

MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



Positive Unintended Consequences

When we started TIP it was with a very narrow objective in mind...to assist survivors of tragedy and to prevent them from being “re-injured” by those around them (the second injury). It didn’t take us long to realize that we were achieving that goal. But as the salespeople on TV infomercials say... *“Wait, There’s More!”*

Over time, TIP leaders gradually became aware that there are many more positive things that happen when TIP volunteers respond to assist survivors of tragedy than we had originally anticipated. I will call these things **positive unintended consequences**. When TIP volunteers respond to calls for service their attention is focused on helping individuals in specific circumstances. After the TIP intervention, volunteers return home and get on with their lives thinking “That’s the end of the story.” But it’s not the end of the story. There are many **unintended positive consequences** which quietly continue long after volunteers respond to individual TIP calls. For example...

- *“Watching my mother helping others as a TIP volunteer inspired me to become a nurse.”*
- *“I have been watching TIP and TIP volunteers for years. They inspire me and give me hope that our country can unite and care for one another.”*
- *“I came to TIP because my girlfriend was a TIP volunteer. It inspired me to become a doctor. I’m now a physician using my TIP skills every day.”*
- *“I was in a situation where a TIP volunteer was called to help my neighbor. I watched her and it gave me a lesson on how I can help others.”*
- *“TIP volunteers coming to our ED day in and day out has made our ED a more caring place, even when volunteers aren’t present.”*
- *“I left the TIP group, but TIP didn’t leave me. I use TIP skills almost every day.”*
- *“Thanks, TIP. Believe me, I’m paying forward your volunteer’s kindness.”*
- *“I came to TIP because I wanted to learn about trauma. I now have skills I use when others in my life have a crisis.”*

These quotes illustrate that one of the positive unintended consequences of being a TIP volunteer is that volunteers themselves are changed. They acquire life skills which they use over a lifetime, and in some cases, they chose careers based on their TIP experience.

TIP volunteers usually respond to TIP calls alone. However, at the scene, they are not alone. They are being watched by all those on emergency scenes including neighbors, family members and first responders. Some of these “observers” are inspired by TIP volunteers while others learn the basics of emotional first aid by watching our volunteers in action.

Although we can't quantify the **unintended positive consequences** that are created by TIP volunteers, they are real. I see and hear about them almost every day. And the feedback we receive from clients and community members (see above) confirm this phenomenon. The fact is that in the process of being a TIP volunteer and of responding to individual TIP calls TIP volunteers are doing more good than they realize. They are doing what I call "the invisible good."

To keep on doing the tough work of walking into tragedy, I urge TIP volunteers and TIP leaders to appreciate the fact that in doing so they are making more of a difference than they will ever know.