

Statement for the Record

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Executive Director, National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

**House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on
Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response
on**

**“Caring for Special Needs During Disasters: What’s Being Done for
Vulnerable Populations?”**

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Madam Chairwoman and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to address “Caring for Special Needs: What is being done about vulnerable populations?”

The National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, or National VOAD as we are more commonly known, is made up of the 50 largest disaster-focused nonprofit organizations in the country. From the American Red Cross to Catholic Charities and The Jewish Federations of North America—from the Salvation Army to Feeding America and Habitat for Humanity International —our member organizations are the driving force behind disaster response, relief and recovery in this country. There are 50 national nonprofit members, 53 State and Territory VOADs, and hundreds of local and community VOADs throughout the United States.

The members of National VOAD represent the nonprofit, faith based, and community based organizations that are already on the ground serving low income communities, people of disabilities, those suffering from illness or medical hardship, children, the elderly, the impoverished, people with pets, and immigrant and non-English speaking populations. Our programs in times of disaster are there to continue to offer support to these local communities and expand to offer more services to those without the means to independently recover from a disaster. Like disasters are planned for based upon an all-hazards approach, our members work together to create an all-community approach to disaster response and recovery, including all unmet needs. Communities can benefit by including these organizations in their planning early and often.

Additionally, it is crucial to include key organizations that represent the full spectrum of a given community, including social service providers, advocacy groups, and local faith based and community groups. Rather than separate plans that address “special needs” or “vulnerable populations,” emergency managers need inclusive plans for their entire community.

Recognizing that humanitarian assistance is most effective when implemented by local partners as part of a coordinated effort for community recovery, National VOAD members have worked to more clearly define these roles and services through Points of Consensus, manuals and tools, direct training and technical assistance, and other guidance. Included in our written statement are the three currently approved Points of Consensus for spiritual care, disaster case management, and rebuilding and repair. By 2011, National VOAD hopes to also offer Points of Consensus for mass care, volunteer management, donation management, and working with diverse communities outside the continental United States.

Additionally, National VOAD members have worked with FEMA and other federal and state partners to develop the Disaster Multi Agency Feeding Template, a tool for local communities

when developing their own mass feeding plans in response to disasters. This tool supports the integrated, interdependent system this country has for providing disaster assistance.

National VOAD is also creating the first National Nonprofit Relief Framework. Structured and modeled upon the National Response Framework and to serve as a companion to it and the National Disaster Recovery Framework, the National Nonprofit Relief Framework more clearly defines how the nonprofit community in general and the National VOAD members in particular respond to disaster in a cooperative and collaborative manner. This document is scheduled to be released in December of this year.

All of this work is being done to stress the role of the voluntary organizations as part of a very elaborate and well coordinated team of support for communities in response to disasters.

In addition, our members are providing programs throughout the country in an effort to fight poverty, build resiliency to disaster, and to recovery faster and more completely.

For example:

- Feeding America has an Emergency Food and Shelter Program – a hunger/homelessness prevention program that fights poverty and builds community resilience to disaster. In its 26-year history, the EFSP has provided \$3.3 billion in funding to address short-term needs that could lead to increased hunger insecurity and homelessness. In 2009, 122 Feeding America Members received a total of \$11.7M from the EFSP.
- The Humane Society of The United States is working to address the needs of people with pets, who are often a vulnerable population given the amount of people with pets in a given community and their reluctance to leave their and evacuate. HSUS is working with federal, state, and local communities to include pets in all evacuation, sheltering, and mass care planning.
- Since 2007, the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc. has been strategically planning and building a network to ensure that those underserved communities can be integrated into the mainstream disaster system. This is in an effort to lessen the impact of a disaster for the total community. Their goal is not necessarily to become standardized but to assess and bring to table those new stakeholders that have much to contribute.
- The Salvation Army has a program called "Preparing Together" which is a preparedness initiative for seniors and people with disability. The concept is simple; they are training churches, clubs and community organizations to pair a volunteer with a senior or a person with a disability together to act as a readiness coach, a family partner, an evacuation advocate and a sheltering in place guide.
- Through their Resilient and Ready Communities Initiative, Save the Children works with emergency planners, emergency responders, schools, childcare leaders, caregivers and children to assess communities' strengths and address critical gaps in emergency planning for children's comprehensive needs. Based on a highly successful one year pilot project in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Save the Children's *Disaster Resilient Communities for Children* initiative engages community stakeholders in implementing best practices of emergency planning to help to safeguard children in at-risk communities.

