

# TriAngle

Promoting Self Determination, Independence, Productivity, Integration, and Inclusion of People with Disabilities

Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2006

## Katrina: Lessons Learned

Katrina was a disaster like nothing this country has ever experienced. Almost 1100 Louisiana citizens died, 2000 more are still unaccounted for, and 3,000 people who were separated from their families during the evacuation have not yet been reunited. A minimum of 1300 people with disabilities were institutionalized after Katrina. Then Rita came and kicked us when we were down.

People with disabilities were disproportionately affected by both hurricanes. The systems that worked for the general population most often ignored the needs of people with disabilities and the systems that failed the general population were a disgrace to people with disabilities. There were rays of light in the darkness that will be described throughout this issue, but on the whole, when it came to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in this disaster and its aftermath, many systems failed miserably at many levels. In an effort to learn from our mistakes so history will not be repeated, lives can be saved and people with disabilities can be treated with dignity and respect in future disasters, the TriAngle offers the following recommendations:

### **Include disability experts in emergency preparedness planning**

Louisiana had an emergency preparedness plan for a fake hurricane named Pam, but neither state disability agency personnel nor advocates were involved in this planning. FEMA, the Red Cross, city and state officials, and first responders will be much better prepared if, in the future, they reserve a seat at the planning table for the experts who know disability issues.

### **Provide disability training to all personnel involved in emergency response and relief efforts**

Basic training on disability issues, e.g. sensitivity training, accessibility, identifying and interacting with people with disabilities - for all people involved in emergency response and relief efforts is a must. The Red Cross created unnecessary hardships for people with disabilities because its personnel was totally oblivious to their needs.

### **Use an automated phone system to inform people of mandatory evacuations with special assistance for people with disabilities**

Our Governor has said the next time there is a mandatory evacuation, she will use an automated phone system to notify citizens. The TriAngle suggests that an automated message should also inform people to call a certain number if they have a disability and need assistance evacuating.

The media also needs to publicize this special accommodation using sign language interpreters.

### **When evacuating people, DO NOT separate families**

On 12/7/05 there were still 10,000 people who had not been reunited with their families after having been separated during the evacuation. This is one of the tragedies of Katrina; so

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# Katrina Affected TriAngle Publishers

## *Advocacy Center*

Hurricane Katrina was hard on the New Orleans staff of the Advocacy Center. Sixteen staff members incurred significant damage to their homes and belongings, with about half of those having lost everything. Eight employees never made it back to work, mainly because they had no place to live in Louisiana. One could not continue to work because of increased personal responsibilities; and, of course, our beloved Virginia Peyton died in Touro Hospital because there was no power to drive the machine that was keeping her alive.

Everything else pales compared with Virginia's death, but virtually every New Orleans staff member experienced some damage to property and, of course, all had to evacuate the city and live elsewhere for the better part of at least two months.

Our New Orleans office at 225 Baronne Street has not reopened and we are currently borrowing space from New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation and the Albert, Garaudy and Associates, Inc. Engineering Firm. We are searching for new space in which to house the twenty-eight people who work out of New Orleans and hope we will have our own space by the end of March. In spite of these tragedies and inconveniences, all AC staff have done a marvelous job at soldiering on. We want the disability community to know we're here and very much open for business!

## *Human Development Center*

Prior to hurricane Katrina, the Human Development Center employed 37 individuals. All but six of our employees experienced either the total loss of their homes or damage significant enough to force them to relocate from their homes. Miraculously, none of our families lost an immediate member of their family to Katrina. However, several of our folks had relatives who perished in, or subsequent to, Katrina. At the time of this writing, approximately ten of our displaced employees have either returned to their home, or found alternate housing, in Greater New Orleans.

As a result of hurricane Katrina, HDC lost about 40% of its pre-Katrina workforce, at least temporarily. Also complicating our efforts is the fact that all three HDC buildings and their contents were completely lost to Katrina. As a result, all personal and agency libraries and resources were destroyed along with decades of training and resource materials developed by our dedicated faculty and staff. In addition, data from ongoing projects, business office, grant applications and reports, contracts and fiscal agreements,

and personnel files were destroyed. Finally, the computers, printers, projectors, training materials, supplies, even the chairs, desks, and phones that HDC faculty and staff use on a daily basis were lost to us.

Despite personal losses and destruction of our physical work space and materials, faculty and staff of HDC continue to be productive making significant contributions in the wake of Katrina in a number of areas including, but not limited to: housing, employment and education of persons with disabilities, as well as preparation and technical assistance to personnel who support persons with disabilities and their families.

HDC has established temporary office space in a building graciously "loaned" to us by Tangipahoa Parish School district. We look forward to moving into permanent office space in New Orleans on the LSU Health Sciences Center campus near University Hospital later this winter. The kind words and well-wishes of many of the people we have had the honor of working with and/or serving over the years are very much appreciated.

## *Developmental Disabilities Council*

Katrina significantly impacted more than one-third of the Developmental Disabilities Council. Ten members of the Council had their lives turned upside down as a result of this powerful natural disaster. Many of these individuals and their families were forced to leave their homes in the New Orleans and surrounding areas and go to other cities and towns while waiting to return to assess the damage. Some of these Council members returned to find their homes totally destroyed, while others suffered less, but still significant damage. Some Council members were fortunate to continue working as soon as their places of business found temporary or new places to set up shop. Yet others have had to struggle with the loss of employment in addition to adjusting to new houses, new schools and services for their children, or new services for themselves. Fortunately, a few were able to return to their original homes or to temporary housing in their home city or town, while others have moved away from Katrina-ravaged areas permanently. The Council will especially miss one of its members, Monique Butler, who has permanently relocated to Union City, Georgia.

