



The History of the Arkansas Crisis Response Team

Mission: to provide emotional support to victims in the aftermath of a natural or manmade disaster, and to enhance services for Arkansas victims of crime.

The Arkansas Crisis Response Team (AR-CRT) is a statewide non-profit, multi-disciplinary organization that responds to the emotional needs of victims, survivors, first responders in the immediate aftermath of a community disaster. AR-CRT is an all volunteer organization, whose members come from all walks of life, sharing their compassion and specific crisis intervention training with those in need. More than 500 Arkansans have received the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) model of Basic Crisis Response Training.

While AR-CRT members may be trained police officers, fire fighters, clergy, administrators, judges, physicians, psychologists, nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, teachers, or any other number of professions, responders must undergo rigorous training and testing to join the crisis response team. AR-CRT members apply the NOVA model of providing assistance in real life situations. AR-CRT responders meet and share their experiences with other members, broadening and deepening AR-CRT's collective experience.

AR-CRT exists to:

1. Provide trained crisis responders to Arkansas communities and to communities in other parts of the nation, on request.
2. Provide support for existing local resources and grassroots crisis response teams.
3. Organize the training and continuing education of crisis responders.

AR-CRT has the distinction of being the first NOVA certified state team. This proud distinction has developed over a seven-year period and countless hours of NOVA trainings, group crisis interventions, and ongoing trainings.

Historically, Arkansas was identified with natural disasters such as tornadoes and floods. This perception changed in March of 1998, because of the tragedies that occurred at Westside Middle School near Jonesboro, Arkansas, where two boys set off a fire alarm and then waited in the woods to attack their classmates. A teacher and four students died in the shooting. Other students were injured, and many of the children witnessed the incident. That tragedy highlighted the vulnerability that even a rural state within the heartland of our nation can face. Arkansans were stunned.

In 1998, NOVA appointed State Coordinator, Ginger Bankston Bailey, was in Washington D.C. participating in the first NOVA Training of Trainers (TOT) Seminar, when she was notified of the Westside Middle School shootings. She had first-hand experience of observing Dr. Marlene Young and Ms. Cheryl Tyiska as they quickly deployed a team to Arkansas. This team, led by a school psychologist, included the first Arkansan to serve on a NOVA Team, the Reverend Lawson Anderson. Craighead County (Jonesboro) Senior Prosecuting Attorney Mike Walden credited his NOVA-trained victim assistance coordinator, Karen Costello, with influencing the decision to ask for a NOVA team.

The Westside tragedy set into motion the relentless efforts by dedicated Arkansas crisis responders that would later evolve into the AR-CRT. It was through this experience that then Attorney General Winston Bryant determined that crisis intervention was a priority for the remainder of his tenure in office. The Attorney General's Office sponsored numerous trainings in Arkansas for the next three years.

Trained AR-CRT responders supported National NOVA teams in 1999 during the Arkansas, January tornado destruction and the American Airline crash at Little Rock International Airport. Responders came from Craighead, Faulkner and Pulaski counties.

In 2000, NOVA advocates met after a North Little Rock kidnapping. It was through the North Little Rock Police Department's Victim Assistance Coordinator, Charlene James, that responders were asked to reaffirm their commitment to support a coordinated state approach to crisis response. In 2001, School Psychologists Jack Bell, Jack Bower, Linda Speer Graham, Leah Mohlke, Sandy Morrison and Clara Penney along with School Counselor Charlotte Rundell lobbied the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to provide basic and advanced NOVA Training to their professional associations. The ADE promptly provided the opportunity for the needed continuing education.

The renewed commitment provided the field experience necessary to answer the call after September 11, 2001. Two Arkansas teams, led by Msgr. Jack Harris and Jack Bell, supported the crisis efforts at the New Jersey Family Assistance Center.

In 2002, the School Violence Resource Center, Criminal Justice Institute (CJI) also supported NOVA CRTs by training its staff and other allied victim service providers such as educators, law enforcement officers, firefighters and victim advocates. The commitment by state agencies assisted in building the professional pool of Arkansas responders.

By 2002, a core group of responders decided that a non-profit status should be pursued and by April 9, 2003, Articles of Incorporation were filed and the process for a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status began. Due to the volume of activity, United Methodist Behavioral Hospital Chief Executive Officer Andy Altom allowed AR-CRT to be housed in his facility.