- Mennonite Disaster Service is involved in mitigation in a variety of places, most notably, perhaps, in New Iberia, LA., and Cheek, TX, where marginalized communities experienced minor damage from a past hurricane, but economics and time have hindered them from adequate or any repairs. Hence, small damage has become a disaster through time and additional weather. MDS is working on a number of homes, repairing roofs, walls, flooring, and replacing whole kitchens for those most in need—the uninsured, the underinsured, the disabled, elderly and single parent.
- Affiliates of the Hands On Network offer neighborhood block parties where neighbors incorporate preparedness planning and community needs assessments to determine how best neighbors can help neighbors in the event of a disaster.
- Children’s Disaster Services, part of the Church of the Brethren Disaster Ministries, partners with the American Red Cross to ensure that shelters and other service delivery sites have temporary respite care for children when the need arises.
- The American Red Cross is working across many agencies to ensure the needs of children and people with disabilities and other functional requirements, including the elderly, are addressed. Red Cross representatives have served on working groups for children’s issues coordinated by the National Commission on Children in Disasters and have implemented many of the recommendations from the Commission into their protocols. Recently, Red Cross representatives worked with FEMA to assist in the creation of guidance for assisting people with disabilities and functional needs in shelters. This guidance will complement the guidance documents that Red Cross already uses in ensuring shelters are accessible and inclusive. In addition to their work with federal agencies, the Red Cross has a number of partnerships with other voluntary agencies. Local chapters are encouraged to partner with Independent Living Centers and other organizations that provide services for people with disabilities to augment the Red Cross response following a disaster.

These are just a few examples. But there is still much work to do. Terms like “special need” and “vulnerable populations” allow us to all too easily group very differing citizens into one homogeneous population and provide instructions that are not appropriately communicated or that are impossible to follow. These are issues that must be addressed with key community representatives and then put into practice by emergency management professionals. While planning needs to include a true representation of the community--- response, immediate assistance, and long term recovery all require a true integration of voluntary organizations, like those that are members of National VOAD, in order to meet all of the unmet needs of the community.

Madam Chairwoman and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I would like to thank you again for your time, and would welcome any questions you may have.

Attachments

Church of the Brethren Children's Disaster Services

Preparedness for vulnerable populations:

All families that have been impacted by a disaster are vulnerable – unexpectedly thrown into a struggle to survive, seeking food, clothing and shelter for their loved ones. In the midst of this are the children, their concerns and emotional needs are not a priority as parents seek to secure essentials for the family's physical needs.

“Homelessness for a child is more than loss of a house. It disrupts every aspect of life. It separates children from their belongings, beloved pets, reassuring routines, friends and community. At a time when children should be developing a sense of safety and security ... they are severely challenged and limited by unpredictability, dislocation and chaos.”¹

To an uninformed observer, children appear to be unaffected because they can be seen playing, and play looks normal. In truth, the opposite is true. Often their play reflects the trauma of the disaster. Children have three unique, pervasive fears after a disaster without the language to express them: Will it happen again? Will someone I love be hurt? Who will take care of me?

Are infants and toddlers immune to traumatic stress? Absolutely not! Young children pick up on the fear and anxiety of their parents and caregivers, and become irritable and fussy themselves.

In shelters children are particularly vulnerable. In addition to being stressed or traumatized by the disaster, the atmosphere is chaotic, increasing their insecurity. The volunteers there are often spontaneous and unscreened. Even if an “Instant Background Check” is initiated or part of a response plan, it is often not completed before a volunteer is placed with children or staffing a shelter with children and other vulnerable people.

While in shelters or resource assistance centers, children and families need support. Parents and caregivers feel overwhelmed by the disaster, which demands all of their resources to cope and create a plan for their family's recovery. This is an all consuming task, leaving little emotional energy to care for the unique disaster-related needs of their children. Considering the wide needs of families, supporting children through temporary respite care supports the parents and caregivers as well.