## DD Council Answers the Call

In the days after Katrina, it was immediately evident that the Council would not be returning to business as usual for some time to come. The Council responded to the overwhelming need for immediate and long term assistance to people with disabilities affected by the hurricane in a variety of ways. Council staff and members immediately began visiting special needs, Red Cross, and independent shelters to find people with disabilities and help them connect to the services that they needed. We took everything from diapers, to Ensure, to clothing, to information; giving them to as many people as we could find that needed them. And while these were necessities that were very much appreciated, the most important thing the Council brought to people with disabilities in these shelters was advocacy. We assisted people in registering for FEMA, found them transportation to another city, worked with the shelter personnel to get their special needs met or moved them to another shelter where their needs would be met, helped them locate family members, etc.

The Council expanded our outreach through the internet by developing a website, [www.katrina-la.net](http://www.katrina-la.net), and linked it to our website and those for LaCAN, Families Helping Families, and the Arc of Louisiana. All resources available to those affected by the hurricane were posted there, as well as volunteer opportunities and a process for people to make financial donations to directly assist people with disabilities and their families. People from across the country posted ads to open their homes free of charge to those who had nowhere else to go. An online submission form was established that enabled hurricane victims to electronically submit requests for housing, clothing, food, financial or other assistance directly to the DD Council office. Over 350 requests were received and processed.

Funds were needed to meet the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to help them with their immediate needs and to begin to rebuild their lives. The Council responded by reallocating \$50,000 from other planned projects to provide direct assistance to people with developmental disabilities and their families affected by Katrina. (Those impacted by Rita were later added to the eligibility criteria.) DD Councils from around the country also

responded to our need by donating over \$100,000 in funds. Families applied for this assistance through the Families Helping Families (FHF) in their region and each family's need was evaluated on an individual basis. Funds were provided for expenses such as rent, rental deposits, furniture, clothing, transportation, and utility bills. The Council also wrote and received a \$5000 grant to assist individuals whose disability does not meet the DD definition. These funds, and those donated through the Katrina website, are allowing us to assist all people with disabilities and their families, not only those with *developmental* disabilities.

In partnership with the FHF Centers across the state, the Council staff went above and beyond to answer the call of those in need – from unloading 18 wheelers of equipment, to driving pick-up trucks of supplies to remote shelters, to driving a kid to school at 6:30 a.m. every day for 2 months to ensure he would attend.



But as important as the individual assistance and advocacy were, throughout the aftermath of Katrina and Rita the Council remembered its role as a systems change advocate. In partnership with our sister agencies, the Advocacy Center and the Human Development Center, we tackled the systemic issues as well, such as lack of accessible FEMA housing, access to services for people temporarily living in other states, ADA violations in shelters, etc. As noted in the cover story, there are many things to be learned from these hurricanes and the Council will continue to advocate in order to ensure that ALL systems are better prepared to respond to the needs of people with disabilities in the next disaster.

Our state has changed dramatically in many ways – fiscally, geographically, politically, and in the way we think. The Council will decide in April when we develop our new Five Year Plan what priorities will best meet the new challenges resulting from Katrina and Rita.

## Update on HDC Work Since Hurricane Katrina

In the days and weeks following Katrina HDC faculty and staff lucky enough to find a place to live in the greater New Orleans, North Shore, or Baton Rouge area began assisting others less fortunate than themselves by working formally and informally in venues across the state. Some of our people simply assisted acquaintances and strangers alike, by providing help and comfort in any fashion they could. Others gave their time to organized efforts by volunteering in shelters across the state. A great deal of time and effort went into communicating with and providing information to others within and across the DD Network within and outside Louisiana. HDC faculty contributed to no fewer than four grant applications seeking funds to locate, support and bring home our citizens with disabilities. With no office, equipment, or supplies and only intermittent communication, the first order of business was simply to find everyone. By mid-September, we had accounted for all of our faculty and staff. Next, to function as a coordinated unit we had to find a location to “set up shop” on a temporary basis, since our buildings and contents were completely destroyed by the hurricane. We managed to secure a small space graciously offered by Tangipahoa Parish Schools in Hammond and a cubicle at Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge.

Since October our faculty and staff have fulfilled all commitments to our existing grants/contracts and unfunded initiatives, and in some cases, expand our efforts. For example, HDC continues to operate in partnership with other members of the Louisiana Aging and Disability network to advocate for more affordable and accessible *community* housing options for persons with disabilities by, among other

things, proposing the formation of a “housing registry”. To this end, HDC provided training on “Person-Centered Support Coordination” to more than 200 Support Coordinators (formerly, Case Manager)



Temporary Location:  
L5007 SAHP  
Pennington Center  
2323 Kenilworth Parkway  
Baton Rouge, LA 70808  
985-310-3130  
[www.hdc.lsuhscc.edu](http://www.hdc.lsuhscc.edu)

across the state via compressed video during December and January. In November, HDC partnered with the Arc of Louisiana to bring Dr. David Pitonyak to the state to deliver a series of workshops on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We are now partnering with the OCDD Resource Center on Community Support to conduct workshops on PTSD all across the state. HDC continues to work with our partners in the Aging and Disability network and the Vocational and Community College system to provide formal post-secondary education leading to career ladder opportunities for Direct Support Professionals. We also are awaiting word on approval of funding to establish a Master in Health Sciences program at the School of Allied Health Professions leading to national Behavior Analyst Certification.

