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**Program Title: Colorado Spirit Crisis Counseling Program (CCP)**

**Organization: San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group**

**Program Abstract** (50 words max, please):

The Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) is a short-term disaster relief team that helps people recover and rebuild their lives after a natural or human-made disaster, or, in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic. SLVBHG partnered with CDPHE to assist survivors, especially those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

**Program Description** (Include program development, program information, staffing requirements, pertinent data and start-up costs.): \*Please limit to 2 pages, and remember to address all criteria specified.

**Program Development:**

Disasters and life-changing events are not self-defining moments but rather experiences that become a small part of one's life story. In 2020, San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group (SLVBHG) partnered with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to institute a disaster response program to help survivors adjust to their circumstances, access emotional support, and linkage to an array of helpful resources. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, it made us a world of survivors. CCP has allowed us to expand our current infrastructure to respond to disasters adequately. CCP teams are not traditional mental health providers in that they do not diagnose or treat mental illnesses. Instead, crisis counselors combine mental health paraprofessionals and professionals who support community members' functioning and coping abilities with disaster disruptions through counseling services. Types of services include:

- Individual crisis counseling
- Group crisis counseling
- Public education
- Community networking and support
- Assessment
- Referral
- Resource linkage
- Development and distribution of educational materials
- Media and public service announcements.

**Program Information:**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funded CCP as a supplemental assistance program to support mental health assistance and training activities in presidentially declared major disasters. With an interagency agreement, the Emergency Mental Health and Traumatic Stress Services Branch of the SAMSHA Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) work with FEMA to provide technical assistance, consultation, and training for state and local mental health personnel. Additionally, CMHS is responsible for CCP grant administration and program oversight.

With Colorado Crisis funds, we have helped survivors of various disasters, especially those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, by assisting them in understanding their reactions, improving coping strategies, and connecting with others that can help them. Further, we reach out to the community and educate on disaster preparedness and general advice and information about seeking help.

Through the work of this program, we have begun to leave behind a permanent legacy of improved coping skills, educational and resource materials, and enhanced community connections.

### **Staffing Requirements:**

Our Crisis Counseling team is composed of three dedicated and compassionate professionals aimed at improving the lives of disaster survivors and helping them adjust and move forward. The team lead focuses on outreach and community education and providing resources for the public to access. The other two team members are a care specialist and a crisis counselor who work with individuals during and after their experience as they work to recover.

### **Pertinent Data:**

Our CCP team has completed 228 individual counseling sessions within all six San Luis Valley counties, including Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache. Additionally, our CCP team has held 38 approved group counseling sessions since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak. Our work suggests that our teams' efforts have resulted in the following positive health outcomes for participants:

- Understanding, managing and reducing stress
- Developing coping strategies
- Connection to community resources and other relief services

COVID-19 has impacted all of us. With CCP, our team has improved our crisis response capabilities and been there to support our friends, neighbors, and community members as we have all adapted to the ever-changing circumstances around us. Colorado Spirit was there for SLV families who lost loved ones, tested positive for the virus, lost their job, or just felt alone – they responded to all of it. The vital component of this program is the positive community connections it fosters, as this is very much a support service everyone can take advantage of during these unprecedented times.

### **Start-up Costs:**

When our agency initially applied for funding to institute this program, Colorado followed Safer at Home health guidelines, limiting travel and continuing to practice social distancing. Therefore, the budget was based on the need to deliver services primarily through virtual means, like phone and video outreach, in addition to hourly salary equivalents and fringe and benefit rates. We anticipated an increase in the need to travel throughout the Valley to distribute information access. The San Luis Valley is located in a geographically reclusive and isolated area with high-density areas of LatinX and immigrant individuals; many of our citizenries also lack financial capabilities access to 21st-century technology.

Therefore, CCP funds were requested for digital media costs, mileage reimbursement, and technology to conduct outreach activities and telehealth services. Our total funded costs were **\$41,376.24**.