One observed strategy in shelters is to provide a space for children and then add toys. However, this quickly becomes a problem without good supervision. An unsupervised area quickly becomes cluttered; children act out their frustrations, increasing the chaos of the shelter and in turn causing additional stress on the children. Occasionally the shelter population can become organized to help with supervision of children, but this is far from an adequate plan in most situations.

In situations when children have prolonged exposure to the devastating effects of the disaster, have witnessed extreme destruction, experienced a personal loss, or were at risk before the disaster struck, they are particularly vulnerable to the impact of trauma and can develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which has been shown to retard both emotional and cognitive development. In these situations it is particularly important for staff or volunteers working with these children have special training and experience.

John Kinsel² shares three critical strategies important in the recovery of children affected by disaster:

- Children need to be assured and reassured that they are safe.

¹ --Ellen Bassuk, MD, Harvard Medical School - Quoted in National Commission on Children and Disaster Interim Report, October 2009, p 56

² Kinsel, John. “Working with Children and Adolescents after a Disaster,” in *Disaster Spiritual Care: Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy*, edited by S. Roberts and W. W. C. Ashley. Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008.

- Even the youngest children that are verbal need a simple and truthful explanation of what happened
- Reestablishment of some semblance of normal routines should occur as soon as possible.

Hopefully it is increasingly clear that the care of children needs considerable planning, not just in the most extreme situations, but in nearly all disaster situations. Children simply can't be handed off to whoever is available or shows up, a well designed plan that includes the family, with support from prescreened and trained staff or volunteers, is critical part of preparedness to most disasters.

In our three decades of experience training volunteers to work with children after a disaster, we have learned that it is essential for volunteers to understand:

- The physical and emotional phases of a disaster
- Common responses of each age group to the experience of disaster
- How to keep children safe in a disaster situation
- How to communicate to children in a way that promotes healing,
- Toys that will draw out a child's experiences
- How to set limits in a way that fosters a warm nurturing environment for traumatized children.
- Listening to distraught parents and appropriate resources to share if requested.

This is accomplished through simulation of a shelter setting and carefully planned exercises that give volunteers practice in the skills being taught.

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) has implemented an expansion plan that will increase the number of trained and certified volunteers in disaster prone areas in the United States. Starting with the Gulf and Pacific coasts, CDS will systematically train and certify volunteers in these areas, deploying them with experienced leadership to foster their understanding of working with children after disasters until the area has the capacity for local leadership. This is being done through partnerships with groups that have an interest in children and disaster response. "CDS (Children's Disaster Services) centers provide a safe, secure environment where children can begin the process of healing and recovery and parents can feel reassured that their children are being cared for in a loving way."³

Our experience responding to 207 disasters over the past 3 decades has shown that one crucial element of preparedness is that those in charge of Disaster Recovery Centers, assistance centers, shelters or other service delivery sites know about the risk disasters pose to children and give their needs priority when planning. It is essential that managers know how to access appropriate respite care services. In addition, it is crucial that sufficient numbers of volunteers are trained to meet the special needs of traumatized children and are close enough to the disaster to set up Temporary Respite Centers within 24 – 36 hours of a disaster's impact.

³ Peek, Lori, Jeanette Sutton, and Judy Gump (2008). "Caring for Children in the Aftermath of Disaster: The Church of the Brethren's Children's Disaster Services Program." *Children, Youth and Environments* 10(1): 418.

FEEDING AMERICA'S ONGOING WORK WITH VULNERABLE POPULATIONS— BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Community members living in the lower economic bracket are disproportionately impacted by disaster. Research has shown that those living in poverty are frequently more vulnerable to injury or death and have a much more difficult path to recovery because they have fewer savings and the lack financial flexibility that can help speed disaster recovery. These individuals may be the least likely to evacuate and may not have a support system to help them recover. Feeding America, the largest domestic hunger relief organization comprised of over 200 food banks across the nation and serving over 60,000 local service organizations in every county of the U.S. works with this vulnerable and at risk population every day.