Two additional areas that will require attention in the post-Katrina and Rita era are employment of persons with disabilities and disability services/pupil appraisal in school districts ravaged by hurricanes. In the former case, HDC is close to achieving an agreement with Louisiana Rehabilitation Services to provide Supported Employment vendor Quality Assurance and Technical Assistance. In the latter case, we are working closely with our partners at the Louisiana Department of Education to identify ways that HDC can assist with the rebirth of schools in Orleans and other parishes impacted by the hurricanes.

Like so many of you, our organization and the people who make us what we are, sustained unthinkable damage from the hurricanes. Also, like our fellow Louisianians, HDC is well on its way to recovery and will emerge stronger, more effective, and better than ever before! From our family to yours, we wish you strength, courage, and peace in 2006.

## Advocacy Center's Role in Hurricane Relief

Even while Hurricane Katrina was still raging toward land, Advocacy Center (AC) staff in Baton Rouge, Lafayette and Shreveport were preparing to spring into action the minute the first evacuees arrived at shelters in those areas. Since that time, the Advocacy Center has been involved in a number of initiatives related to Katrina and Rita relief:

**Outreach to Shelters:** AC staff and volunteers visited all major shelters that were opened in Louisiana after the hurricanes. Staff assisted persons with disabilities with short-term needs and gave out our toll-free number so that people would know how to contact us for future needs. We also assessed the shelters as to their compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and reported deficiencies to the Red Cross and others.

### Outreach to Disaster Recovery

**Centers:** All DRCs in the state were visited by AC staff who: (1) assessed them for compliance with the ADA and (2) left materials developed by AC and others on issues of importance for persons with disabilities post Katrina and Rita. Again, DRCs that were not in compliance with ADA standards were notified and follow-up visits will be made.

**Development of Written Information:** AC prepared a packet of information on issues such as FEMA, other benefits, housing, and transportation for victims of the hurricanes.

**Development of a "Katrina Unit":** The Katrina Unit provides specific information to persons with disabilities and seniors about how to pursue disaster relief and provides information, referral, and short-term assistance on all other Katrina-related issues.

**General Outreach:** We have initiated a wide-scale outreach campaign designed to get information about our toll-free number and services to as broad an audience as possible.

**Systems Advocacy:** We have attended weekly meet-

ings with HUD, FEMA and state officials and routinely present issues of importance to persons with disabilities and seniors at these meetings. It was largely through contacts made at these meetings that we were able to convince FEMA to purchase and distribute accessible trailers for persons with mobility impairments. We are also working on other systemic issues such as the need for accessible transportation for people displaced by the storms; the need for community placements by people who were put in restrictive environments after the storms hit; the need to provide affordable and accessible housing in the face of wide-scale evictions that are currently occurring; and other issues as they arise.

**Public Policy:** We have prepared a report on the needs of persons with disabilities both pre and post major hurricanes. This report will be part of a larger



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report being presented to the Mayor of New Orleans by the "From the Lake to the River" Foundation. We will continue to "be at the table" as plans are made for the recovery of the gulf coast of Louisiana.

**Development of a Katrina Fund for Persons with Disabilities:** Thus far, AC has raised more than \$20,000 to assist persons with disabilities. The purpose of the fund is to assist people in ways that will help them to live more independently in the community.

### New Staff

Since the last issue of the TriAngle, several new staff have begun work at AC. These include Heidi LeBleu and Debbie McCullough, Long Term Care Ombudsman in BR; Amanda Baker, Community Living Ombudsman in Shreveport; Carol Wright, Clerical/Support in BR; and Emily Trammel, Executive Assistant in NO.

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many families were ordered onto separate buses, having no idea where they were going, and they remain separated today.

**Make provider evacuation plans comprehensive and detailed**

Providers and support coordinators need to be responsible for making sure the people they serve are evacuated safely. State and local governments should assist small providers in evacuating the people they serve. Every individual served and staff person must be able to stay in contact with their provider organization throughout the evacuation process. (More on provider evacuation plans on page 14.)

**Eliminate bureaucracy**

This is directed to every system because we saw it everywhere and people suffered and died because of it. One of our politicians from the New Orleans area said “Katrina didn’t kill us but the bureaucracy was going to finish the job.” Everything possible must be done to establish a clear chain of command, and to eliminate any rule that stands in the way of saving lives and eliminating suffering.

**Only use accessible buildings as shelters**

This wasn’t possible in Louisiana because nearly every empty building was needed as a shelter. What was possible and wasn’t done was accessibility assessments and modifications to buildings to be used as shelters before the hurricane hit. Again, the Red Cross was oblivious to the needs of people with disabilities and when advocates brought those needs to their attention they were often reluctant to make accommodations. Plan now what buildings in your communities will be used as shelters, see what modifications are needed,

like temporary ramps, grab bars, etc. We observed plenty of ADA violations including no accessible showers, no sign language interpreters, and a medical clinic on the second floor with no working elevator. If interpreters are not available in your area, equipment can be brought in to provide remote access to interpreter services.

**Register everyone when they enter a Red Cross or Pop-Up shelter using a standardized form that identifies people with disabilities**

A standardized form, developed in advance, will allow people to self identify any physical or mental disability or health condition when checking into a shelter. Also, if shelter personnel have been trained to identify disabilities, they will be able to recognize that a person has a disability, enter that information into a database, and make referrals to appropriate agencies for assistance (OCDD, OMH, Aging, etc.)

**Assign at least one permanent Red Cross position in each shelter to address the needs of people with disabilities in that shelter**

Large shelters are overwhelming for everyone; for people with disabilities, this is multiplied ten times. Having a person (or several, depending on the size of the shelter,) whose job it is to specifically address the needs of people with disabilities is extremely important. Simple things like moving an elderly man who uses a cane from one end of the arena to the other so he will not have to walk as far to the showers or putting up a tent for someone who needs his or her diaper changed can make all the difference in the world. Also ensure that accessible transportation is available from the shelters to the community.

