



Amanda Jung, center, and other volunteers from Headwaters Relief Organization work to remove several feet of mud from a pool area in the backyard of a Boulder home on Saturday. The volunteer group is from Minnesota. *Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post*

A second wave of first-rate aid

“Almost a greater need” weeks after flooding

By **Alison Noon** *The Denver Post*

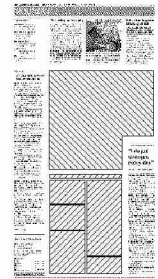
LYONS» A second wave of flood assistance is flowing into Colorado, including a group of mental health professionals who made a trip to Lyons this weekend to help people still shocked by the deluge that ruined their town.

The group includes Rebecca Thomley, a pioneer in the concept of second responders. She is more concerned about long-term mental health care than with shoveling mud out of basements — although volunteers with her

nonprofit, Headwaters Relief Organization, did both on Saturday.

“Waiting a few weeks, there’s almost a greater need,” Thomley said. “I think when we come in around now, we can help families who really are starting to cope with the loss.”

Among the 38 Headwaters volunteers who either drove or flew to Colorado from Minnesota this week are eight psychologists, social workers and other mental health professionals. Those people met with flood victims to let them know what otherwise might go unsaid — that post-trauma emotions are normal.



“Like telling someone, ‘You might have trouble sleeping,’” said Thomley, a clinical psychologist.

Other symptoms include difficulty sustaining relationships, anger and loss of enjoyment in activities. The brief counseling sessions are the backbone of what the volunteer group of fers communities after natural disasters.

The group, which set up shop Saturday morning at Lyons Community Church, walked the streets in the afternoon, talking to about 30 people. The volunteers, Thomley said, often speak with people on doorsteps.

“It’s very different from what you’d do in your office,” Thomley said, adding, “It’s kind of the power of presence.”

Cheryl Supino and the five other people living at 1885 Upland Ave., adjacent to Fourmile Creek in Boulder, left home around midnight on the first night of the flood. The creek deposited 3 feet of mud across the block.

Even though neighbors helped the family clear out the wrecked house, the Supinos are, five week later, still shoveling mud from their home.

“It gets to the point where you have to go back and do your own thing,” Supino said.

She said she was grateful for the work of about 20 Headwaters volunteers Saturday, a service she found through Calvary Bible Church in Boulder. Thomley said religious groups play a big role in connecting disaster relief with community members.

On Sunday, 17 Jewish teens with the Orthodox Union’s National Conference of Synagogue Youth are scheduled to arrive in Boulder and join the second-wave relief efforts.

Thomley’s team saw other scenes of devastation in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, in Oklahoma after summer twisters and during their ongoing work in Haiti.

Sifting through the rubble can be more drawn-out and emotionally devastating than losing everything, Thomley said.

Volunteer Alec Demgen, 22, said the main difference between Colorado and Louisiana disaster relief has been homeowners’ presence alongside the workers in Colorado. Some people in New Orleans who lost everything picked up and moved on, but most affected Colorado residents have not.

“I think the big part is just letting people know there are still people out there who care,” Demgen said.

Thomley said one Jamestown woman, who couldn’t accept Headwaters’ construction help because her electricity was not yet restored, thanked the group for helping her neighbors.

“She said, ‘It gave me hope just that some-

one came and is helping,’” Thomley said.

Demgen said their second-wave work in Colorado is probably far from over.

“I doubt this will be our last trip out here,” Demgen said.

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