In this, the world's wealthiest nation, one in eight people do not know where they'll find their next meal. An estimated **36.2 million Americans, or 12.2 percent, are food insecure**; meaning their access to enough food is limited by a lack of money and other resources. These are American citizens with homes, jobs and families, in communities of every description. They are our neighbors, coworkers, relatives and friends. Their stories are filled with lost jobs, stagnant wages, medical calamities and the rising costs of food and fuel. ***The last year has brought many more Americans to the brink and as such individuals, families, and whole communities are increasingly vulnerable to the impact of disasters and will have greater difficulty recovering following the next disaster.***

Current Status: More food and Funds, but Increased Need leading to Increased Vulnerability

- Feeding America has increased the amount of food and grocery products secured and distributed to its network of food banks more by more than 22 percent over last year to 2.63 billion pounds annually.
- Financial donations increased 63 percent to \$75 million in Fiscal Year 2009.
- Demand for food at agencies of local food banks around the country still continues to outpace supply - demand has grown on average by 30 % over the past year
- Current recession and the continuing rise in unemployment—now at 9.7% across the nation-- are having a profound effect on the ability of local food banks to feed millions of Americans living at risk of hunger and homelessness.
- Over 55% of our Network members have had to turn away clients because they cannot meet demand for food.

Emergency Food and Shelter Program – a hunger/homelessness prevention program that fights poverty and builds community resilience to disaster

- In its 26-year history, EFSP has provided \$3.3 billion in funding to address short-term needs that could lead to increased hunger insecurity and homelessness.
- In 2009, 122 FA Members received a total of **\$11.7M** from the EFSP.
- The Feeding America network and individual Member food banks can be a resource for identifying and quantifying hunger in communities and can efficiently meet these needs.

The relationships established on a day-to-day basis through this program provide a unique outlet for the federal government to work with in times of disasters. Marrying up the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Voluntary Agency Liaisons, cadres of Community Relations Specialists with the EFSP local boards will help resources get out to those who need it most in an expedited manner.

PREPAREDNESS

Feeding America Member Food Banks are working with Corporate and non-profit partners to share preparedness materials with their network of social service agencies that serve populations which government has traditionally struggled to reach including the poor, seniors, children, and recent immigrants. The following case studies highlight some recent initiatives to improve community and individual preparedness.

North Texas Mass Care Task Force begins work to enhance local disaster-relief efforts

Goal: To increase number of people to be sheltered and fed to 40,000 individuals.

Following the one-year anniversary of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Gulf region, executives of the North Texas Food Bank (NTFB), American Red Cross Dallas Area Chapter (ARC), The Salvation Army Metroplex Area Command (TSA) and the Volunteer Center of North Texas (VCNT) came together to initiate an important project designed to improve the efficacy and efficiency of mass care disaster response for their community. These four nonprofit organizations formed the Mass Care Task Force to strengthen their ability to take action in partnership when called upon to respond to a disaster in North Texas, or to serve evacuees from a neighboring community.

The task force helped to fully define each organization's primary responsibilities to avoid duplication. The strides made since 2005 and when Hurricane Ike hit in 2008 demonstrated the success such collaboration and planning can have in preparing non-profits to respond to disasters. "But with Ike in 2008, we knew exactly what resources were needed and the right agencies to provide them as a result of our Mass Care Task Force planning," said Jan Pruitt, president and chief executive officer of the North Texas Food Bank. "The organizations in the Mass Care Task Force want to make sure we're prepared to meet the needs of the North Texas community should a much larger disaster occur."

In early 2009, the Communities Foundation of Texas announced \$5 million as a challenge grant over four years to support development and implementation of a Mass Care Response and Disaster Relief Plan for North Texas with funds from its W.W. Caruth, Jr. Foundation. This is the first-in-the-nation collaboration of this scope with the goal of increasing emergency preparedness from their current ability to shelter and feed 7,800 to being able to accommodate 40,000 individuals.

On May 20, 2009, national representatives of Feeding America, the American Red Cross, Salvation Army joined the North Texas Mass Care Task Force and the W.W. Caruth, Jr. Foundation to recognize the important work of this task force in keeping North Texans safer in times of disaster and hosted a kick-off meeting for the next phase of their work together. Specifically, the Task Force began work on a joint disaster planning and exercise effort to further refine the joint operations plan through a series of table-top exercises with the final plan expect by late 2009.