The 2003 founding AR-CRT Board of Directors were:

Chair:	Max Snowden
Vice-Chair:	Andy Altom
Secretary:	Karen Lowery
Treasurer:	Heather Bailey
Chaplain:	Rev. Lawson Anderson
Attorney:	Shirley Jones
National Liaison:	Cheryl Guidry Tyiska
Executive Director:	Ginger Bankston Bailey
Public Information Officer:	Sgt. Terry Hastings
Ethics Review Chair	Msgr. Jack Harris
Membership Chair	Linda Speer Graham
Networking Chair	Leah Mohlke
Resources Chair	Mickey Siler
Training Chair	Tommie Canady

In 2004, Larance Johnson replaced Karen Lowery as Secretary.

To strengthen the professionalism of AR-CRT, trained responders began the long process of studying for the NOVA Certification Test. As responders successfully passed the certification test, AR-CRT had the prerequisite requirements to apply for NOVA state team certification. The state team certification process was successfully completed in 2003.

AR-CRT evolved into the umbrella organization for strong grassroots county and professional associations such as Craighead County CRT (1998), Faulkner County CRT (1999), Pulaski County CRT (2001), Southeast Arkansas CRT (2002), Arkansas School Psychologists Association CRT (2002), Arkansas School Counselors Association RT (2002), Saline County CRT (2004) and White County CRT (2005).

In addition to many local jurisdictions, crisis response teams are housed in faith-based organizations - Clergy CRT (2005), Episcopal Church CRT (2005), hospitals - Methodist Family Health CRT (2003), and state agencies - Criminal Justice Institute CRT (2002) and additional teams are building throughout the state. AR-CRT is a member of the Arkansas VOAD and networks with the Arkansas Chapter of the American Red Cross, National Disaster Medical System through the Emergency Management Strategic Healthcare Group, Catholic Charities, FEMA, Arkansas Department of Emergency Management and the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services.

Word of the team's work and aspirations reached the Department of Homeland Security, whose Undersecretary, Asa Hutchison, was a former Arkansas Congressman. On May 1, 2003, the Reverend Lawson Anderson and representatives of the AR-CRT and Pulaski County CRT briefed Mr. Hutchison on how they help ease the distress of disaster victims. Mr. Hutchison was impressed by what he heard, and said he would brief Secretary Tom Ridge on the value of the NOVA teams - one of which Mr. Ridge warmly supported when he was Governor of Pennsylvania.

Basic, advanced and continuing education training were the life blood of the new non-profit. Crisis response trainings were sponsored by the Pulaski County CRT (2003), Craighead County CRT (2004), Conway Public School and the Faulkner County CRT (2005) and Baptist Health and Methodist Family Health (2006). Quality spring and fall trainings were offered to the membership. Featured speakers that highlighted the ongoing learning experience were: Sgt. Terry Hastings – Working with the Media; Tommie Canady – Weapons of Mass Destruction; Conway Fire Chief Bart Castleberry – Detco Explosion; Richard Williams – Oklahoma Bombing Survivor; Jeannette Adkins – NOVA Executive Director's Vision for the 21st Century; Richard Carvell – The Media and Crisis; Cheryl Guidry Tyiska – Companionship with Victims and Lt. Robert Speer, Arkansas State Police SWAT Commander.

Ginger Bankston Bailey (1998), Linda Speer Graham (2004), Msgr. Jack Harris (2004), Mickey Siler (2004) and Dr. Stan Wilson (2006) have become certified NOVA basic crisis response trainers. The Criminal Justice Institute (CJI) partnered with AR-CRT to provide the official training site for the team. CJI's commitment allowed the team to offer a minimum of two day-long trainings annually.

