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SPOTLIGHT

Responding to Tragedy in Tucson

Public health graduate Khin Mar '11 offers support to victims and shows others how to help

By Sandra Bienkowski

● ● ● **IT WAS A SATURDAY MORNING IN JANUARY**, and Dr. Khin Mar was participating in a Red Cross disaster training class when she received a call to respond to a very real emergency. It was a mass shooting in Tucson, Ariz. Fourteen people injured. Six dead. Mar was called to the office of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, where family, staff, and well-wishers were gathering as they heard false reports of the congresswoman's death.

On the scene, Mar provided support, food, and water to comfort people. News circulated that federal Judge John Roll was dead. Some people were in shock; others were inconsolable. Volunteers gathered around a car behind the office as a radio broadcast the news that Giffords was alive. Everyone cheered.

Mar, who earned an M.D. in 1982 and was pursuing a Master of Public Health (M.P.H.) at

Walden at the time, responded as part of the Disaster Action Team of the American Red Cross Southern Arizona Chapter. At Walden, Mar learned that emergency preparedness is one of the most important aspects of public health. "The immediate response to a disaster is important to a community," says Mar, who has 20 years of clinical experience. "I am prepared for whatever disaster I might face."

In the tight-knit city of Tucson, Mar says it was difficult to find anyone who was not impacted by the shooting. "As volunteers, we understand grief is a universal emotion," she says. "We are there to empathize and to listen carefully."

Mar earned her medical degree in Myanmar (formerly Burma), and although she has her U.S. medical license, she would have to attend a formal medical program in the United States to practice here. She decided instead to work full time as a volunteer so she could be close to her son, who is attending the University of Arizona on a full scholarship, and to apply what she's learned at Walden in the field.

The cultural competency Walden integrates into the M.P.H. degree program has helped Mar interact with a range of community members, she says. "It's important to understand the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs of individuals to produce intended public health outcomes," Mar explains. As a result of her work, she was quickly promoted to assistant supervisor of the Disaster Mental Health Team.

Cheryl Bender, director of emergency services at the American Red Cross Southern Arizona Chapter, says there are always volunteer opportunities available in every community, even for people who don't have mental health expertise.

Typically after an event—whether it's man-made or a natural disaster—people's basic needs come first. "People always need a place to stay, or need food and clothing. Volunteers can assist in a shelter or at an operations center. We need team members on call 24 hours a day to respond to anything from a single-family fire to major events."

“ Together we can all make a difference. ”

— Khin Mar

Bender says having a cadre of vetted volunteers to respond to a disaster is essential. "It doesn't need to be our organization, but we need affiliated volunteers so we can be sure we're putting the people involved in these emergencies into safe environments," she says.

Mar says there's a role for everyone who volunteers. At the Red Cross, it could be stuffing envelopes, teaching health and safety classes, offering comfort to a person who has lost everything, and even communicating the news of a birth to someone serving our country. "Together we can all make a difference."

Connecting With Students

● ● ● **TWO FACULTY MEMBERS KNOWN FOR MENTORING** and fostering a true connection with their students have been named recipients of the 2011 Presidential Award for Faculty Excellence, which recognizes leadership and commitment to Walden University's students and its mission of social change.



Dr. Patricia Thurmond, of The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, encourages her students

to think critically and create social change in ways large and small, including volunteering for school projects, tutoring, coaching, and working on committees.

She also mentors new faculty and serves on dissertation and governance committees while working on course and program development, including the implementation of the student assessment system and the redesign of the M.S. in Education (M.S.Ed.) specialization in Middle Level Education (Grades 5-8).

"I want to help change the climate of education by providing hope and direction," she says. "Our students complete our program with a renewed sense of purpose that generates positive change at the classroom, school, district, and national levels."



Dr. Tony Leisner, of the School of Public Policy and Administration, focuses on helping first-year students assimilate and

move toward completing their degrees. To do so, he brings to bear his years of professional experience—as an educator, a businessman, and a participant in poverty-fighting nonprofits—and a level of understanding as a Walden alumnus.

Knowing that a true connection can't be forged with a faceless professor, Leisner created a video to introduce himself, which, in turn, encourages his students to post photographs of themselves and their families in the class cafe and creates a personalized, collaborative environment.

"I still run a small business, but teaching gives me the most satisfaction," he says. "I have been where the students are, so I understand the challenges they face. I believe they can all achieve their goal of completing a degree and use it to create positive change." — C.V.D.

Read more about Walden faculty members and their accomplishments at www.WaldenU.edu/facultyaccomplishments.