into Canada.

• Teams are insured: $2 million in liability

• All members complete background checks

• HOPE AACR is a member of National VOAD and sits on the Emotional & Spiritual Care Committee
Each region follows national guidelines for delivering AACR services through independent regional management.
Our Goals

• Train and certify a growing nationwide network of crisis response teams.

• Assist first responders and relief agencies by providing comfort to those affected by crises and disasters.

• Continually seek ways to improve our training, service delivery, professionalism, and collegial teamwork.
Benefits of Animal-Assisted Programs

- Lowers blood pressure
- Lowers heart rate/respiration
- Helps to relax and relieve stress
- Aids in relieving physical pain
- Helps relieve mental anxiety
Why Use Dogs in Crisis Response?

• There is a special bond between people and dogs.

• Dogs are generally accepted as “helpers of man”.

• Contact with a well trained, calm dog is very different than human contact.

• AACR dogs are highly social, and are sensitive to human needs.
Needs after a Crisis

- Trust/Restore balance
- Safety
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Routine/Structure
- Normalization/Info
- Tactile Reassurance
- Coping Tools
- Questions & Answers
- Improved control
- Connectedness
- Feelings Expression
- Sense of Strength/Future
Crisis Response “Comfort Dogs” Offer:

- Sense of normalcy
- Reassurance
- Grounding tool – Help people focus outward
- Safe, unconditional nurturing touch and affection
- Positive impact on stress response
  - Decreases cortisol
  - Increases endorphins, oxytocin
Therapy Dogs vs Working Dogs in Crisis Response

• All crisis response dogs are therapy dogs, but not all therapy dogs are crisis response dogs.

• Some therapy dogs may become crisis response dogs after receiving specialized training for both the dog and the handler.
Evolution of Crisis Response Dogs

The event that got things started…

Thurston High School Shooting
Springfield, OR
May 1998
## Key Differences

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal Assisted Activities/Therapy</th>
<th>Animal-Assisted Crisis Response</th>
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<td>Most visits are routine and predictable with limited exposure to people expressing emotions, stress and grief.</td>
<td>Call-outs may be chaotic and unpredictable and are in unfamiliar environments. Teams are <em>likely</em> to encounter people expressing intense emotions, stress and grief.</td>
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<td>Help is usually available from facility staff, if needed. Places visited are typically quite safe. Visits are usually of short duration and not physically demanding for the dog or handler.</td>
<td>Crisis response teams must be <em>self-sufficient</em> so as to not burden responders, or worse, become victims themselves. Call-outs may be outside, <em>physically demanding</em>, requiring teams to walk long distances, <em>work for longer periods over several days</em>.</td>
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<td>Training is typically in the nature of dog obedience and general Canine Good Citizenship skills.</td>
<td>The HOPE certification process requires <em>continuing education for handlers and canines</em>, participating in workshops, drills and desensitization exercises.</td>
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Among the Prerequisites

• Dogs should not be easily stressed and should be able to recover quickly from exposure to stressors.

• Dogs cannot exhibit any form of aggression; their behavior around other dogs should be fairly neutral.

• Applicants planning to work as Team Leaders (without dogs) are not required to have experience in AAA/T; leadership and/or crisis response experience is helpful.
Certification Workshop

- Workshops are conducted in a positive, supportive manner.
- Hopefuls will be trained in all critical aspects of AACR work.
- Hopefuls will be evaluated for their ability to successfully work in stressful situations.
- Hopefuls must successfully complete the workshop to join HOPE AACR.
HOPE AACR Training Workshop

- Emotional First Aid
- Crisis Intervention
- Concepts and Phases of Disaster
- Role during Disasters
- Incident Command System
- Human Stress Reactions
- Working with Other Agencies
- Canine Stress
- Canine Behavior & Learning
- Team Welfare Guidelines
- Role of Team Leader
- Lessons from Past Deployments
- Field Training Exercises:
  - First Responder Exposure
  - Traveling with your dog: public transportation, airline
Field training includes:

- Exposure to emergency response vehicles
- Crisis-response drill
- Transportation training
  - bus, subway, trains
  - airport protocols
- Interaction with public
- Debriefing
HOPE ANIMAL-ASSISTED CRISIS RESPONSE

Airport Field Trip

Bus Training
Emergency Equipment Desensitization Team Role-Play Session
Continuing Education

Topics may include:

- Crisis intervention
- Psychological First Aid
- Community outreach
- Agency networking
- Disaster drills
- Canine handling/skills
- Involvement with other crisis response groups, such as CERT or Red Cross, is encouraged!
Who HOPE works with:

- Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD):
  ARC, Salvation Army, Faith-based Orgs
- Government Agencies:
  FEMA, State and County EMAs, Military
- Public Safety:
  Fire & Forestry Agencies, Law Enforcement Agencies
- Relief Personnel:
  Chaplains, School Counselors, Medical and Mental Health workers, Disaster Recovery Centers
- Citizen Corps Volunteer Groups:
  CERT, MRC, Fire Rescue Reserves, VIPS and affiliate partners
How To Use HOPE Comfort Dogs

- Interactions among people waiting in line for services
- Visitations with sheltered persons, particularly children
- Respites for agency volunteers and first responders
- Other mutually-agreed-upon services per agency request
  - Aid in allowing workers to perform designated tasks
  - Assist in approaching and interacting with clients
Responding to a Deployment

- When a crisis or disaster occurs, the president and regional director in the affected area will determine if HOPE teams should be on stand-by.
- HOPE AACR does not self-deploy. We depend on other response agencies to request comfort dog teams to provide emotional support services.
- When an agency requests teams, we will deploy teams based on their proximity to the incident and their level of experience.
Arriving on Scene

• Upon our arrival on-scene, Team Leaders are trained to check in with the Incident Command staff first.

• A Team Leader (with or without a dog) is always designated and will be the primary interface with personal on-scene.

• HOPE teams are trained to be self sufficient and to not impact the relief effort with their presence.
Hurricane Harvey 2017
Area DRCS/Shelters & JFO Austin, TX
Recipient of the

National VOAD Member of the Year Award for 2018

National VOAD, an association of organizations that mitigate and alleviate the impact of disasters, provides a forum promoting cooperation, communication, coordination and collaboration; and fosters more effective delivery of services to communities affected by disaster.
Contact Info

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