

The description of events begins with Edith Shapira, a psychiatrist who was appalled by the scenes in the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, the Louisiana Superdome, and elsewhere in the area. Well connected with key community and government leaders in Pittsburgh through her service on agency boards, she was able to contact key people in strategic leadership positions to instigate a humanitarian call to action. This story is fully outlined in this *Case in Point* publication.

What is significant is that her calls were like throwing a lighted match into a bundle of straw. People were just waiting to be asked. The response from community leaders and volunteers of all kinds—people who had witnessed on TV the sorry sights a thousand miles away—was overwhelming. Even though a Labor Day weekend intervened, people worked overtime to prepare for the expected arrive of evacuees by plane.

Political leaders quickly determined that the Allegheny County DHS would be the lead agency. Director Marc Cherna fashioned a plan involving many governmental and nonprofit agencies. Cherna and

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other agency heads were able to draw upon lessons learned during the September 2004 floods in Allegheny County caused by Hurricane Ivan. A crucial component was establishing a “one-stop shop” arrangement in a facility on the North Side owned and operated by the faith-based Pittsburgh Project and led by its Executive Director Saleem Ghubril. This avoided the cumbersome, frustrating procedure of sending evacuees to agency offices scattered around town. Thus, the creation of the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center constituted a major step in placing first the needs and convenience of clients, rather than those of cooperating institutions.

A second component was a case-management system of assigning a trained social worker to each individual or family to be a guide through the maze of helping agencies. This strategy came from the Gaps Initiative, a Pittsburgh Foundation-sponsored case-management system of providing one-on-one case managers to aid welfare mothers in entering the workforce. The Pittsburgh model also capitalized on lessons learned in recent decades by the Jewish Family & Children’s Service while resettling Soviet Jewish refugees—namely that it takes three or four Pittsburgh families assigned to each refugee family to avoid the possibility of burn-out common with a one-on-one arrangement.

As it turned out, the planeloads of people forecast by FEMA never materialized. But it soon became clear that the preparations weren’t in vain. Dozens of people began arriving on their own, usually because they



Edith (Edie) Shapira

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had relatives or friends in Pittsburgh—the “any-port-in-a-storm” factor.

During the three-week period that the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center was active (September 12 to October 3, 2005), 335 persons were served. Evacuees received aid with housing, furniture, welcome baskets with food and household supplies, and financial assistance was available for host families feeling the strain of extra household members. For many, the help continued, thanks to the case-management arrangement. Eventually, the number of persons registered totaled 364.

But that was only the core of the Pittsburgh story. What astonished the organizers was the outpouring of aid of all kinds from the community—gifts of money from individuals, businesses, and philanthropic foundations; and material aid from businesses “not looking for credit,” as one official put it. Volunteers, both individuals and workers from agencies and businesses, offered to put in long hours at the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center and at ancillary operations. At the Pittsburgh Project, “you had to order people to go home or take time off; they were so wrapped up, so exhilarated in what they were doing,” according to Robert Stumpp, the DHS emergency coordinator in charge of the engagement center. This displayed the generosity of a community opening its doors. “So many tiny acts of kindness,” as one participant put it.

A report by the county DHS has this apt conclusion:

“The Hurricane Katrina response in Allegheny County has been characterized by unprecedented collaboration across so many sectors of the community. Throughout the planning and execution of this initiative—which required tremendous flexibility—a spirit of good will and cooperation

prevailed. The shared process of mobilizing resources, the thoughtful design and management of the engagement center and guest housing, the competent case management system and the integrated, cross-systems philosophy of the Department of Human Services all contributed to the success of this initiative. For the hurricane evacuees, resettlement and coming to terms with loss and change will take time. The Allegheny County Department of Human Services, with broad community support, will continue to coordinate this collaborative effort in the months ahead.”

This *Case in Point* publication tells the story of a concerted community effort to help another population of humanity in dire need. It recounts an awesome story of cooperation across sectors, overcoming all societal, economic, bureaucratic, and political barriers to labor for a worthy cause. What follows is a detailed, day-by-day account of how the communities across Allegheny County communicated and organized to help the people of the Gulf Coast region. The main text is followed by an observations section, which describes the essential lessons and themes that resulted from this effort. An interview with Lynn Coghill provides a personal look at challenges facing volunteer workers.

A CALL TO ACTION

Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the adjacent Gulf Coast on the morning of Monday, August 29, 2005. Thousands of lives were immediately affected, especially the poor in zones struck by high winds and flooding. When levees protecting New Orleans were breached, thousands more were impacted by the rising waters.

Millions across the globe watched the misery of people trapped in flooded homes or pushed to temporary and overcrowded shelters such as the Louisiana Superdome and the convention center. Many people were mishandled by the bungling of unprepared and uncoordinated governmental agencies. Those watching in dismay must have wondered what to do.

