



## Crisis Response Case Study: Hurricane Sandy

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Hurricane Sandy left a path of destruction throughout the metro-New York area; some of those most severely affected by the storm were also those responsible for repairing its damage. Service providers. Healthcare employees. Transit workers. These intrepid individuals put their own problems on hold to return to their stations as quickly as possible to ensure that our city got back online as soon as possible. But who helped **them**?

CCA, among others.

Even with CCA headquarters shut down by the power failure and staff displaced by the storm, CCA management coordinated on-site services to assist the people working around the clock to restore services and aid the storm victims. Less than 24 hours after the storm passed, CCA clinical staff were on site to support our clients' employees throughout Long Island, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Manhattan. Over the next three weeks, CCA counselors went on-site more than 80 times.

And these were not standard on-sites. Most requests were filled within 12 hours; many were filled with only a couple hours notice. CCA provided 24-hour counseling services at some locations to accommodate workers on all shifts. Our counselors went to devastated areas, offering counseling services in makeshift tents, company buses, and cars because there were no buildings left intact. At times, they were transported by police because no other transportation was available. Like the employees they were counseling, CCA's counselors put their own problems second in order to provide much-needed support.

CCA counselor, Jonathan G., spent Monday night in the dark watching the cars in front of his flooded apartment building being swept away. Jonathan evacuated with his small daughter and his wife who was seven months pregnant to his brother's house in Long Island. Sharing the house with 12 people, Jonathan was able to reconnect with CCA management to ask, "What can I do?"

The answer? Provide support to the people trying to get New York up and running. Jonathan borrowed a car and drove to the call center of a major service provider to offer counseling, guidance, information, and assistance to employees responding to the community's problems.

Beset by their own difficulties, the call center employees were working extended shifts, inundated with calls from terrified, sometimes angry, storm victims. Working through the weekend, Jonathan counseled 13-15 people a day – people who had lost their homes, who were sleeping at work so that they could man the phones, dispatch field workers, and restore service to the area.

When gas shortages threatened his ability to reach the call center, Jonathan managed to find a ride to the location with one of the employees, requiring him to put in the same long hours as the staff.

Like all the on-site counselors, Jonathan provided practical coping techniques for maintaining composure and reducing stress. He offered simple, yet effective self-care recommendations to over-extended workers. He taught the workers how to:

- Find empathy for callers, even in the face of frustrated, sometimes abusive customer behavior
- Defuse the caller's anger
- Deal with the strong emotions that were bombarding them – their own and those of the customers
- Take care of themselves, e.g., not to take on too much, stay connected to family and friends, develop realistic but proactive action plans for recovery efforts

Jonathan provided crisis intervention services as well as referrals for crisis housing, transportation, and other essential services.



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Over the next week and a half, Jonathan assisted more than 150 employees, enabling them to keep going to help the community get going again.

Separated from his family, who were able to return to Manhattan, Jonathan remained in temporary housing so that he could continue to provide the support that these employees desperately needed. He says, "Being needed helps make my own problems bearable. And these people need me."

Jonathan's experience reflects CCA's approach to crisis response. Every CCA counselor worked extended hours and through weekends as did senior management and the entire Account Team, many of whom also fulfilled on-site requests.

In addition to providing continuous on-site services, the CCA team:

- Provided 24-hour telephone consultation support to managers who required support and advice in dealing with their distressed employees.
- Used mobile technology to access information and resources to provide uninterrupted crisis support to employees even when they were themselves displaced by the storm.
- Interfaced with other emergency service organizations such as the Red Cross and FEMA on behalf of our clients. In many instances, our counselors worked in tandem with FEMA representatives on-site.
- Distributed topical information, updated resource listings, helpful "tip" sheets, and posters to companies impacted by the storm.
- Continued to provide services to ongoing EAP clients despite expanded schedules, limited resources, and difficult working conditions.

Hurricane Sandy was a crisis of magnitude. At CCA, we treat every catastrophic incident that affects our clients' employees with the same immediacy, commitment, and comprehensive support.