

## Alabama tornado counseling service to close

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**Robin DeMonia -- The Birmingham News**

By



Project Rebound team member Martell Hall hugs David Spanick after their visit in Concord. The crisis counseling service started in the wake of the April 27 storms will close June 25. (The Birmingham News/Joe Songer)

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- A crisis-counseling service launched to help Alabamians recover from the 2011 tornado outbreak will shut down June 25, a testament to how far the survivors of those storms have come, the program's director said.

"The resiliency of the citizens of Alabama -- they have put all the **Project Rebound** people out of a job, which is a very good thing," said Lisa Turley, state director for Project Rebound.

The timing is not a huge surprise; the federal funding for the service was provided only through this month. But a year ago, Turley said, officials fully expected they would be asking at this point for the Federal Emergency Management Agency to extend the service another three to six months.

Instead, she said, "People have really moved forward in their recovery, and they are looking toward the future. ... People are feeling more hopeful, more 'normal.' They're not in despair."

That's not to say Alabamians are not experiencing and won't continue to experience emotional fallout from the April 27 storms, which killed at least 248 people and wrecked more than 23,000 homes. Some ongoing frustration and anxiety are to be expected, Turley said.

"Just because Project Rebound is ending and 14 months have passed, we're not all better," she said. "April's always going to be a month that's going to be a little challenging for all of us."

But the number of people who have required more intense help has been relatively small. Project Rebound made fewer than 1,000 referrals for those needing long-term counseling, 12-step programs or other ongoing assistance, she said.

Going forward, if people find they are having emotional issues that interfere with their lives, they should seek help, Turley said. The Project Rebound hotline will continue to be operated, and other community mental health services will be available.

But most people can expect only occasional times of sadness or worry, Turley said, and for them, the most valuable help may be much closer at hand -- a neighbor or friend who can listen.

One reason Project Rebound is winding down, she said, is because of "the way we all came together to support each other in this."

"People really feel supported, that their concerns have not been pushed to the side," she said.

Project Rebound addressed those concerns in a variety of ways, Turley said. It has knocked on survivors' doors and listened to their stories. As of this past April 30, Project Rebound had conducted close to 28,000 counseling sessions that lasted 15 minutes or more, and its contacts with survivors that lasted less than 15 minutes totaled more than 160,000.

In addition, it made more than 300,000 contacts with people in public places, handing out fliers or providing information. And it worked with almost 95,000 people in group activities -- 67,000 of them children involved in classroom exercises designed to help them discuss their feelings and manage their fears.

The program will end up costing about \$3 million, shy of the \$5 million it had been approved to receive, Turley said. She believes it is an investment that will continue to pay dividends. She points to a Tuscaloosa fifth-grader who announced that when she gets nervous about starting middle school in the fall, she'll use the breathing exercises she learned from Project Rebound.

"I really believe people are going to be able to apply these coping techniques to other areas," she said.

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