Partnership for Forward-staging of Essential Hurricane Supplies

Goal: Reduce lag time associated with the movement of shelf-stable nutritional supplement to areas impacted by disaster and/or receiving larger numbers of evacuees.

Pre-positioning is one of the most effective ways to provide life saving/sustaining supplies in a timely manner. Abbott Nutrition has been a long-time supporter of Feeding America with the staging of disaster relief supplies. Abbott wanted to explore new ways to support food banks in disaster with a slightly more forward-leaning approach. Rather than placing all of the donated relief supplies in the 5 national disaster distribution centers – we staged smaller amounts of Abbott product directly in food banks throughout the Southeast and Gulf Regions. The pre-positioning sought to reduce the time lag associated with transporting this type of product to responding food banks and organizations while quickly address shelter support and immediate needs following an evacuation and/or effects of a storm. To do this Abbott donated supplies including Pediasure, Pedialyte, Ensure and Zone which were staged in pre-packaged, pre-mixed modules. The East Texas Food Bank in Tyler and America's Second Harvest of South Georgia in Valdosta agreed to serve as mixing centers for the Network by packaging the donated supplies for distribution prior to the beginning of Hurricane Season. The Feeding America-Abbott Disaster supplies were delivered to multiple locations the last week in May, coinciding with National Hurricane Preparedness Week (May 24-30). Locations were selected due to its vulnerability to hurricane, ability to assist in disaster response and recovery, and the quantities were based on the size of the population in the food banks' service areas. Specifically, Feeding America pre-staged Abbott's donated goods at 7 food banks that served a population over 1 million, and another 14 food banks with service areas under 1 million. The partnership exemplified the investment that can be made to help communities in urgent need, when disasters strike.

California earthquake table-top Exercise

Goal: To build capacity of local faith-based and non-profit organizations and to improve COOP

On Wednesday, July 1, 2009 the Foodbank of Santa Barbara County, California hosted a disaster preparedness conference and table-top exercise with representatives from more than 30 member agencies that provide emergency services through food distributions, preparation and by providing shelter. The half-day conference included representatives from Feeding America, the Orfalea Foundation and the American Red Cross representative to the county's Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters.

The development of the conference agenda and its facilitation were a collaborative effort between the Santa Barbara Food Bank and Feeding America's National Office. The conference included a table-top discussion of an simulated earthquake scenario with the local service agencies working through a variety of problem statements to be resolved within their geographical area; a presentation by on Continuity of Service or Who's Open for Business to help provide the basic tools needed to develop a disaster contingency plan, and then a discussion with the Red Cross on coordination of service delivery during times of disasters.

The funding for the conference was provided by the Orfalea Foundation as part of its "Aware & Prepare: A Community Partnership to Strengthen Emergency & Disaster Readiness" and in partnership with the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services (SBC OES). The initiative's mission is to create a community partnership to strengthen capabilities to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency or disaster in Santa Barbara County.

The conference was an opportunity to address seven key areas of disaster preparedness, including:

- Public Education and Awareness
- Coordination and Communication.
- Preparedness.
- Emergency Public Information.
- Resources and Personnel.
- Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters.

Tarrant Area Food Bank engages Vulnerable Populations in Preparedness

Target Corporation supports the disaster programs of Feeding America, The Salvation Army, and the American Red Cross and has developed a Family Safety booklet to promote disaster preparedness. The booklet contains a checklist of supplies that every family should have on hand at all times, as well as tips for keeping children safe and helping families create a safety plan. The disaster preparedness booklet was made available in Target stores during National Preparedness Month in September 2009.

In September 2009, the Tarrant Area Food Bank in San Antonio was able to distribute more than 1000 copies of the Target disaster preparedness materials to more than 300 social service agencies throughout the 13 counties that they serve. Through this network of food bank agencies, they were able to share information about individual and family preparedness with children, seniors, and recent immigrants that frequently are not the target of disaster preparedness efforts.

