



New subdivision rebuild in McComb, Mississippi through Voice of Calvary Ministries. Photo by Alex Jones

New Challenges in Hurricane Response

Southern NeighborWorks® Organizations Enter New Phase of Helping Families Rebuild

By Olufunke Adebajo

Following last year's devastating hurricanes, a number of NeighborWorks® organizations provided much needed support to evacuees and their families. This article provides an update of several of the organizations as they enter a new phase of the work.

Affordable Housing Resources Nashville, Tennessee

Affordable Housing Resources (AHR), a Nashville organization, and its sister organization, the Resource Foundation in Baton Rouge, set up a call center that initially fielded over 5,000 calls a week from Louisiana citizens looking for various kinds of hurricane support, and have received 140,000 since its inception.

Currently, the organizations are fielding calls relating to FEMA trailers in which Katrina victims live. "There are now 75,000 FEMA trailers in the State of Louisiana," says Eddie Latimer, executive director, Affordable Housing Resources, which oversees 18,000 trailers, down from 23,000 a year ago. "We handle the data and maintenance calls which are mostly related to propane used for heat, air conditioning and cooking."

AHR also started its first 58-lot subdivision south of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Tennessee-based Clayton Homes is working in conjunction with AHR to build a specialty manufactured housing product similar to New Orleans style shotgun housing.

DASH for LaGrange
LaGrange, Georgia

With the support of NeighborWorks®, DASH for LaGrange has created a new subsidiary organization, DASH for the Gulf Coast, located in Mobile, Alabama. The new organization is focused on building homes and revitalizing communities in response to the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina.

“We have identified a neighborhood in Mobile where we will be putting about 300 homes and have gone into Pascagoula, Mississippi, and identified a neighborhood where we will put about 310 homes, where there are no homes because they were all wiped away,” said Kathy Tilley, director, sales and marketing. “We’ve been approached to go to several other cities but need to make sure that we can continue our work in LaGrange as well as in Mobile and Pascagoula. There will be lots of houses over the course of the next 10 years. It’s not just about building the houses, but it’s about comprehensive community revitalization.”

Fifth Ward Community
Redevelopment Corporation
Houston, Texas

When Houston took in more than 125,000 evacuees who had lost their homes in Hurricane Katrina, Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation provided an extensive communications network that included computers and information for connecting families with resources. At the same time, the organization provided temporary and long-term housing. The organization settled 300 families (about 1,200 family members) in apartments and

offered food, clothing, furniture, transportation, gas and phone cards.

In addition, the organization assisted 2,500 people to register for FEMA assistance and partnered with Julia Hester House and Dr. Dre, a national recording artist, to provide 50 families with \$20,000 each to help rebuild their lives.

Kathy Flanagan Payton, Fifth Ward’s president and CEO, said some of her organization’s greatest challenges involve the influx of new families into apartments. Though their rents are subsidized by the city and FEMA, delayed payments are an ongoing issue, she said, adding, “We’ve also seen here in the city as well as on our property higher levels of gang violence, vandalism and theft – which has meant more security, cleanup and other expenses.”

Fifth Ward continues to provide communications networks and employment assistance and is aiding individuals and families looking for housing or in need of social services.

Foundation Communities
Austin, Texas

Since Hurricane Katrina, Foundation Communities has provided housing or support to 650 hurricane evacuees. They were the first to do triage housing and services for Austin’s Convention Center shelter, assisting those with the most need – families with small children, those with medical conditions, and the elderly. In October 2005, they opened resource centers at three apartment complexes (not owned by Foundation Communities) which were home to about 150 families from the Gulf Coast. Six social workers made house calls, assessing families’ needs, delivering donated beds and household goods, getting critical medical help, calling other agencies to fill specific needs, providing shuttle services, and coordinating volunteers, donors and churches.

Foundation Communities converted an extended-stay hotel into supportive housing where they placed 120 families from the Austin Convention Center.

One of the ongoing challenges they have had to deal with is high rent (rent is much higher in Austin than in pre-Katrina New Orleans). Most people’s rental assistance has expired and in February 2007, 150 families will have



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their rental assistance terminated. There is also still a very high unemployment rate among evacuees living in Austin.

Walter Moreau, executive director of Foundation Communities, says, "Our focus now is strictly on case management. We are down to six full-time staff who work with about 150 families at any given time. We are in the process of closing out that work next year because we don't have any funding to continue."

Currently, the majority of families are in stable situations. Half the families are staying in Austin until their FEMA benefits run out.

Tejano Center for Community Concerns *Houston, Texas*

The Tejano Center for Community Concerns assisted approximately 57 families from New Orleans displaced by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Located in a predominantly Hispanic community, Tejano Center provides a full range of services such as housing, food, clothing, job search assistance, and school enrollment for children, serving more than 400 individuals (approximately 150 families).

"One of the biggest challenges Tejano has faced in servicing our communities in the past year is employment and providing transportation for those who are anxious to work," said Diane Falcon, project coordinator, Tejano Center. "It's hard because they aren't familiar with their surroundings and everyone's scattered all over the place. Many live away from the bus routes so it's hard for us to get around to everybody's apartment."

Tejano has partnered with several faith-based and nonprofit organizations as well as health organizations who have stepped up their services to help the evacuees. Through collaboration with the National Council of La Raza, NeighborWorks® America is providing four AmeriCorps members

to the Tejano Center to provide direct support to families who face language and cultural barriers in applying for jobs and obtaining services.

Voice of Calvary Ministries *Jackson, Mississippi*

Voice of Calvary Ministries (VOCM) worked closely with churches in the post-Katrina rebuilding efforts and provided food, clothing, transportation and temporary housing for families from New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. They also made available a mobile medical unit for use by the Coastal Family Health Center in Biloxi, Mississippi.

With the assistance of NeighborWorks® and several churches, VOCM laid the foundation for 16 homes in a subdivision in McComb, Mississippi where approximately 7,000 evacuees still live.

The organization continues to help the families with basic home needs like beds, dishes, and household items, says Erma Driver, chief operating officer. "We have an adult education program which many are involved in and many hurricane victims are still employed here."

In building the new subdivision in McComb, VOCM is helping to organize the residents as a community. They have provided evacuees with homebuyer workshops, financial fitness, and credit and debt management to help them get back on their feet.