**Secure agreement between Red Cross and disability organizations now to gain immediate access to shelters after the disaster**

Many shelters welcomed staff from disability organizations; others refused entry. This posed a real problem since the shelters were not addressing the needs of their residents and they weren’t allowing disability advocates in to assist. By going up the Red Cross ladder advocates eventually gained access, but lost precious days in the process.

**Organize and train State Disability Shelter Teams in advance so they can deploy immediately**

Disability advocacy organizations went into the shelters immediately; the state agency teams followed three weeks later. By then, some of the people had already left and almost all of them had already been interviewed so they were answering the same questions again and again.

**Establish a central database with compatibility for sharing information and a means of tracking where people go when they leave**

With information sharing, questions that are asked by varying agencies won’t have to be asked more than once. Shelters did not collect a forwarding address when residents left the shelter. This information needs to be collected and entered into the database. On 12/1/05 the state was still trying to locate about 30% of its home and community based waiver recipients.

**Don’t separate families through the use of Special Needs Shelters**

Special needs shelters (SNS) only allowed one person to stay with the person needing care, thereby splitting up families. People often didn’t know where their other family mem-

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bers were going, they didn't have transportation to go from one shelter to another to visit, and they often weren't even in the same city. This is inexcusable. Either spread the staff that was in the SNS to all of the shelters and eliminate the SNS altogether or allow the whole extended family to stay together in the SNS.

**Shelters and other temporary housing should be equipped to support people with significant disabilities in order to avoid unnecessary institutionalization**

We know of at least 1300 persons with mental retardation who have been admitted to nursing homes in 5 southern states since Katrina hit. There are certainly more in other states across the country and probably hundreds with disabilities other than mental retardation. This could have been prevented if Louisiana had a better home and community based support system in place and if we had done better planning with the system we do have. (More on this issue on page 13.)

**Distribute resource information at shelters and Disaster Recovery Centers**

Develop a list of disability organizations and phone numbers for distribution to people with disabilities. Since 800 numbers didn't work in South Louisiana, it is important to create regional lists and include local numbers.

**Have FEMA and Red Cross personnel on site to take applications**

This is important not only because the 800 numbers didn't work, but to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to apply and gets assistance with the process if needed. The large shelters were overwhelming for everyone and not being able to get through on the 800 numbers was an extremely frustrating experience.

For people with disabilities, it was that much more difficult. Not only are personnel needed on site, but people with disabilities should be allowed to go to the front of the line.

**Develop a checklist for evacuees**

A checklist and someone to help guide evacuees through all they needed to do (change their address, file an insurance claim, apply for FEMA, etc.) would have been very helpful.

**Use accessible buildings for FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers (DRC) and make accommodations for persons with sensory impairments**

The DRC are set up for people who are not staying in shelters and we found that many of these were not in accessible buildings and also didn't have accommodations for people with sensory impairments.

**Write Emergency Disaster Rules in advance re: services, funding, providers, relaxing requirements, etc.**

Under the circumstances, it has been very difficult for families, providers and support coordinators to follow the state's rules regarding disability services. Emergency disaster rules must waive some of the regulations under which personnel normally operate.

**All FEMA trailers manufactured in the future should be of universal design**

FEMA lets states set the priority for housing – who gets the trailers first. Our state put people with disabilities in the first priority group, but when the first FEMA trailer community in Louisiana opened in Baton Rouge six weeks after Katrina with six hundred trailers, not one of them was accessible. So it didn't matter that people with disabilities were in the first priority group – they couldn't

get into the trailers. What we have found is that people with disabilities were actually some of the last ones to leave shelters across the state - not only due to the lack of physical accessibility, but also because they were the least vocal about expressing their needs. So much for our priority system...

**Develop a registry of vacant government subsidized housing in the State**

HUD issued emergency housing vouchers to people who were in government subsidized housing prior to Katrina, but it has been very difficult for these people to find vacant housing. The Louisiana Housing Finance Agency should be required to maintain a database of *vacant* government subsidized housing.

**PLAN how you will COORDINATE the relief efforts of disability organizations**

No one could have predicted the magnitude of what we are experiencing, but as disability organizations, both public and private, we were not prepared. Just something like receiving, storing and distributing donated items can get very complicated. When numerous organizations are receiving donated equipment – you need to find warehouse space to store it, a process to match a person with the equipment they need, and transportation or funds to ship it to the person who needs it. The equipment is just one example of where we didn't have a coordinated effort. Plan ahead that one agency will keep a database of all donated equipment and supplies. Locate sites around the state that could be used to store equipment at no charge. Make sure that some funds are set aside to transport equipment or get Fed Ex or UPS to donate this ser-

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## Resources

**Did you know you can get  
TriAngle on-line?**

**To sign up for the  
on-line version, go to  
<http://www.ladir.org/news/>**

**Information for people with disabilities and their families who have been affected by Hurricane Katrina.**

<http://www.katrina-la.net/>

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/katrina/>

**Louisiana Assistive Technology Access Network (LATAN)  
Hurricane Katrina Equipment Distribution Program**

<http://www.latan.org>

**Disaster Resources for People with Disabilities & Emergency Managers**

<http://www.jik.com/disaster.html>

**Katrina Disaster Relief Information for People with Disabilities**

<http://katrinadisability.info/>

## The Nation Responds

During the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, many DD Councils, Protection and Advocacy Systems personnel, other organizations, and private citizens across the nation came to the aid of Louisiana's citizens with disabilities with a range of donations. Over \$113,000 has been donated from the DD Councils in the states of Arizona, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, Vermont, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. These funds are being used to directly assist persons with developmental disabilities and their families who were affected by the hurricanes. The Louisiana Council made an additional \$50,000 available to assist those affected by the hurricanes. Private citizens and corporations have also donated an additional \$17,000 that is being used to assist individuals whose disability doesn't meet the DD definition. Persons with disabilities affected by the hurricanes in need of assistance can apply at their local Families Helping Families Resource Center.