One such observer in Pittsburgh decided to take action. Edith (Edie) Shapira, a psychiatrist whose avocation is serving on the boards of numerous nonprofit agencies, set in motion in her community a remarkable response to the Katrina crisis. It came on Thursday, September 1, three days after Katrina struck New Orleans. For the purposes of chronology in this *Case in Point*, we shall call that Day 1.

DAY 1

Shapira called then Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy to ask what the city government or anyone else was doing about aid for Katrina victims, such as providing a haven for homeless refugees (later called evacuees) forced to leave New Orleans and other stricken communities. Murphy replied that he didn't know of anything specific under way but promised to follow through. He made a pivotal call to Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato, who had earned his emergency



While local rescue workers assist residents of New Orleans by boat, Allegheny County officials prepared to help evacuees willing to relocate here. Photo courtesy of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

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management spurs the year before by taking effective action when flooding on September 17 caused by the tail end of Hurricane Ivan lashed through such riverbank communities as Millvale, Etna, and Carnegie.

Shapira also placed calls to such compatriots as Pittsburgh school board President Bill Isler, Greg Spencer of the Manchester Youth Development Center, Esther Bush of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, Saleem Ghubril of the Pittsburgh Project, and her brother David Shapira, Chair and CEO of the Giant Eagle grocery chain, to involve the business community.

Edie Shapira said everyone was eager to help, and were only awaiting direction. “It was like throwing a match on a bundle of sticks,” she recalls, downplaying her Paul Revere-like role.

DAY 2

The call to Onorato resulted in an impromptu meeting on Friday morning when 40 people showed up at the county’s emergency operations center in Point Breeze.

“...the best immediate answer might not be to send professional aid personnel to the Gulf Coast but instead to bring them (evacuees) up.”

Included were Onorato, Murphy, Edith Shapira, Cherna, Allegheny County Health Department Director Bruce Dixon, Loren Roth from UPMC, representatives from the West Penn Allegheny Health System, G. Reynolds Clark and John Wilds from the University of Pittsburgh, Bush, Patricia Trainer from Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh, Father Ronald Lengwin from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, Sister Patricia Cairns from Catholic Charities, and Rabbi James Gibson of Temple Sinai.

Onorato initiated the process by suggesting that the reins of responsibility be given to Cherna, head of the county’s DHS. The group approved and started to ask questions such as how to prepare for the arrival of evacuees, how many people could Pittsburgh take, and when planeloads of people would be arriving.

Cherna already had the outlines of a plan and a press conference was held that afternoon to assure the public that action had started.

Cherna had scheduled a personal day off on Friday (Sept. 2) but cancelled that plan. First, he decided against a suggestion that the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Downtown Pittsburgh be used as a reception center for the evacuees. No showers, for one thing, Cherna pointed out. Also, like millions of others, he had watched on TV the scenes at the New Orleans convention center and believed the last thing evacuees coming to Pittsburgh should have to worry about was a repeat of that ordeal.

Instead, Cherna adopted a suggestion from Edie Shapira to use the Pittsburgh Project site on the North



Marc Cherna



U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Shawn Beaty of Long Island, N.Y., looks for survivors in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as he flies in an HH-60J Jayhawk helicopter over New Orleans. Photo courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard.

Side. The Pittsburgh Project was founded in 1985 by the Reverend Saleem Ghubril, a Presbyterian pastor, and six college students who wanted to invest their summer in equipping high school youths for lives of service while addressing the needs of poor homeowners. For the next six years, the project ran weeklong summer service camps for young people from across the nation who repaired the homes of vulnerable homeowners and reflected upon the responsibility of individuals toward neighbors whose options are few.

In 1992, in order to have a permanent presence in the city, the Pittsburgh Project board purchased the closed Annunciation Roman Catholic Church and School

in the Charles Street neighborhood on the North Side. This enabled the institution to have dormitory and boarding space for up to 300 youths per week for the weekly camps.

Because the summer programs were over, the site was ideal for providing shelter and dining facilities for incoming evacuees. Also, Ghubril and his staff had experience in dealing with the turnover of waves of people from afar. The closed Annunciation sanctuary next door was designated as the one-stop-shop reception area. The entire complex would be known as the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center.

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Already, there was an important difference from the procedures used during the Hurricane Ivan crisis of the year before. This time provisions would be made for people to live at the intake site, unlike September 2004, when the Allegheny Campus of the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) was used as the emergency point.

In a separate development, Trainer and Bradley Burger, two officials at Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh, had drawn up a plan designating specific persons and organizations to provide services in 15 different “domains.” These domains were behavioral health, child care, communications, durable goods, employment, food, housing/utilities, insurance, legal services, leisure activities, medical services, schooling, spiritual/bereavement, transportation, and translation services. Trainer said the motivation came with a realization that the best immediate answer might not be to send professional aid personnel to the Gulf Coast but instead “to bring them (evacuees) up.” Although their plan was eventually somewhat modified by Cherna and the DHS, it provided a valuable template for Pittsburgh’s organizational response.