RESPONSE

Feeding America Member Food Banks supplements mass care congregant feeding sites managed by National VOAD partners, provides an alternate distribution mechanism for individuals and families that cannot be reached through government Points of Distribution, and is involved with household distribution of food that helps people move into the recovery process. The following case study highlights the role that the Houston Food Bank played as a partner and resource to emergency management t the local, state, and federal level.

BP Deepwater Horizon Gulf Coast Oil Spill

Many coastal communities throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida are reporting drop-off in sales from their grocers, revenue losses from money spent in restaurants, condos and hotel rentals, as well as the loss wages of boat owners and crews and the seafood packing operators.

To respond to the increased demand for assistance, Feeding America food banks throughout these coastal communities in these states are bracing for the long term economic impact and burdens families will face. Immediately the Second Harvest Food Bank of New Orleans and Acadiana began preparing for the need to support their communities for the long term. They began working with other VOAD partners, emergency management community and started to identify the long-term impact this devastating event would have on their communities. They began to distribute food and water to those in need and are currently assessing how they will continue to do so for those newly in need.

In response to record unemployment and uncertainty with the recent oil spill, Bay Area Food Bank (Theodore/Mobile) began deploying the mobile pantry program, a traveling food pantry, to those communities affected along the Gulf Coast including Pascagoula, MS (1 distribution) and Grand Bay, AL (5). Specific distributions are scheduled for additional mobile pantries in Bay St. Louis, MS (1); Bayou La Batre, AL (4); Biloxi, MS (1) and Grand Bay, AL (7). Considered a blessing to the grateful families who receive the much needed food, recipients have been heard saying that they had “given up all hope until the mobile pantry showed up” (Pensacola, FL). Several ladies attended a food distribution in Grand Bay, Alabama after losing their jobs just two days earlier. Both stated that the food from the trailer was a “godsend” to them and they “didn’t know what they would do without it.” Some distributions are targeted specifically for the Asian community’s dietary preferences and will also include SNAP enrollment information in various Asian languages.

Many of these communities are still recovering from Hurricane Katrina. Of particular interest to this committee may be that the Mobile Pantry operation in the Bay St. Louis/Waveland, MS area is being conducted at a temporary church building where both the church and the area homes were entirely underwater and devastated by Katrina. This church hosted the pantry distribution and provided cooking classes to talk about how to prepare the food provided by the pantry as well as held discussions on how to stretch food dollars.

April 2010 Flooding: Second Harvest of Middle Tennessee (Nashville)

As a result of the flooding in late April of this year, Second Harvest of Middle Tennessee worked on contingency plans developed over the weekend for the flooding as their facility was directly impacted by 5 feet of water. The food bank quickly became inaccessible due to road closures and lost valuable equipment, office space and product. Further, it quickly moved over 200 pallets of key disaster food items such as peanut butter, canned meats, vegetables and fruit and cereals to its alternate facility at a warehouse facility at Metro Nashville Airport.

From that location, Second Harvest Food Bank activated its disaster team and began responding to the needs of the community and individuals who had been affected by the flooding disaster. In the immediate days following the flooding, Second Harvest’s efforts focused on assembling and distributing emergency food boxes, cleaning supplies, bottled water, and other non-food items to Metro’s Disaster Information Centers.

When the flood waters receded and Metro Center became accessible and power was restored, Second Harvest reoccupied its building and quickly accelerated operations to meet both the ongoing hunger needs in our community and the emergency food needs for folks affected by the disaster. The primary instrument by which they used to distribute food quickly and efficiently into the rural counties affected by the disaster was Mobile Pantries. The Mobile Pantry is a traveling food pantry that delivers food directly to agencies to hold a large-scale food distribution for people in need. To continue their day-to-day services and the added needs caused by the flooding, Second Harvest of Middle TN reached out to their local Kroger, Walmart, and Dollar General contacts regarding their interest in supporting food bank flood relief efforts. Other members of the Feeding America network quickly stepped in and offered support—personnel and product—but true to the Volunteer State, the food bank effectively engaged in local partners to raise funds and foods to meet the needs thus minimized the need to ship in product from other areas.

