



The Voice of the Human Services Community

Human Services Council of NYC Ends Disaster Planning

Due to the loss of expected government funding, the Human Services Council of NYC (HSC) has suspended its program of preparing the not-for-profit human services sector to help people recover from catastrophic disaster.

HSC's disaster program began in 2004 when it took over planning from the 9/11 United Services Group, an organization created after the attacks of September 11, 2001 to coordinate the efforts of dozens of not-for-profit agencies helping surviving family members, residents of downtown Manhattan, workers who lost jobs and income, injured people, rescue workers, and others who were affected by the attack.

By planning and working together, separately functioning agencies make their services easier to access for people in need, ensure that information about benefits and program are widely known, train staff more efficiently, and improve client service by identifying and resolving operational issues.

With the leadership of the Disaster Preparedness and Response Committee, chaired by Msgr. Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, HSC accomplished a great deal over the past two and a half years. The Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plan of the Not-for-Profit Human Services Sector in New York City developed by HSC is the most comprehensive experience-based plan of its kind. The sector's voice was represented in multiple collaborations with government agencies, including the development of a Disaster Assistance Service Center Plan. A study of the sector's response on behalf of Katrina evacuees in New York City produced concrete recommendations that improved our planning. Multi-agency consultation generated recommendations that were incorporated into the national Coordinated Assistance Network software, making that system more responsive to the needs of local agency staff. A strong program of exercises and drills was begun with two tabletop exercises that tested sector responsiveness.

The key to helping people recover from catastrophic disaster is a network of individual service coordinators that can offer assessment, counseling, crisis intervention, referral, and advocacy. The HSC Human Services Disaster Plan calls for a consolidated network of agencies to provide not only individual service coordination, but also a toll-free HelpLine, information technology, and financial assistance for unmet needs. The ongoing work of preparedness and planning includes assessment, documenting specific plans, and conducting drills and other exercises. The Plan also led to planning with philanthropies, including the New York Times Company Foundation and others, to create a Disaster Recovery Assistance Fund that would ensure that not-for-profit agencies would be able to begin helping people immediately after a catastrophe.

HSC encourages agencies to participate in New York City Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NYC VOAD). For information on NYC VOAD, contact Katey Walsh at the American Red Cross in Greater New York, walshk@nyredcross.org.

We would like to thank all our partners in the disaster preparedness and response efforts. The Altman Foundation generously providing funding for the study of Katrina lessons learned and also for the development of the DP&R program. The New York Times Company Foundation and the Open Society Institute made financial commitments to enable the sector to respond in the event of a major disaster. Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP provided *pro bono* legal assistance.

HSC planning brought together representatives from multiple partners including Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, The American Red Cross in Greater New York, The Salvation Army (Greater New York Division), Asian American Federation of New York (AAFNY), Black Veterans for Social Justice, CAMBA, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), Goodwill Industries of Greater New York and Northern New Jersey, GroupWORKS for Education, Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, Mental Health Association of New York City (MHA), New York Cares, New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS), Safe Horizon, Steinway Child and Family Services, The New York Board of Rabbis, UJA-Federation of New York, and World Cares Center. HSC expresses its appreciation to all the agencies involved.