The Advocacy Center has also raised approximately \$20,000 to assist persons with disabilities. The purpose of these funds is to assist people in ways that will help them to live more independently in the community. To apply for these funds, contact Susan Howard at (800) 960-7705.

There have also been many donations of needed supplies such as food, water, clothing, and medical equipment, to name a few. A truckload of supplies was delivered to the Arc – Baton Rouge by two parent members of the Delaware Down Syndrome Association. A medical supply company in Georgia sent a large trailer load of medical equipment and supplies via a couple who volunteered their rig, their time, and travel expenses to get to Baton Rouge and home again. A family in Ohio sent packages of the most needed supplies every week for two months. These are only a few examples of the many donations that Louisiana has received from other states.

People across the country also opened their hearts to our Louisiana citizens, taking strangers into their homes to give them beds to sleep in and food to eat. Others offered their rental property to evacuees rent free for several months and offered to help them find jobs and reestablish themselves in these other states. There were even offers from people who were willing to donate homes to families. These compassionate people were not offering rent free housing but giving these homes to families in need.

The TriAngle would like to express our sincere gratitude for the innumerable donations and acts of kindness bestowed upon our state and its citizens with disabilities who were hurt the most by these disasters. Your thoughtfulness and generosity will not be forgotten.

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vice. Also figure out what you will do with donated funds - the process you will use to get the money into the hands of people with disabilities quickly. Do this now so you won't waste precious time developing policies and procedures when people are in desperate need. Also plan how

you will use volunteers. People will show up wanting to volunteer and you need things for them to do.

Louisiana will hopefully never face another disaster as horrific as Katrina. But in any future disasters, large or small, the lessons learned

from Katrina will make our state better prepared to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

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## Support Coordination Program to Begin Soon

The Advocacy Center is excited to begin a new program offering support coordination (case management) services to people with disabilities affected by Hurricane Katrina throughout the state. This is a 22 month grant, projected to end in October 2007. It is part of a larger, multi-state effort involving many different agencies to help people navigate the service delivery system and available resources. These organizations will work in tandem with the Advocacy Center, accepting referrals for complex cases involving individuals with disabilities and referring cases without a disability component to other organizations. "Navigating the system of government and private recovery support can be overwhelming and survivors of this disaster often don't know their rights or whom to trust," said Warren Harity, interim executive director, Katrina Aid Today. "Katrina Aid Today's trained staff and volunteers will reach out to people and families to connect them with the resources they need to recover from this tragic disruption of their lives."

This project will be implemented in several steps. First, the Advocacy Center will begin contracting with case managers and training these case managers on the project. This training will be provided by both the Advocacy Center and Human Development Center. Second, individuals with disabilities and their families will be identified and told how to contact the Advocacy Center; the Advocacy Center will also begin accepting referrals from the partner organizations. Third, the Advocacy Center's specialty trained case managers will help people with disabilities identify sources of support, acquire access to services and take appropriate action to rebuild their lives through the development and implementation of individual recovery plans. Individual recovery plans will be developed through discussion of all available options and resources with clients. Clients will then decide on desired outcomes and case managers will help them through each step to achieve these goals. As part of this implementation of individual recovery plans, case managers will make referrals to other resources and service delivery systems. Clients who need legal assistance will be referred to the Advocacy Center's legal division. The Advocacy Center's systems advocacy group will address systemic barriers to successful recovery.

The Advocacy Center is currently recruiting case managers and partner organizations. The estimated date to begin providing case management services is February 1, 2006.

If you are interested in finding out more about this project, please contact Stephanie Patrick at 800-960-7705 ext 27 or email [Spatrick@advocacyla.org](mailto:Spatrick@advocacyla.org).

This grant is sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and US Department of Homeland Security through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).



## Quarterly Events Calendar

**April 20-20 DD Council Quarterly Meeting**  
Baton Rouge – Holiday Inn Select  
Call 800-450-8108 for more information.

**Families Helping Families Resource Centers in each region of the state sponsor local and regional workshops on issues such as education, transition, advocacy, community supports and other topics of interest to people with disabilities and their families. For information on workshops in your area, contact your local Families Helping Families. Contact information on the each center can be found at <http://www.fhfla.org/> or by calling 1-800-922-DIAL or 1-800-450-8108.**

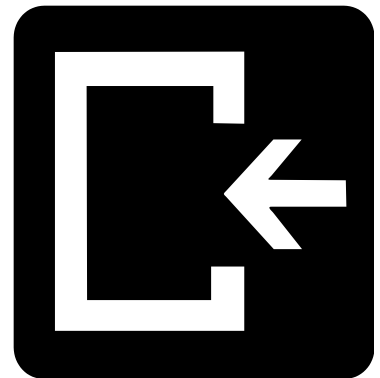
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The Advocacy Center, the Human Development Center and the DD Council will jointly host two public forums to gather input for each of the three agencies' planning processes. The public forums are scheduled for **Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>** at the St. Tammany Parish Library, 310 W. 21<sup>st</sup> Ave. in Covington and **Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>** at the Calcasieu Parish Library, 301 West Claude St. in Lake Charles. Both forums will be held from 11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. and a light lunch will be provided.