Since May 2, when the rain finally stopped, Second Harvest has operated 20 Mobile Pantries, distributing close to 1,000,000 pounds (781,250 meals) to folks whose lives have been affected by the flooding disaster.

Hurricane Ike: Houston Food Bank as Force-multiplier for Emergency Management

The 2008 hurricane season was recognized to have been one of the busiest seasons on record by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Hurricane Ike goes down as the 3rd most destructive storm in history. The Houston Food Bank played an integral role supporting the response operations in America’s 4th largest city and to Galveston Island which bore the brunt of the storm’s landfall.

The Houston Food Bank (HFB) distributed just over 20 million pounds of relief supplies during the initial relief efforts and during the on-going recovery phase. HFB coordinated with 239 different local agencies thereby lending an distribution infrastructure to emergency management partners that allowed far wider and more diverse coverage than is possible through the County Points of Distribution (POD). The food bank, along with partner agencies were able to reached deep into even the small population neighborhoods that were otherwise not being reached through traditional distribution efforts. In areas where there were no viable agencies in existence, the food bank utilized mobile pantries and made deliveries.

HFB began distribution the day after landfall and ramped up to an average daily output of over 500,000 pounds within 4 days. Well over 50% of the relief supplies distributed originated with FEMA and was provided in coordination with the State of Texas' feeding plan and the cooperation of Houston City officials. The balance of the relief supplies, beyond the product that originating with FEMA, was provided through private donations at the local level and through national corporate partners leveraged by the Feeding America National Office.

RECOVERY

Feeding America Member Food Banks remain in communities long after other national relief efforts have ended and they continue to support the immediate and long-term recovery efforts of community-based organizations. The following case study highlights recent efforts to by the Northeast Iowa Food Bank during the floods in June 2008 and during the on-going recovery for the communities they serve.

Midwest Floods of 2008: Northeast Iowa Food Bank support of Long-term Recovery

The flooding experienced in Northeast Iowa continues to impact communities through the long-term rebuilding and on-going mental health treatment for children impacted.

The Northeast Iowa Food Bank has made a conscious effort to stay involved with the long term recovery process of the communities we serve. Staff have been dedicated to b a member of multiple long term recover committees and have support work crew and camps for long-term mental for children.

Northeast Iowa Food Bank and Camp Noah

- Providing food and drinks to camps in 8 cities affected by flooding and/or tornadoes of 2008
 - New Hartford
 - Hazelton
 - Parkersburg
 - Shell Rock
 - Waverly
 - Lamont
 - Dunkerton
 - Laporte City

- Product provided includes:
 - Water
 - Gatorade
 - Fruit Juice
 - Shelf Stable Milk
 - Snacks (Chips, Fruit Snacks, Granola Bars)
 - Macaroni and Cheese
 - Ground Beef
 - Ground Turkey
 - Hot Dogs
 - Canned Fruits and Vegetable
 - Fresh Produce
 - Bakery Items

Camps are completely funded by the community and it cost \$2500 to bring the national team in. By helping to provide the food we are able to help supplement the budgets for these important camps in rural communities.

Humane Society of the United States

For the past few decades, and especially since Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Government and many state and local emergency management officials have increased their awareness and recognition that families and individuals with pets must be considered when addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association's 2007 statistics, 59.5% of U.S. households have pets – and two-thirds of those had more than one pet. This is an increase of more than 7 million pets from the same organization's 2001 statistics, or a total of more than 680 million pets living with families.

In spite of the fact that pet owners are clearly in the majority in our communities, planning and execution of disaster evacuation and sheltering operations have not adequately or consistently addressed their needs, resulting in loss of life and personal anguish.

We have learned too many times that individuals have failed to evacuate, or have returned to dangerous areas because they were not allowed to take their pets away from dangerous conditions. Too many times, we have seen heart-breaking images of pets torn from children's arms, or watched distraught adults as they were forced to abandon helpless pets, or learned of those who perished because they would not leave their animals or lived on the streets because no shelter would accept them. Too many times, first responders and emergency personnel have been imperiled by circumstances involving injured or abandoned pets in disasters.

