

**Santa Fe New Mexican, The (NM)**

## **SANTA FE TRAUMA EXPERTS TO HELP EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS**

SUE VORENBERG

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It's been nearly three months since a massive earthquake devastated cities in China's Sichuan Province, but for the people of those towns, the trauma goes on. The events killed about half of the health care workers in the affected towns, and left millions of people suffering from nervous problems like post traumatic stress disorder. Now, a Santa Fe group is coming to help with the recovery efforts. Four Santa Feans from the non-profit Trauma Resource Institute plan to take a series of trips over the coming year to train a new crop of Chinese medical workers to deal with PTSD and other trauma problems. "Traumatic events can throw the nervous system out of balance, and people get stuck there," said **Laurie Leitch**, co-founder of the nonprofit and research director for the Foundation for Human Enrichment in Colorado. "That's why they have symptoms like headaches, stomach aches and limb weakness." The Trauma Resource Institute teaches biological methods called somatic therapies to help patients deal with trauma. The technique teaches the patients how to reprogram their nervous systems to deal with the stress, said **Leitch**, who just returned from her first trip to the Sichuan Province. "The first team did a lot of work with kids," **Leitch** said. "We had a three and a half year old who had just shut down. He had no affect. People were really worried about him. And after a half hour of treatment, he was running around again." Stress disorders happen when the body's fight or flight mechanism goes out of whack, triggering episodes where people relive the event, become aggressive or shut down, she said. The method shows people how to track stress in their bodies and then shift to a calmer state, **Leitch** said. "It doesn't rely on retelling of the trauma story; it's gentle," she said. Typically, training in somatic techniques takes about three years, but after **Leitch** finished the regimen she developed a faster three-day method to teach to health care workers in disaster situations. She has taught that method to New Mexico state health workers, responders to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and to groups around the world, she said. Ellen Elgart, a licensed social worker on the board of the Trauma Resource Institute, plans to go with **Leitch** on the second trip to Sichuan Province in mid-September. She's been on other trips where **Leitch** has taught the method, including trips to southeast Asia after 2004 tsunami. "We did some detective work to see how well the method worked on patients, so we went back after a year to re-interview them," Elgart said. "We found those that had some somatic treatments had retained a reduction in symptoms." One of the strange things to get used to when helping people in other countries is speaking through a translator, she added. "If you haven't done that before, you have to learn when to stop talking and how much to say," Elgart said. "You have to remember to maintain eye contact with the client and not the translator. But it's amazing to see how all the culture differences fall away when you're working eye to eye with somebody and they know you're there to help them." The group has funding for two trips to China, but they'd like to do six over the coming year. **Leitch** and Elgart said they're hoping people will donate through their Web site at <http://www.traumaresourceinstitute.com/>. Contact Sue Vorenberg at [svorenberg@sfnewmexican.com](mailto:svorenberg@sfnewmexican.com).

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