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### *Keep In Touch*

**With all the recent events, please don't forget to inform the TriAngle if your mailing address has changed. Email [advocacycenter@advocacyla.org](mailto:advocacycenter@advocacyla.org) or call the DD Council at (800)450-8108. Thanks!!!**



# Accessible FEMA Trailers: Enforcing the ADA

It was apparent after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that the largest need for people effected by the storms, and possibly the most difficult to fill, would be housing. Emergency, temporary and permanent housing solutions would all be extremely important to many people who lived in south Louisiana. However, since accessible and affordable housing stock was difficult to come by prior to the storm, it became nearly impossible after the storm.

The Developmental Disabilities partners recognized housing as a major issue immediately and called together a group of advocates to work on the housing problem. In addition, Advocacy Center staff made appropriate contacts with FEMA and began attending housing meetings that were held every evening at the FEMA field office. At these meetings Advocacy Center staff raised the issue of the need for accessible housing over and over and kept the issue on the front burner. However, not even that was good enough when FEMA opened the first group trailer site in Baker, Louisiana. After many assurances of available accessible units by FEMA, not one trailer placed at the Groom Road site was accessible for a person with a mobility impairment.

In October of 2005, approximately six weeks after Hurricane Katrina, people began leaving shelters, specifically the shelter at the River Center in Baton Rouge, and moving to the trailer site at Groom Road. Left behind were people with mobility impairments. Finally, when only people with disabilities were left at the River Center shelter, they were told that they would have to be moved to yet another shelter. The Advocacy Center sent a letter to FEMA and to the Governor's office demanding that people be provided proper accessible housing, as is their right under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The DD Council also advocated for these individuals, especially by using the media. The day after

the letter was sent, it was announced that a small section of the River Center would remain open indefinitely so that people there would not have to be moved until proper housing became available. Approximately one week later, the families left at the River Center were provided with wheelchair accessible mobile homes in Baton Rouge at an already existing mobile home park. In addition, the Advocacy Center was given assurance that 20% of the next group trailer site would be wheelchair accessible, and that the common areas would also be accessible.

The next group trailer site developed in the Baton Rouge area, opened in November 2005, had 35 "accessible" trailers; however, a complaint from a person living in one of the trailers prompted a closer look. The accessible trailers provided by FEMA did not have reachable kitchen cabinets, the thermostat was too high and the handrails to the ramp were not built properly. In addition, the laundry facilities, the administration building and the maintenance building for the site were not wheelchair accessible. The Advocacy Center has made FEMA aware of the problems and is waiting for a reply.

The Advocacy Center is also assisting a number of individuals with disabilities in other areas who have not been provided with any form of accessible temporary housing, or who have been given trailers or mobile homes that do not have the accessibility features they need.

The Advocacy Center is considering available options. However, we are very interested in continuing to work to make sure that people displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are provided accessible housing through FEMA. If you need a wheelchair accessible trailer from FEMA and do not have one, or need other accessibility features to accommodate a disability, please contact us at 1-800-960-7705.





## Laws & Policies

# LaCAN's Post-Katrina Agenda Calls for Reform

In Governor Blanco's speech opening the special legislative session, she said she wanted a state that is stronger, safer and better than before, focused on rebuilding, recovery and reform. LaCAN couldn't agree more – especially with reform. Louisiana is long overdue for reform of the long term care system if it will ever be able to address the needs of the 13,789 people on the New Opportunities Waiver (NOW) waiting list. In the past 6 years, only 491 new NOW slots have been added – inadequate to say the least!

Louisiana was never going to have enough "new" revenue to address this waiting list pre-Katrina. Now with the serious loss of revenue the state is experiencing in the aftermath of the hurricanes resulting in huge budget problems, there **must** be a shift in resources to meet demand.

In this post-hurricane fiscal environment, the state can no longer justify funding nine developmental centers. Reform was needed prior to Katrina. It is now imperative - not only to improve the system's ability to serve those who are waiting, but also to minimize the impact of budget cuts on individuals already receiving services. Many fear that consolidating and closing some developmental centers will eliminate choice for people, but that is simply not the case. Residents of developmental centers selected for closure would be given the choice to live in their own homes with appropriate waiver supports, move into a community home or transfer to another developmental center. Money saved from the closures could then be used to serve the thousands of individuals on the waiting list who now must wait over ten years for needed supports.

Our world is a very different place than it was before Katrina and Rita hit several months ago, so we must ask ourselves how LaCAN fits into a post-hurricane Louisiana. LaCAN's mission hasn't changed, LaCAN's values haven't changed, and the needs of people with disabilities certainly haven't changed, except in those cases where they have actually increased due to the hurricanes. What does need to change is how we get the administration and legislature to hear our message when there are so many voices expressing so many needs. Increased membership in LaCAN is vital to having our message heard. Please join us to deliver the message to REFORM our long term care system that is institutionally biased, very costly and ineffective in meeting the needs of the overwhelming majority of people with disabilities in our state. If you think it is patently unfair and wrong for the state to maintain a waiting list of almost 14,000 people while it maintains nine developmental centers for 1500 people, join LaCAN and participate in its advocacy efforts. There are no membership fees or dues.

You can read about LaCAN's mission and values and join LaCAN at [www.lacanadvocates.org](http://www.lacanadvocates.org).

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## Public Input Sought

In April 2006, the DD Council will write a new Five-Year Plan. Anyone interested in commenting on what should be included in the Plan is invited to complete an online survey on the Council's website, [www.laddc.org](http://www.laddc.org). The website also includes a link to the Council's current Five-Year Plan.

