

Stay + Connected

Transitioning to a new home, a new life

Neighborhood Centers Inc. February 2007

This month, Neighborhood Centers Inc. celebrates 100 years of service to our neighbors. Through those many years, we've welcomed new Houstonians with open arms, recognizing their unique abilities, strengths and dedication.

Whether they arrived in the early 1900s seeking entrepreneurial opportunities or became Houstonians in 2005 following a natural disaster in their hometowns, we've been here to help them prosper and succeed, becoming vital contributors to the overall fabric and culture of our city.

The year 2006 was one of successful transition for many former Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

With memories of the hurricane still fresh, these new Houstonians set about finding jobs, schools and housing – rebuilding their lives as they put down roots in their new hometown.

Along the way, Neighborhood Centers Inc.'s Stay Connected program provided links to resources and information. The program's staff of Service Connectors worked directly with families, getting to know them, understanding their unique strengths and skills and helping them navigate through the uncertainty of their new surroundings.

Many of those families made great strides in 2006. During the year, close to 1,500 participating families "graduated" from the Stay Connected program – that is, they no longer needed assistance or had moved outside the area.

Meanwhile, the Stay Connected staff – almost all of whom were displaced by Hurricane Katrina themselves – provided a wide range of support and assistance to evacuee families:

- + 1,495 individuals received help in finding employment – from resume writing assistance to facilitating job contacts.

- + More than 1,000 families received help in recertifying for FEMA assistance.
- + More than \$400,000 in direct aid – utility deposits, moving costs, car repairs and employment-related activities – was paid for through funds raised by Stay Connected.
- + More than 400 senior citizens received ongoing assistance.
- + Holiday toys and gifts were provided to 160 evacuee families.

In addition, Stay Connected conducted three resource fairs where evacuees could meet with potential employers and register for needed services such as health care, food stamps and educational opportunities. And Service Connectors conducted outreach activities in five apartment complexes with a large number of evacuees.

Since its formation shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, Stay Connected has assisted 3,041 families, becoming one of the lead agencies in hurricane recovery efforts.

"The Stay Connected program has helped our family tremendously," says Bridgett Barlow, a Katrina evacuee who has settled here. "My family has accepted the fact that returning 'home' is not the best choice for us at this time. We are grateful for the financial assistance we've received that enabled us to put a deposit down on an apartment and pay for utilities. Now, my children are enrolled in a charter school and we've made Houston our home."

Success stories

These new Houstonians are an inspiration to all of us!

- + Mr. Brown is a single, 51-year-old former long-haul truck driver. A Stay

Connected Service Connector met him when he came to one of the program's FEMA recertification fairs. After we successfully recertified him for FEMA assistance, we began talking with him about what additional needs he might have. He said that he had worked previously as a truck driver but was having trouble getting into the field in Houston. His Service Connector referred Mr. Brown to The WorkSource, where he was able to begin training to become certified in forklift driving. He successfully completed the program and is now employed with Wal-Mart as a warehouse employee.

- + Mrs. Nguyen became a Stay Connected client in February 2006. She had her own cosmetology business in Louisiana but lost everything when the hurricane hit. Since the family carried homeowners insurance, she was denied FEMA benefits; however, all of her insurance money went directly to her mortgage company in Louisiana, leaving the family with nothing. Mrs. Nguyen also reported that language barriers were creating difficulty as she sought assistance for her family, and her three children were struggling to transition into their new schools. With the assistance of her Service Connector, Mrs. Nguyen overcame the language barrier and applied for – and was granted – a Small Business Administration loan. This money enabled her to rent space in a salon and resume her business. Since then, Mrs. Nguyen has purchased a home and her children have adapted to their new schools, where all three are making straight As!

- + Ms. McCalab entered the Stay Connected program in early August 2006, seeking assistance with permanent employment and housing. She also needed help obtaining a birth certificate for her son so he could register for school. Ms. McCalab had previously found temporary employment but resigned because of safety concerns. Thanks to her Service Connector – and her own diligence – Ms. McCalab now has a permanent position as a secretary with a nursing home, a position she found through leads generated by our Reintegration Counselor. She has also achieved all of the goals on her service plan, including getting the birth certificate for her son, registering for a Harris County Hospital District Gold Card and securing a safe apartment. She is now an independent Houstonian!



"The Stay Connected program has helped our family tremendously," says Bridgett Barlow, a Katrina evacuee now teaching in the Houston Independent School District.