The 2006 PETS Act, passed by Congress and signed by the President, began to address the needs of this vulnerable population at the federal level. We applaud Congress and the Executive Branch for taking this action, and acknowledge the significant steps taken by FEMA, USDA/APHIS and other Federal agencies since then to address the needs of families and individuals with pets. Our members have appreciated the commitment shown by representatives of these agencies, and the active role they have assumed in coordinating the efforts of public and private disaster-related organizations to ensure that families with animals are included in disaster planning.

By working together in collaboration and cooperation, the members of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster have also strengthened the fabric of non-profit support for families with animals.

Many communities – especially those who have extensive experience with disasters - have also recognized the importance of planning for families with pets and have included them in the planning process. In others, "lessons learned" after a disaster have included the need to act on behalf of those with animals.

Our commitment to this vulnerable population is solid, and we applaud the efforts by all those who have included planning for their needs into their Disaster Plans. We encourage all communities currently reviewing or updating their Disaster Plans to recognize and include the needs of families and individuals with animals in disaster.

Mennonite Disaster Service

Virtually all of our work is being done within vulnerable populations. Much of our continuing work entails preparedness and mitigation.

ERT

We have been and continue to train Early Response Teams (ERT) in various communities where we have sizable populations (specifically Mennonites and Amish). They are supplied with a trailer (which they buy together) that is equipped for self-containment and use as soon as the authorities allow us to come in. It is loaded with chain saws, fuel, water, and a great variety of tools.

Materials

MDS uses an adapted version of the Lutheran Disaster Response's "Preparing for Disaster: A Guide for [Mennonite] Congregations." MDS also collaborated on a booklet called, "Beyond our Fears: Following Jesus in Times of Crisis," published by Mennonite Publishing Network.

Hurricane Preparedness

MDS and MCC (Mennonite Central Committee—our sister organization that concentrates on disaster response overseas, and activism in the US) met with Mennonite congregations in Texas to discuss and plan preparedness for the next hurricanes, including the situation for evacuees. Mennonite churches in San Antonio, Houston and other parts of Texas are readying themselves to receive those fleeing a storm.

Mitigation

MDS is involved in mitigation in a variety of places, most notably, perhaps, in New Iberia, LA., and Cheek, TX, where marginalized communities experienced minor damage from a past hurricane, but economics and time have hindered them from adequate or any repairs. Hence, small damage has become a disaster through time and additional weather. MDS is working on a number of homes, repairing roofs, walls, flooring, and replacing whole kitchens for those most in need—the uninsured, the underinsured, the disabled, elderly and single parent.

None of these really reflect the additional work being done in the Gulf, even now as we listen and begin responding to those affected by the oil spill—many of the people who have received help from MDS for their homes are now looking at the oncoming and present disaster that is the oil spill.

Scott Sundberg
Director of Communications
Mennonite Disaster Service

National Baptist Convention, USA Inc

From: The Office of Disaster Management
National Baptist Convention, USA Inc.
Randy G. Vaughn, Director

Through our Office of Disaster Management we are organizing and structuring our convention to strengthen and fill gaps to the vulnerable and underserved communities. The underserved communities have been added to the list of vulnerable populations and should be included as such due to these populations lacking resources to prepare for a disaster and recover from its aftermath. We have begun to build capacity, educate, and create new partnerships with other disaster related organizations.

Since 2007, the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc. has been strategically planning and building a network to ensure that those underserved communities can be integrated into the mainstream disaster system. This is in an effort to lessen the impact of a disaster for the total community. Our goal is not necessarily to become standardized but to assess and bring to table those new stakeholders that have much to contribute.

Capacity building is a necessary activity for disaster risk reduction; however we now recognize what a mammoth task it is to equip 15,000 communities in such a vast geographic area. The organizational Development is moving steadily but the Human Development is lacking. The resources to equip individuals with understanding, knowledge and skills are just not available.

If we equip and educate that vulnerable community it will become economically beneficial as it will somewhat lessen the impact on public safety net programs. Lack of preparedness for the health and welfare of the vulnerable population can have devastating consequences. The catalyst that will trigger better preparedness, mitigation, protection of human health, and safety and welfare is additional informational and economical resources.