The Council will also be accepting one-page concept proposals from any interested individual or organization briefly describing an activity they would like to see included in the plan, how it would benefit persons with developmental disabilities and an approximate cost of the activity. Concept proposals can be emailed to Kandi Smith at [kssmith@dhh.la.gov](mailto:kssmith@dhh.la.gov) or faxed to 225-342-1970 before March 15, 2006.

# Post-Hurricane Institutionalization

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita had a drastic effect on Louisianians, but people with disabilities who had chosen to live independently in their own homes felt an even greater effect. Not only did many people with disabilities living in South Louisiana lose their homes, they also found that Louisiana was not equipped to provide necessary and appropriate housing, temporary or permanent, for many people with disabilities. As a result, many people ended up in nursing homes. Some were placed in nursing homes within Louisiana, but many were placed outside of Louisiana far from home, with no plan of how to get home.

In March of 2005, Governor Kathleen Blanco revealed her plan to reform long-term care in Louisiana. Louisiana's Plan for Immediate Action: Providing Long-Term Care Choices for the Elderly and People with Disabilities, gave many people with disabilities hope that they would have a real choice of where to receive necessary long-term care. However, as we look back after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, many people with disabilities were offered only one option – institutionalization. The big question is how this is possible, given the Governor's commitment to give people with disabilities more community options, not fewer.

Evacuees with disabilities who were able to live safely and comfortably in their homes prior to

the hurricanes were forced into shelters that were not equipped to provide the services or supports that were needed. People were placed in nursing homes because the State, which ran the special needs shelters, and the Red Cross, which ran the general population shelters, were not able to properly assist many people with disabilities. However, the problems for people with disabilities did not stop there. Neither the state of Louisiana nor the Red Cross kept records of what institutions accepted people with disabilities from shelters. The Advocacy Center has made several attempts, through requests to the Department of Social Services, which ran the special needs shelters, and to the Department of Health and Hospitals, which paid the bills, to determine which nursing homes house people who lived in the community pre-Katrina, but we have been told that this information is not available.

In October of 2005, Advocacy Center staff met with staff from the Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) to discuss the issue of hurricane evacuees being placed in nursing homes. At that time DHH was aware of 1042 admissions to Louisiana nursing homes that appeared to be evacuees. In addition to that, 2581 people had been evacuated from nursing facilities in southern Louisiana to other nursing homes. The belief of DHH and advocates was and still is that many more people were

placed in nursing homes as a result of the hurricanes, but a final number has not yet been made available. The Advocacy Center has requested that information from DHH, but it has not been received.

There is some good news. Currently FEMA, DHH, and the Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs have joined forces to seek out evacuees in nursing homes in Louisiana and to perform certain tasks. The first will be to assure that the evacuees are registered with FEMA; the second task is to determine what type of living arrangement people want in the future; and the third is to reconnect people to any State services they may have been receiving in the past. These efforts could provide the assistance some people will need to leave the nursing homes. This, in combination with the Advocacy Center's assisting these evacuees through case management services, will provide a meaningful choice of living arrangements for people with disabilities who were inappropriately and unwillingly institutionalized as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Individuals who have been institutionalized since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita deserve to be able to choose where they want to live. If these individuals want to live in the community and are not receiving assistance in moving, they can contact the Advocacy Center at 1-800-960-7705.

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## Disaster Planning and Developmental Disabilities: Louisiana's Response

**Kathy Kliebert, Assistant Secretary, OCDD**

On August 27, 2005 as Hurricane Katrina threatened the Gulf Coast of Louisiana, developmental disability stakeholders were prepared for the storm and evacuation plans proceeded smoothly. Our providers have had significant practice and experience in hurricane evacuation and had disaster plans that were considered effective. These plans included very detailed procedures regarding staff responses and multiple assurances for health and safety of people receiving services. What neither the developmental disabilities services system, nor most of Louisiana's citizens, were prepared for was the aftermath of the storm.

**What Worked:** Each provider of supports and services for people with developmental disabilities is required to have a specific and clear evacuation plan. For most people who relied primarily on a provider to support them, these plans worked and the majority of people evacuated quickly and safely. Those individuals who relied primarily on family members or other natural supports were also able to evacuate to safe places with the assistance of these natural supports. In some cases, individuals evacuated to safe housing accompanied by their direct support staff. Overall, the immediate disaster responses were effective for most people with developmental disabilities. Licensing agencies and other state agencies worked together to allow maximum flexibility for variations in rules and regulations during the aftermath of the storms. Advocacy agencies, providers, self-

advocates, state agencies and families worked together to assess people in shelters and to locate needed clothes, food, housing and equipment for people with disabilities. The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities established workgroups and a nationwide toll-free number to help locate people and reconnect people to services. Donations from sources throughout the world came through to help provide some of the necessities that were not available. Many stakeholders worked around the clock to assure that people in emergency situations were supported and that families received help in locating loved ones.

**What Didn't Work:** Communication from almost every source failed making it virtually impossible for people to connect to their family members and the outside world. Important information that needed to be dispersed to people with disabilities, their families, providers and others could not be relayed. Support coordinators could not get in touch with participants; participants could not get in touch with providers. Agencies did not have adequate communication systems to assure the current location of people. People who went to shelters often moved to other locations before we were able to assess, take action and track these subsequent moves. This significantly impaired the ability to reconnect people to the supports and services they needed. Almost a week after the initial hurricane, we were still unable to locate over 75% of people receiving waiver services and 50% of those receiving

ICF/MR services. Four months later, we still have not accurately identified locations of 13% of waiver participants. People who were not receiving services and/or who did not have family support available struggled both in the evacuation process and in the aftermath. People without identification were transported to destinations unknown; many were unable to provide information to assist with their identification and service provision. People were placed in nursing homes because of the lack of more appropriate shelter. In general, housing was expensive and/or unobtainable and accessible housing was no longer an option. No agency or system in Louisiana was prepared for the enormity of the disaster and our ability to respond was often slow and frustrating.

