

EMERGENCY RELIEF AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

Stage 1: Immediate Relief Efforts and Assessment for Long-term Recovery

Following first responder efforts to save lives and move people to safety and as part of FEMA's national involvement, volunteer medical support teams including mental health professionals (such as licensed art therapists who have completed the [Crisis Counseling Assistance & Training Program](#)) are often deployed to the affected area to work with national organizations (e.g. Red Cross and Save the Children).

Stage 2: Recovery and Rebuilding

AATA's state chapters in the affected areas can be particularly helpful to the greater community by working in collaboration with established organizations to conduct community-building art making events. Public events, although therapeutic in nature, are not to be characterized as art therapy services, which would require the participant to sign informed consent. It's important to use the event as a referral point for follow-up by qualified art therapists. AATA chapters or member groups can apply for grants through AATA's Emergency Trauma Recovery Fund, which supports chapters' recovery efforts following state emergencies.

“ Art making can provide a non-verbal means to discharge acute stress that is inherent in disaster and traumatic experiences also known as critical incidents. Every person who experiences a disaster or traumatic event has a story to tell that is often best told visually through the art. Partnering with the Red Cross and Save the Children has given me and teams of art therapists the unique opportunity to support communities in the immediate aftermath of traumatic events and natural disasters. These experiences have allowed us to bear witness to powerful moments of how art assists people in processing their grief and accessing resilience during recovery from wild fires, earthquakes, and other traumatic events. Most recently, when responding to Hurricane Harvey in Texas, I was reminded how essential our work is when we were called to support children in FEMA shelters with Save the Children. I encourage all art therapy students and faculty across the country to join as many disaster organizations that you can so that we can take our place in the disaster preparedness community!”

” Paige Asawa, PhD, MFT, ATR-BC



Artwork created in Art Therapy Open Studio Program following tornadoes in Manhattan, KS (printed with permission)

Stage 3: Returning to Stability/Routine

In this phase, the local economy has begun to recover and people have re-developed routines in their daily lives. Although the impact of a major catastrophic event may diminish over time, community members can benefit from art therapy to manage lingering symptoms resulting from the trauma. The creation of artwork surrounding what occurred is a lasting symbol of the experience that can be revisited safely with a professional art therapist and help promote continued healing.

AATA RELIEF CAMPAIGN

The American Art Therapy Association has launched a new campaign to help support communities who have been devastated by recent natural and human-created disasters including Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, the tragic shooting in Las Vegas, and the California wildfires. Ensuring that life-saving, safety, and basic needs are met in the moment of and immediate aftermath of disasters is crucial. But as time goes by and the mental health impact becomes more clear, so too is it crucial to provide support that addresses the resulting trauma. In the aftermath of natural and human-created disasters, art therapy can really help.

Visit our [campaign page](#) to join the effort by donating or becoming a fundraiser.

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MEDIA LINKS

[Art Therapy in Action: Trauma](#), AATA

[After Las Vegas shootings: What do we tell the kids?](#), The Inquirer

[Campaign for Hope: Florida Art Therapy Association Expands Art From the Heart](#), Art Therapy Today

[Art Therapy: Disaster Response](#), TEDx Talks

[Art Therapy in the Cultural Context of Trauma](#), Laura Greenstone, ATR-BC, LPC

[Releasing Trapped Images: Children Grapple with the Reality of the September 11 Attacks](#), AATA

[An Expert on School-Based Art Therapy Explains how Art Therapy Helps Children Make Sense of the Insensible](#), Art Therapy Today

[Transformations in Time: Art Therapy Exhibit Captures Responses to 9/11](#), Art Therapy Today