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**FEMA CENTERS CLOSING, BUT PROJECT HEARTLAND STILL COUNSELING THOSE AFFECTED BY MAY TORNADOES**

Even though Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster recovery centers are closing around the state – with the last two closing on June 12 – people who need counseling services or related information still can access help through Project Heartland, a crisis counseling program operated through the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Project Heartland, with a team of 10 counselors, has been out in force recently, going door-to-door in Moore, Bethany and Choctaw to visit with people affected by the recent tornadoes. In addition to distributing literature on disaster mental health and helping citizens access related services, team members also have been providing counseling on an individual basis, said Project Heartland Director Larry Gross.

“With 25 counties as declared disaster areas, our counselors have been busy throughout the state providing crisis counseling at both established and ‘roving’ disaster recovery centers, in addition to recent door-to-door outreach,” Gross said. “We have been

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conducting a lot of community programs, as well, including puppet shows for young people affected by the tornadoes.”

The crisis counseling team will be active this weekend, staffing a booth at Stroud’s citywide garage sale and a booth Choctaw’s “fishing derby” on Saturday. On Wednesday, June 18, the group will perform a puppet show at 10 a.m. at Adventurous Beginnings for Children, 720 S.E. 12<sup>th</sup> St. in Moore.

“We are attending as many community events as possible to distribute mental health information about how people respond to disasters,” Gross said. “Natural disasters are traumatic, and we want to help all Oklahomans who are experiencing reactions related to the storms.”

FEMA, which closed its last two disaster recovery centers in Moore and Henryetta on Thursday, has been providing a number of services, including debris removal and housing repair for Oklahomans who suffered losses or damage in the May 2003 tornadoes. Although disaster recovery centers now are closed, Oklahomans still can apply for assistance or discuss their existing applications by calling **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**. The deadline to call and apply for FEMA assistance is 6 p.m. Wednesday, July 9.

Those who need mental health counseling and other services can call Project Heartland at **1-800-522-9054** or **405-858-7070**.

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