

A shock to the system

Janet Holland heads the mental health agency charged with helping Roseburg heal after UCC shooting

AMANDA WALDROUPE
STAFF WRITER

At 10:38 on the morning of Oct. 1, a 26-year old Umpqua Community College student shot and killed nine students and injured nine more before killing himself.

Less than two hours later, the community college's students, faculty and staff were evacuated to the Douglas County Fairgrounds where they could call friends and family to tell them they were safe. Waiting there were mental health counselors, therapists and members of Roseburg's religious community to provide emergency grief support.

The shooting in Roseburg is the deadliest in Oregon's history, and it has rattled the core of this small, rural community, leaving residents wondering how something so violent and atrocious could happen in a town of 20,000 people.

Janet Holland, the director of the Community Health Alliance, is overseeing the mental health care efforts in the wake of the shooting. The Community Health Alliance is the state-licensed mental health provider for Douglas County and provides mental health care for people on the Oregon Health Plan and to those who are uninsured. The Community Health Alliance formed in July 2014 after the Douglas County board of commissioners voted to outsource county mental health care due to funding cuts.

Umpqua Community College re-opened to students and staff Oct. 5. Counselors were on campus as well. In that week alone, staff from the Community Health Alliance, the Red Cross and a mental health team from the federal government provided group and individual counseling to more than 2,000 people.

Umpqua Community College resumed classes at the beginning of this week. Holland says 25 counselors will continue to be available to the campus community.

Holland spoke with Street Roots about providing effective and compassionate mental health care in the wake of a disaster.

Amanda Waldroupe: *After the shooting, the students and staff at the community college*



Flanked by law enforcement and media, Janet Holland addresses reporters on response efforts shortly after the Oct. 1 shooting at Umpqua Community College. SCREEN SHOT FROM YOUTUBE

were taken to the fairgrounds. How were you able to have mental health staff there so quickly?

Janet Holland: We have a crisis team. We didn't deploy anybody who was still looking for people at the college. We deployed within an hour to the fair grounds and started bringing this together. The folks from the federal government were here within 10 hours. I was trained in incident command as the county mental health director. We've always just practiced it. We've never done it.

A.W.: *What is grief counseling? What have people been talking about?*

J.H.: The message we wanted to get out to everybody is that after a trauma like this there are some normal reactions that happen. Sleeplessness, anxiety. Those basic things, and get the word out for people to talk about it, tell their story and get support from other people. Then people know, two or three weeks later, that if they're still struggling, they can get help.

It's not therapy. This is really about having those connections with people so they can talk about what happened. Normalization of what they were feeling. People were scared, what had happened, what their concerns were. That was a lot of what was going on.

A.W.: *It's about connecting with other people and preventing someone from feeling isolated.*

J.H.: Yes. We have trained staff who are looking at the people who are having most difficulties, looking at their emotions, noting if they are crying or in withdrawal. We made sure there was outreach. I think the part that I heard from the staff when I got out

there is that there was a lot of support from each other. Students were coming together. This is about hearing and supporting and compassion. Making sure there's a warm hand-off and that those people don't get lost. A lot of this was organic.

A.W.: *How do you think the shooting has impacted Roseburg?*

J.H.: This is a small community. We know each other. There isn't anybody on my staff that doesn't know somebody who was affected. Those impacts are huge across the community. It is our community college. You have people who went to school with several of the victims who were shot. The impact is large.

A.W.: *What community-wide trauma will Roseburg face?*

J.H.: There is something that is called post-traumatic growth. Instead of trauma, there is growth. Disaster can bring some communities closer. People have new opportunities, new goals, new values. Out of that, instead of the community being immobilized and stuck or unhealthy, you see the opposite.

A.W.: *It seems like Roseburg is already seeing that - Umpqua Bank set up a Relief Fund the day of the shooting and multiple businesses are having benefits and fundraisers.*

J.H.: Yes. It is bringing together cross-sections of people. The fire chief and I have met each other in passing a couple of times. But we've never sat down and talked about how we can work better together. You have certain people you intersect with on a regular basis and other populations that you don't. It blows me away sometimes.

A.W.: *What is the Community Health Alliance going to be doing in the coming months as Roseburg continues to deal with what's happened?*

J.H.: We're looking at expansion of mental health resources. The impact of this is going to be felt for decades. We're looking at outreach efforts. We're looking at multiple avenues for additional funding. One of the goals I have is to do outreach in all of the schools. What we want is more of a preventative aspect of identifying kids who may be struggling. We can offset the long-term trauma symptoms that may result from things like this. So, a clinician would rotate through all of the schools.

A.W.: *When you talked about trying to find kids who've experienced some trauma, I immediately thought of the shooter. Reports say that he was socially isolated, from a divorced family and may have had mental health problems. How do you find those people who may be flying under the radar? You can't necessarily sit a kid down and say, "you could really use some mental health care."*

J.H.: Our public health folks have a whole different lens on this. One of the observations they made is that we do tend to focus on schools. The other thing is educating the broader community about mental health first aid. The spiritual community has asked to train their clergy members. We're going to be doing that. The other thing that they brought up is that it's the conversation with department managers and folks who are bar and restaurant owners - there are a whole plethora of people who can notice things. They don't always know what to do when they get that information. It is tightening the response from "it's not my problem" to "it's a community's problem." That is our best hope.