

# Stay+Connected

## Collaboration is key to long-term relief efforts

Continuing Response: November 3 - April 1

### The six stages of recovery

Survival

Sanctuary

Life  
in "Limbo"

Resignation/  
Acceptance

New  
Normal

Recovery



Neighborhood  
Centers Inc.  
Lifting hearts.  
Building futures.

**Neighborhood Centers Inc. — through our Stay Connected program — is working with a wide range of partners on some of the toughest issues facing hurricane survivors.**

The six-month anniversary of Hurricane Katrina has come and gone, yet the need for assistance and support hasn't waned. In fact, with personal savings and many official relief sources tapped out, evacuees are facing even more difficult times ahead as they continue the struggle to build new lives.

"In some ways, the easiest work has been completed, but the hard work is just beginning," says Dave Detcher, director of the Stay Connected program for Neighborhood Centers Inc. "Many of the evacuees we're serving have critical, long-term needs that go beyond simply providing food and clothing. There is still a lot to be done."

To maximize the effectiveness of Stay Connected and stretch thin resources, Neighborhood Centers Inc. is collaborating with a number of other organizations to ensure that assistance reaches those most in need.

"What we're focused on now is providing the type of 'infrastructure' mechanisms that enable people to work, to find housing, to care for their families," Detcher says. "These issues are not going away any time soon, but we can accomplish a great deal with the proper resources and the right partners."

Some of the organizations that Neighborhood Centers Inc. is working with include the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast, The WorkSource, Children's Defense Fund, Skills For Living and others who have provided training and support.

**United Way provides money, support**  
For example, soon after Hurricane Katrina, the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast committed more than \$250,000 to Stay Connected. In the early days, a portion of those funds was used for gas and food cards, bus passes and household items, helping more than 300 evacuee families. The United Way also donated clothing and shoes that Neighborhood Centers Inc. distributed to more than 700 families.

But United Way's support has also been used for longer-term goals, such as providing matching funds to secure a grant enabling Stay Connected to hire 20 Service Connectors. And United Way continues to provide technical assistance and unmet needs funding to Stay Connected.

### From survival to recovery

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Houston community demonstrated overwhelming support to evacuees and welcomed them as neighbors.

The combination of social service organizations and corporate and private support has been unprecedented. But how will we know when the "job is finished?" The news media report regularly on "compassion fatigue," and it's no doubt a very real issue.

That's why Neighborhood Centers Inc. is beginning an exploration of the stages of disaster recovery from the viewpoint of human needs — starting with the event itself and the survival stage and ending with recovery. Our initial work has identified six distinct stages, and upcoming interviews with evacuees will provide greater detail at each level, along with associated emotional and behavioral characteristics and the resources or interventions needed to overcome the challenges and move to the next stage:

- **Survival** — escape from harm's way; attention to emergency basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, critical medical needs); emotionally characterized by fear, anger and confusion.
- **Sanctuary** — finding an intermediate, short-term source for basic needs while contemplating what happens next; attempting to locate family and friends; emotional need to process events of disaster — telling the story.
- **Life in "Limbo"** — discerning the scope of the disaster and lacking information about options for returning home, or if return is even an option; beginning to understand the need to resettle, at least temporarily, but not knowing how long to plan for this resettlement to last; daily decisions to be made about basic needs and how to meet them on an ongoing basis; frustration arising from lack of information — possible feelings of abandonment by the home community.
- **Resignation/Acceptance** — resigned to long-term settlement in a place other than home; likely need to change official residency; accepting the fact that the bonds and ties of "home" are forever changed; taking stock of personal assets and resources; emotionally moving back and forth on a continuum between helplessness/hopelessness and self-reliance/promise.
- **New Normal** — implementing a long-term plan for housing, employment, education and ongoing social services; forming identity as a resident of the new community; establishing the platform on which the future will be built; emotions are stabilizing.
- **Recovery** — settled with a place to live, means of support and connections to new community's people and resources; may still be open to the possibility of returning home if the opportunity arises, but not seen as a prospect for the near future.



Rashida Jackson, left, and Wilma DeVoe are two of the Service Connectors working to help fellow evacuees find employment, housing and assistance. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Jackson was a graduate student at the University of New Orleans and a certified health education specialist, and DeVoe worked as literacy coordinator for the New Orleans Public Library Learning Center.