NOVA continued to recognize AR-CRT members and their work. In 2003, Ginger Bankston Bailey received the George M. Donnelly *Crisis Responder of the Year Award* and Msgr. Jack Harris, received NOVA's *Volunteer of Year Award*. In 2004, Florida Hurricane Deployment Team Leader, Gray LeMaster, initiated field work with FEMA that was unique and was included in FEMA's situation report to President Bush. This work would be further developed for other NOVA state teams after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Ms. Bailey was elected to the NOVA Board of Directors, served as Board Secretary and is currently Vice-President of Development. By 2005, AR-CRT was asked by NOVA to send an advance team – Ginger Bankston Bailey, Gray LeMaster and Dr. Steve Thomason to the Mississippi Attorney General Office. This team set up NOVA’s response strategy for the Mississippi Gulf coast. Scott Sasser and the SEACRT team followed the advance team and held a press conference with the Attorney General to discuss the work in the FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers. Jack Bower and Steve Farmer were the first Arkansans to work in a decampment center operating for US Parks and Forestry Services employees. Tommie Canady developed a specialized NIMS training for NOVA, and currently Dr. Stan Wilson and Rev. Andrea Northcut are developing a clergy certification program for NOVA.

AR-CRT continues to respond to communities and assists local crisis response teams when requested. NOVA crisis responders have participated in state "call outs" involving homicides, sexual assaults, suicides, car crashes, natural disasters and follow-up care for the caregivers. In addition, crisis responders have participated in national "call outs": Arkansas Tornadoes (1997), Westside Middle School Shootings (1998), Arkansas Tornadoes (1999), American Airline crash (1999), assistance for families of victims of September 11, 2001, employees and first responders involved with the workplace violence shootings in Meridian, MS - Lockheed Martin (2003), Hurricanes Charley and Jean (2004), Fulton County Courthouse shootings (2005), Wright, WY Tornadoes (2005) and victims and evacuees of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (2005).

The founding AR-CRT Board members serve three year terms. In 2006 the membership elected the following to the Board:

Chair:	Andy Altom
Vice-Chair:	Larance Johnson
Secretary:	Coralie Maxwell
Treasurer:	Dr. Stan Wilson
Chaplain:	The Rev. Lawson Anderson
Attorney:	Shirley Jones
National Liaison:	Cheryl Guidry Tyiska
Executive Director:	Ginger Bankston Bailey
Public Information Officer:	Sgt. Terry Hastings
Debriefing Co-Chair	Karen Lowery
Emotional/Spiritual Care Co-Chair	Msgr. Jack Harris
Ethics Liaison	Leah Mohlke
Finance Chair Co-Chair	Jack Bell
Team Leadership Co-Chair	Scott Sasser

Often crisis response teams are identified more with national call-outs. However, the bulk of the call-outs are on the local and state level. AR-CRT and local teams contribute countless hours annually, as demonstrated with the recent Hurricanes Katrina/Rita evacuees who were relocated to Arkansas. AR-CRT leadership conducted its first Spanish group crisis intervention in 2006, with Hispanic responders Maria Touchstone and John Rodriguez facilitating the interventions.

Internal and external communication is important in serving Arkansas communities. AR-CRT developed an e-newsletter for the membership, a website and toll free number for both internal and external communication.

AR-CRT's team leaders and managers are:

AR School Counselors CRT	Jacque Briley, Charlotte Rundell
AR School Psychologists CRT	Rita Lynn Jones, Sandy Morrison
Clergy CRT	Msgr. Jack Harris, Dr. Stan Wilson
	Rev. Andrea Northcut
Craighead County CRT	Jack Bower, Linda Speer Graham
	Phyllis Curtis
Criminal Justice Institute CRT	Deborah Flowers, John Morgan
	Allison Hoffman
Episcopal Church CRT	Coralie Maxwell, Heather Bailey
Faulkner County CRT	Jack Bell, Mickey Siler
	Leah Mohlke
Methodist Family Health CRT	Andrea Allen, Cyndi Coleman
	DeLana Keeler
Pulaski County CRT	Ruth Fissel, Susan Koller
Saline County CRT	Russ Sherrill, Ed Losey
	Tamra Gore
SEACRT	Scott Sasser, Becke Williams
	Carol St. John
White County CRT	Carla Choate, Rhonda Smith

What started by a concerned and passionate group of Arkansans in 1996 has developed into an effective team that uses the NOVA model for addressing trauma in individuals and groups. Team members seek to reduce acute emotional stress caused by the victim's proximity to the disaster.

Communities are usually unprepared to deal with the aftermath of a sudden traumatic incident. Services, networks and critical resources may be unavailable or insufficient. AR-CRT stands ready to help, always waiting on an invitation from the affected area.