Lessons from the Century 16 Theatre Shooting

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City of Aurora, Colorado

April 7, 2016
Public Library Association Conference
Profile of Aurora

- Located on the eastern edge of the Denver-Aurora metro area
- Known as an affordable, family-oriented community. Economic drivers are transportation/logistics, health care, Aerospace (Buckley Air Force Base) and renewable energy.
Profile of Aurora – People

• Population of 340,000 (54th largest in US)
  – Larger than St. Louis and Pittsburgh, just ahead of Honolulu
  – 155 square miles spanning three counties

• One of the most diverse large cities
  – 28.7% Hispanic, 15.7% Black/African-American, 4.9% Asian, 61.1% white (2010). Substantial immigrant and refugee community.

• Median household income of $50,468; 61% homeownership rate (2007-2011)

• Poverty rate of 16.5%
The Incident
The Initial Response

• Police response impacted by the Summer Initiative
  – First Police Officer arrives in 83 seconds, second in 85, 52 cars in 21 minutes
• First ambulance on scene in 3 minutes, first Fire unit in 5 minutes
• Chaos of the scene and emergency response
• Joint training (Police and Fire) including active shooter training
• All victims off site to hospital in 55 minutes
  – Every victim that left the scene alive survived
The Emergency Operation – 24 hours

• Century Theatre – Identification of the 10 victims left in the theatre and process crime scene

• The Paris Street Operation
  • Booby trapped apartment
  • Evacuation
  • Second command post
  • Inter-jurisdictional operation – FBI, APD, AFD, ATF, Local law enforcement agencies
Paris Street Apartment
The Vigil

- Overwhelming outpouring on the need for the community to come together
- Program would be inclusive
- Potential for attendance by President Obama
- Logistics of large number of elected dignitaries, victims and family members of victims
- Planning and execution in 48 hours
- Attendance is estimated at 10,000
The Presidential Visit

• Planned and executed in 48 hours
• Security – route and site (University Hospital)
• Access of families of victims to the visit
  • Who would attend
  • Security
  • Transportation
  • Communication
• President, Governor and Mayor spent 3 hours with families of deceased and patients in ICU at University Hospital
Communications

- Managing communications including media is a critical task
- In first 2 days, over 3,000 media contacts we can identify
- Used all city resources plus help from other communities
- Focusing communication to specific spokespersons with consistent message is vital
- First day, communication was limited to scheduled briefings
- Police Chief and Mayor Hogan provided the “face”
Supporting Our Community

• Immediate response to community trauma
  • Aurora Mental Health and others provided 24 hour hotline and support

• The need for people to give
  • Outpouring of offers of funds, fundraising and in-kind support

• Donations for victims and victims families
  • Governor Hickenlooper and the Community First Foundation
  • Donations to the City of Aurora
Temporary Memorial
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Patti Bateman, Dir., Library & Cultural Svcs
City of Aurora, Colorado

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Situation

- Shooting site visible from Central Library windows and offices
- Site is land shared with busy shopping mall
- Major bus stop across street from theater
- Major thoroughfares within easy walking distance
• Staff and public drive by site regularly

• Several staff live in apartments nearby and awoke to flashing emergency lights

• Many knew someone who was in the theater complex that night, if not in the actual theater space

• Everyone’s comfortable world stunned and shocked
Two-pronged Approach Needed

- Staff needed emotional support immediately
- Community needed a resource to access as needed, a safe place where information could be provided
Immediate Action Steps
• Contacted City Administration to ensure they were aware of library resources

• Collaborated with City Administration to ensure no duplication of actions

• Victims Assistance counsellors brought onsite for library staff & City staff

• Counselling opportunities onsite for public
Open Hours Scheduled for the Public

• The large Community Room dedicated to open hours for the public, as well as other city staff

• Specific grief & trauma public programs scheduled on Sunday for 6 – 8 weeks; trained grief/trauma counselors

• Youth programming with counselors: drawing & talking about concerns & worries
Resources provided

• Displays of appropriate topic books
• New materials quickly researched & purchased by staff
• Online community resources for mental health identified:
  ✓ On the Library’s website
  ✓ Paper copy for quick pickup
Resiliency Center Concept: Aurora Strong

- Hoffman Heights Library: closed from 2010 due to “Great Recession”

- A neighborhood facility with new PC Center on main level

- Youth Center in rest of main level

- The lower level: empty.
A Perfect Match

- Partnered with Aurora Mental Health for a community support center
- Easy access from 2 major roads
- A busy activity center where people come for a variety of reasons, so no stigma
- Open 6 days per week
- Activities for individuals & groups
- Trained experts onsite to help
Supporting Our People

• Trauma of the incident on first responders
• Police Officers had access to police psychologist and peer support both individually and as a group
• Firefighters got substantial support from FDNY and IAFF
  ‒ Used the incident to create a more robust, ongoing peer support program
• Aurora Mental Health and our EAP provide on site support for civilian employees
• Support continues on, particularly at key “trigger” events
Lessons Learned

• Remember the Basics
  • Active shooter planning, training and exercise
  • Interoperability
  • Inter-jurisdictional cooperation

• Crisis Communications Plan

• Managing the need to give

• Legal structures to facilitate giving
Lessons Learned

• Role of elected officials
• Differences with crime scene, live suspect, gag order
• Everyone is grieving and must be allowed to grieve
• Put the victims first
• Long-term Resiliency Initiative
Questions/Comments?