Our Mission

To bring resources, education and connection to underserved neighborhoods.

Our Vision

Individuals and communities living up to their full potential.

Our Core Values

Respect & Responsiveness

Leadership & Excellence

Accountability & Integrity

Growth & Innovation

Diversity & Inclusiveness

Strategic Directions

Hispanic Education Senior Services Early Care and Education Centered Neighborhood Development Emerging Communities

Our Story

Neighborhood Centers Inc. was founded in 1907 in response to a dire need in one Houston neighborhood. In the 100 years since, we have evolved into a network of 58 service sites. We provide help and hope to 180,000 children, youth, adults, and senior citizens across 13 counties each year.



Neighborhood Centers Inc.
Lifting hearts.
Building futures.

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Working together to benefit evacuees

Neighborhood Centers Inc. received a \$3.2 million grant from the Houston-Galveston Area Council to manage a citywide initiative in support of Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

The project – called the Joint Hurricane Community Settlement Task Force – is a partnership among Neighborhood Centers Inc., the City of Houston, the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast and The WorkSource.

The Task Force's responsibilities include coordinating recovery efforts, advocating on behalf of evacuees, providing ongoing communication to local, state and federal agencies as well as local non-profits, and assisting individuals who wish to relocate.



Trudy Wright, right, is a new client who was brought to Stay Connected through the elderly and disabled outreach initiative. Her Service Connector, Trishawn Lewis, left, has helped Ms. Wright connect to services for the disabled.

To date, the task force has:

- + Produced a series of videos that assists evacuees in finding work and accessing needed resources.
- + Subcontracted with 2-1-1 Texas (United Way) to provide information and referral assistance and with Coytrean Properties to provide housing assistance to evacuees.
- + Developed a resource website at www.houstonhurricane-recovery.org.
- + Developed a database used community-wide to track the activity of evacuees and cut down on any duplication of services.

Outreach to the elderly and disabled

Many of the elderly and disabled evacuees who fled to Houston after Hurricane Katrina have decided to stay here permanently. Some of these new residents are still in need of assistance and support, and Stay Connected is working to identify as many of them as possible through various outreach efforts, including telephone contacts with apartment complexes around the city.

Once identified, these individuals are enrolled in the Stay Connected program where they receive ongoing support from Service Connectors.

"One of the tools we're using is a service called Benefits Check-Up, which is an Internet-based service that helps us identify resources for the elderly or disabled," says Dave Detcher, Stay Connected Program Director. "Every person we bring into the program is registered with the service, and our Service Connectors work with them to obtain the long-term resources they need to live here successfully."

In addition, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has received \$225,000 for helping the elderly or disabled move to suitable living accommodations within the City of Houston.

Neighborhood Centers Inc. has received another \$650,000 to help at least 650 evacuee families relocate to the city of their choice outside of Houston.

Smoothing the road home

"Many of the evacuees we are working with want to move back to their original neighborhoods, but those areas are often still unlivable," says Service Connector Kimberly Clofer.

To ensure that Stay Connected families won't be stranded after they relocate, Service Connectors work with them to develop a "moving plan" that ensures the families will have a place to live, that the housing can be sustained financially through employment or benefits, and that children are enrolled in school.

And thanks to a partnership with Episcopal Relief and Development, Stay Connected families will have assistance and support once they return to New Orleans.

Your help is still needed

Though FEMA has extended housing assistance through mid-2007, there are still a significant number of evacuees seeking employment. Many of these individuals received public assistance in New Orleans and do not have a work history that can help them secure employment here.

When housing assistance ends, many of these families will need continued services and support. This population is at risk of "falling through the cracks" and winding up homeless, hungry or both.

Neighborhood Centers Inc.'s Stay Connected program remains focused on providing support for those in need. If you'd like to help with a cash or in-kind donation, call Marc Levinson, Director of Agency Development, at 713-669-5222. If you have a job opportunity for an evacuee or would like to volunteer, call Dave Detcher, Stay Connected Program Director, at 713-547-8213.



Tammy Johnson, at right, is a single mother of two pre-teen daughters. Her Service Connector, Wilma Devoe, left, provided needed resources that enabled Ms. Johnson to take the registered nurse exam. The Johnson family is now back home in New Orleans, thanks to the Stay Connected relocation program, and Ms. Johnson is working in the medical field.