

Stay + Connected

Hurricane Preparedness, Response and Recovery

Neighborhood Centers Inc. July 2006

Neighborhood Centers Inc. and its partners provide critical ongoing support to Katrina evacuees

Thanks to the efforts of Neighborhood Centers Inc.'s Stay Connected program and its community partners, Houston's massive relief effort in support of Hurricane Katrina evacuees continues to produce impressive results.

Thousands of new residents are building the foundations for productive lives – finding employment and housing, enrolling their children in school and becoming vital contributors to the city we all call home.

In the weeks following Hurricane Katrina, Neighborhood Centers Inc. created the Stay Connected program and set a goal of providing both emergency and continuing services to more than 2,000 families during the first year. Stay Connected has surpassed that goal, having helped more than 6,100 people from more than 2,000 families.

Since the first days after the hurricane, Houston's human services agencies, coordinated by the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast, have worked together to provide services and connection to our new neighbors from New Orleans. This group of ongoing providers, known as the Houston Long Term Recovery Team, now consists of 20 agencies. The Stay Connected program is a key member of the team.

Meeting weekly, the team plans and implements a systematic approach to helping evacuees, ensuring that no one who needs help is left behind, regardless of the difficulty or circumstances.

The weekly meetings have also become a

clearinghouse for vital information, connecting the Mayor's Office, FEMA and other key organizations involved in the recovery effort.

Dave Detcher, Stay Connected Program Director, acknowledges the vital responsibility taken by the United Way in coordinating and funding this ongoing effort.

"The United Way's contribution goes beyond its role as coordinator," he says. "United Way provided partial funding for Stay Connected's 20 Service Connectors during the first months of our program, and helped Stay Connected supply evacuee families with food, clothing, gasoline and other urgent items as well as continuing case management services.

"Thanks to everyone who has provided time, funding and other support, Stay Connected has been able to make a real difference in these people's lives. And we aren't finished yet."

Help us ring the bell!

We've helped hundreds of evacuees find work—help us finish the job!

Every time one of our program participants gets a job, we celebrate by ringing the bell in our Stay Connected office.

One of the primary goals of Stay Connected staff has been linking evacuees to permanent employment. And we've rung that bell often over the past few months – Stay Connected has helped more than 900 people find permanent employment.

But we are still assisting more than 500 people seeking full-time work. We are deeply grateful for a significant grant in support of our



Bringing N'awlins to Texas. Neighborhood Centers Inc. Service Connectors and their clients hosted a fun-filled Mardi Gras Day with the senior program at Ripley House. More than 70 people enjoyed New Orleans-style red beans and rice, learned the history of Mardi Gras from a member of the Zulu Krewe and danced the traditional "second line." Here, Alice Moreno celebrates in style.

work from the Hurricane Katrina Relief Campaign, a fund of the McCormick Tribune Foundation. This generous grant will allow us to provide additional job training and other employment services to Katrina evacuees.

Stay Connected helping families relocate

For more than 8,000 evacuee families, July 31 will be a difficult day.

That's the cutoff date for housing assistance from the federal government. Beginning Aug. 1, families relying on FEMA funds to rent apartments or houses will have to find alternative sources of funding.

The Stay Connected program at Neighborhood Centers Inc. is committed to helping as many as possible of the estimated 2,500-3,000 families who have not yet accumulated sufficient resources to be able to pay for rent and utilities.

In preparation for Aug. 1, we have identified apartment complexes that are willing to work with evacuee families; and, we are sharing information and resources to make it possible for families to connect with affordable housing.

Many of our clients have experience in hospitality, clerical work, data entry, medical assistance, retail and general labor. Can you help "ring the bell" by offering one of our participants a job or passing along a lead? For more information or to tell us about an available position, please call Katie Gomez, Stay Connected Reintegration Counselor, at 713-547-8223.



Tricia Thomas is one of many evacuees now contributing to her new hometown. She works as a teacher in the Houston Independent School District.



Katie Gomez, Reintegration Counselor, celebrates by ringing the bell whenever a client is hired for full-time employment.



Brandy Sawyers from New Orleans, now working full time at Walgreens, benefited from Stay Connected's efforts to find permanent jobs for Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

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 nearly 100 years since, we have evolved into a network of 59 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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Day camp helps provide healing for evacuee children

Thanks to a generous grant from the Greater Houston Community Foundation, Stay Connected enrolled more than 20 children from evacuee families in Neighborhood Centers Inc.'s Passport to Summer Fun program.