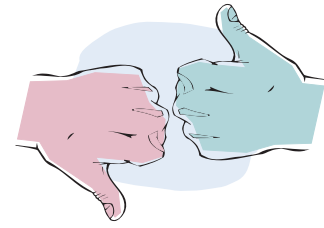
**What Needs to Change:** While most of our initial disaster responses were tried and effective, the responses to the unexpected long range effects were by trial and error. Our developmental disability system had never been faced with the reality of the extensive disbursement of people, loss of direct support staff, extended shelter stays, loss of infrastructure, nonfunctional communication, extended evacuations, and loss of providers and housing. We need a comprehensive response system that can address each of these realities. An initial solution is to have policies and procedures which delineate and require specific responses by our developmental disability state and local governmental entities, providers, support coordinators, family mem-

*(continued on page 15)*

# Prompts & Praises



Many people in the disability community have gone above and beyond their duties to make the lives of people with disabilities and their families better. Countless individuals have worked long and hard hours visiting shelters to assess the needs of people with disabilities there and help them in any way possible. Many more people have taken hurricane victims into their homes that had no where else to go. Others have helped people in ways too numerous to mention.



Many people with disabilities perished during or after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Their normal support systems vanished and they were unable to meet their needs or get necessary care and support. Some of those entrusted with caring for these individuals were not prepared to meet these obligations. Let us learn from this experience so that it does not happen again.

*(continued from page 14)*

bers and advocacy agencies. Every stakeholder in the system must take responsibility for some part of the response effort in order for it to be effective. It is critical that the responses include procedures which will provide immediate communication methods that are practical and effective for stakeholders. Our system response must also include plans for all stakeholders to be available to immediately assess living situations such as shelters or other temporary living environments. An efficient data system that can track and locate people for reconnection to family and services will be essential to a viable, effective plan. Such a response system will require revision and monitoring of individual and provider disaster preparations in order to incorporate all of the lessons learned from these recent disasters. Additionally, future disaster planning must include a critical review of the areas in which state funded public and private residential settings are located in order to assure not only safe evacuation, but also health and safety in the

aftermath.

Longer term solutions must be developed to address the more difficult disaster issues. The development of evacuation sites that can be easily accessed and utilized for extended periods of time must be explored. Communication directly with these sites will be critical to ensure prompt location efforts along with delivery of appropriate and timely health care services. The ability to have emergency contingency plans for community based options in time of disaster must be addressed. The ever-expanding barriers of accessible housing, transportation, and dwindling direct support workforce must have real solutions if we are to have a reasonable disaster response for people with disabilities.

Our developmental disabilities services system in Louisiana sustained significant impact from the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We will work to rebuild our system while facing the reality of the destruction of many of the state's economic resources. While these challenges seem overwhelming,

we have a strong stakeholder group in our state and know that they can be relied on to work with us not only to rebuild our system, but also to make it stronger and more responsive to people.

NOTE: The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities will be having a stakeholder meeting on January 27, 2006 in Baton Rouge. The purpose of the meeting will be to review the many lessons that we have all learned through Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and to begin preparations for the design of new disaster response policy for the developmental disabilities services system. Please come and share your input so the policy will be truly reflective of the experiences and responsive to the needs of the people with developmental disabilities in Louisiana. The exact time and meeting place will be announced. Please contact the state office at 225-342-0095 or your local OCDD office for more information.

# Mental Health Issues Increasing Since Hurricanes

The effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the mental health of Louisiana's citizens is just beginning. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), past research on the mental health consequences of major floods and hurricanes suggests that the psychological impacts of the recent hurricanes could be extensive. SAMHSA estimates that -- in those areas that have been significantly impacted by the hurricanes -- 25 percent to 30 percent of the population may experience clinically significant mental health needs and an additional 10 percent to 20 percent may show sub-clinical, but not trivial, needs. Up to 500,000 people may be in need of assistance.\*

People who were displaced by the storms have lost their homes, schools, communities, places of worship, daily routines, social support, personal possessions and much more. In some cases, these losses were coupled with losing loved ones and witnessing death, destruction and criminal violence. According to SAMHSA, the psychological impact of these experiences can be both serious and long-lasting. Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder -- including depression, grief and anger -- are to be expected among some who survived the hurricanes. They may also develop physical health and

behavior problems, such as substance abuse disorders among adults and conduct problems among children. Some of these problems may not surface for months or years.\*

Louisianians must continue to remain aware of the effects of this trauma and ask for help when needed. There are several cope lines available to assist people with this crisis, including Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals: Cope Line: 1-800-749-2673 and Crisis counseling for Louisiana hurricane victims 1-800-273-8255.

Meaningful Minds of Louisiana, a consumer directed mental health organization, is working to establish a peer support program. This program is designed to train mental health consumers in peer support and then employ these mental health consumers as peer supporters in "warmlines" and peer support centers during the next 2-year period. For more information about this program, contact Meaningful Minds 1-888-886-6882; e-mail: [info@meaningfulmindsla.org](mailto:info@meaningfulmindsla.org); [www.meaningfulmindsla.org](http://www.meaningfulmindsla.org).

\*SAMSHA <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/disasterrelief/psa.aspx>



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