### Needed: Health care, life skills

One of the greatest needs shared by many evacuee families is health care coverage — especially for children. Neighborhood Centers Inc. is working with the Children's Defense Fund to reach out to more than 400 families living in Houston-area apartment complexes, conducting health assessments and assisting them in applying for appropriate coverage via the Harris County Hospital District's Gold Card, the federally funded CHIP program, Medicaid or private insurance at reduced rates.

Another critical need is basic life skills for low-income evacuees, enabling them to improve their ability to find work and manage resources.

Neighborhood Centers Inc. is working with Skills For Living, a Houston non-profit that provides education and mentoring to help people cope with today's complex society. Through Skills For Living, the Stay Connected program is conducting classes for evacuees to help them define goals and implement strategies to enhance their lives.

### Connecting people to services

Our unique collaborative effort is the Service Connector program, in partnership with The WorkSource. These 20 Service Connectors — evacuees themselves — make weekly contacts with as many as 40-50 families each, helping them obtain housing, employment, health care and more. They also provide stable, ongoing emotional support.

These Service Connectors are a living example of the strengths and assets that hurricane evacuees brought to their new community. Many of the Service Connectors are skilled professionals with extensive experience in social work and related activities. And like the fellow newcomers they are helping, they are eager to build new lives here in Houston with permanent jobs and housing.

"Despite what you might hear or read, the great majority of evacuees are settling into their new lives by finding work and creating new households," says Detcher. In fact, nearly a third of the families initially enrolled in Stay Connected have left the program because they've already met their service plan objectives. And as of April 1, more than 500 individuals have found full-time employment

a big difference in the lives of those involved," Detcher says.

"This is real hands-on, person-to-person support that is really needed to ensure that these families have a firm foundation and

## The need is still great

Can you help Neighborhood Centers Inc. continue to provide assistance to hurricane evacuees living in Houston? Despite the tremendous strides made by many new Houstonians, there are still those in need of ongoing support. If you'd like to help with a cash or in-kind donation, call Marc Levinson, Director of Agency Relations, at 713-669-5222. If you'd like to volunteer, contact Stay Connected Program Director Dave Detcher at 713-547-8213.

To: Neighborhood Centers Inc.

From: Cheryl Joseph  
Malijah Santee  
Montelle Joseph

Thank you for the furniture given to me during this time of need. I really appreciate all you have done for me.

Thank you, Thank you,  
Thank you



can become self-sufficient," he says. "What's so effective about it is that the Service Connectors – being evacuees themselves – can really relate to the people they are supporting. It's like having a friend from home extend a helping hand."

After conducting initial assessments of their case families, the Service Connectors helped families complete an action plan toward self-sufficiency. Now, the Service Connectors are tracking progress toward achieving each family's objectives and providing support and assistance where needed.

### Teaching the teachers

A wide range of organizations has provided training to help the Service Connectors be more effective, including FEMA, the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program, the Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston, The Metropolitan Organization and The WorkSource.

with help from their Service Connectors. "It's important to understand that a great many of these 'new Houstonians' are already contributing to the city's vibrancy through their hard work, skills and professionalism, even if it's happening outside of the spotlight," says Neighborhood Centers Inc. CEO Angela Blanchard.



Training has taken many forms. This trainer, Michelle Paul, came to us from The Metropolitan Organization.



Pictured (L-R): Jewish Federation of Greater Houston CEO Lee Wunsch, Federation Vice President and Hurricane Relief Committee Chair Bobby Lapin, Neighborhood Centers Inc. Director of Agency Relations Marc Levinson, Federation Director of Planning and Allocations Barb Bratter, and Federation President Joe Williams.

"It's a great testament to the evacuees' survival instincts and to the support that programs such as Stay Connected have been able to provide. Houstonians should be proud not only of their own willingness to help, but also proud of their new neighbors and the contributions they are making – and will continue to make – to this great city."

"The six-month Service Connector program began in January and is making

"This training is critical to staying up to date on issues related to housing, employment, health care and other services that are available," Detcher says. "It's been invaluable, and we sincerely appreciate everyone who has taken the time to help us."

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