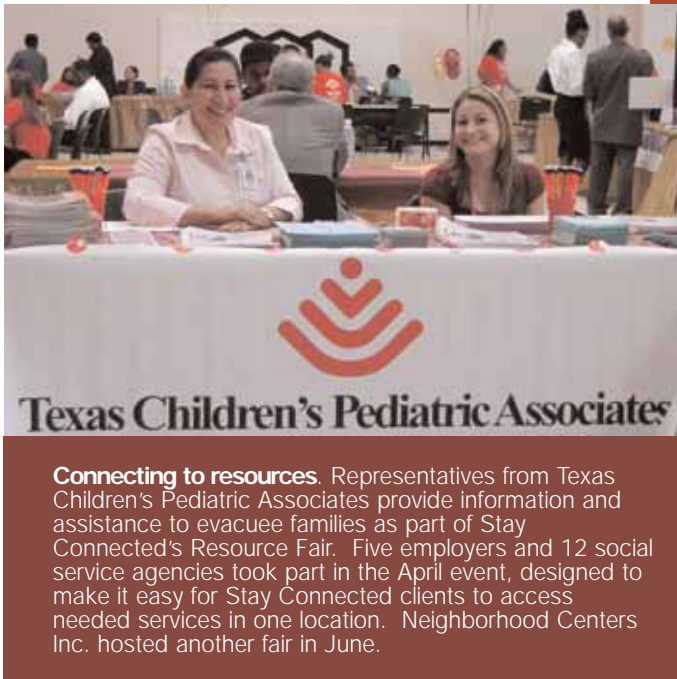
The program benefits evacuee families in two ways – the camp gives the children a place to go during the day so their parents can work; and the youngsters will receive assistance in coping with their feelings in the aftermath of the hurricane.

For example, Katrina Counseling is providing mental health assessments and services for the children and their families. And the children are participating in "The Rainbow Days Kid's Connection" curriculum, which has been specially adapted to help Katrina evacuees understand and

deal with the feelings that result from being uprooted from home.

Stay Connected staff – evacuees themselves – are providing cultural activities that give the children a taste of home and allow them to share their backgrounds with classmates from New Orleans and Houston. Planned activities include storytelling, home-style foods and music.

Passport to Summer Fun is also working with local safety agencies to teach participants how to prepare for emergencies.



Connecting to resources. Representatives from Texas Children's Pediatric Associates provide information and assistance to evacuee families as part of Stay Connected's Resource Fair. Five employers and 12 social service agencies took part in the April event, designed to make it easy for Stay Connected clients to access needed services in one location. Neighborhood Centers Inc. hosted another fair in June.

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, call Stay Connected Program Director Dave Detcher at 713-547-8213.

Be prepared for hurricane season

What to do now

- Protect your windows.
- Permanent shutters are the best protection. A lower-cost approach is to put up plywood panels. Use 1/2 inch plywood - marine plywood is best - cut to fit each window. Remember to mark which board fits which window.
- Pre-drill holes every 18 inches for screws. Do this long before the storm.
- Trim back dead or weak branches from trees.
- Check into flood insurance (there may be a waiting period).
- Homeowners policies do not cover damage from the flooding that accompanies a hurricane. Call your insurance agent for more details.
- Develop an emergency communication plan.
- Have a plan in case family members are separated from one another during a disaster.
- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address and phone number of the contact person.

What to do during a hurricane watch

A hurricane watch is issued when there is a threat of hurricane conditions within 24-36 hours.

- Check emergency supplies.
- Fuel car.
- Bring in outdoor objects and anchor objects that cannot be brought inside.
- Secure buildings by closing and boarding up windows. Remove outside antennas.
- Turn refrigerator and freezer to coldest settings. Open only when absolutely necessary and close quickly.
- Store drinking water in clean bathtubs, jugs, bottles and cooking utensils.
- Store valuables and personal papers in a waterproof container on the highest level of your home.
- Review evacuation plan.

What to do during a hurricane warning

A hurricane warning is issued when hurricane conditions (winds of 74 miles per hour or greater or dangerously high water and rough seas) are expected in 24 hours or less.

- Listen to the radio or television for official instructions.
- If in a mobile home, check tie downs and evacuate immediately.
- If at home, stay inside, away from windows, skylights and glass doors.
- Keep a supply of flashlights and extra batteries handy. Avoid open flames, such as candles and kerosene lamps, as a source of light.

What to do if you have to evacuate

- Leave as soon as possible. Avoid flooded roads and watch for washed-out bridges.
- Secure your home by unplugging appliances and turning off electricity and the main water valve.
- Tell someone outside of the storm area where you are going.
- If time permits, elevate furniture to protect it from flooding.
- Take pre-assembled emergency supplies, warm protective clothing, blankets and sleeping bags to shelter.
- Lock up home and leave.