Cherna moved to coordinate the mobilization of resources by five major assignments: Goodwill Industries for clothing and furniture; the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank for food donations; The Pittsburgh Foundation to handle monetary donations; the United Way of Allegheny County to coordinate volunteer support; and the Urban League of Pittsburgh to handle housing.

Spencer, following up on Edie Shapira’s call to involve the African American community as quickly as possible, began telephoning the Pittsburgh NAACP, church organizations, fraternities and sororities, and professionals he knew. Spencer described the response as overwhelming: “How can I help? What can I do?”

DAYS 3 AND 4

Continued rumblings that a planeload of evacuees might be arriving the next week spurred Cherna’s DHS and other agencies in the community to spend the Labor Day weekend preparing for the major tasks ahead. Local Boy Scouts were mobilized to gather donated clothes and to sort toiletries into convenient packages for the expected evacuees.

Edie Shapira continued her round of calls, including contacting University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Mark Nordenberg in order to enlist Pitt’s further support.

Stumpp, emergency coordinator on Cherna’s staff, was placed in charge of the resettlement center at the Pittsburgh Project, working with Ghubril to develop plans for the intake process for the evacuees—starting with room assignments, then a nap, and then a meal.

Additional emergency shelter sites were lined up in the event they were needed at the Boys & Girls Club of Western Pennsylvania, CCAC, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, vacant schools in the Pittsburgh Public School District, the University of Pittsburgh, the YMCA of Pittsburgh, and others. Among those agencies that offered permanent housing solutions were the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, the Allegheny County Housing Authority, and Allegheny Housing Rehabilitation Corporation (AHRCO).

A concept paper was sent to Governor Edward G. Rendell’s office in Harrisburg, Pa., for approval and to keep state officials apprised of Pittsburgh’s plans.

Wheeling into action, too, was the county’s Department of Emergency Services with its permanent emergency center on Lexington Street in Point Breeze, considered one of the best in the state. Chief Bob Full explained that the center went on a round-the-clock basis and also put together action plans for meeting planeloads of evacuees

coming into Pittsburgh International Airport.

A number of conference calls were convened by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) that included city, county, and state officials. PEMA was critical in bringing needed state agencies and service providers to the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center and the Katrina evacuees.

The plan for the expected planeloads was to take the evacuees first to the U.S. Air Force's 911th Airlift Wing base in nearby Moon Township. That destination was chosen rather than the international airport to avoid the crush of the press.

At the 911th base, UPMC and West Penn Allegheny Health Systems were ready to perform medical triage for evacuees as they deplaned, on the assumption that 10 to 20 percent might need medical help. Dixon agreed to oversee these operations.

Scott Gilstrap, vice president of UPMC's Integrated Medical and Information Technologies, explains the preparations that UPMC made. "We were geared up to receive 600 folks out at the 911th base, working under Dr. (Bruce) Dixon." That included an assembly line for screening medical and pharmaceutical needs and an immunization clinic with a mobile doctors' office in a semi-tractor trailer. UPMC also had a Medivac helicopter on hand.

A phalanx of EMS ambulances would be available to take any evacuees in need of medical assistance to local hospitals. Port Authority Transit (PAT) buses would be present to take the others to the Pittsburgh Project site.

DAY 5

Labor Day was a day of mad scrambling as the DHS and other organizations prepared for the expected imminent planeloads of evacuees. Efforts continued to reach Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco's office

and FEMA and PEMA officials to find out what was going on and when the planes might be expected to arrive.

By fortunate coincidence, a joint meeting of three groups called earlier by the Reverend Johnnie Monroe, was convening for a religious service at his church, Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church in the Hill District. They included the Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), the Black Presbyterian Caucus, and Clergy and Churches United (a group of Hill District pastors). Presiding was PIIN's president Wallace Watson, emeritus English professor at Duquesne University.



People gather outside the Louisiana Superdome seeking shelter from Hurricane Katrina. After learning of the horrific conditions there, community leaders in Allegheny County decided to develop better plans for temporary housing in the Pittsburgh region. Photo courtesy of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

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PIIN is an interfaith, activist organization of 30 congregations and faith-based organizations—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—founded in 1990 as part of the national Gamaliel Foundation’s network. Monroe was its first president.

The service included not only hymns and prayers but explanations of preparations in Pittsburgh—one of the first metropolitan communities in the nation to step forward with a specific plan. Then City Councilman Sala Udin informed the meeting, with exhortations to the organizations present to help with the plan; and the taking of an offering which netted \$5,000. The list of speakers, in addition to Udin and Monroe, included Cherna, Bush, Rabbi James Gibson, and Watson.

DAY 6

Anxious scrambling continued as the first alert announced that one plane would be coming the next

“...in Pittsburgh the degrees of separation are much less than six because people know each other, their capabilities and shortcomings, and therefore whom to trust.”

day, Wednesday, then one more would be arriving soon afterward. Next came information that there would be no planes coming; instead, three were to go to Philadelphia. Then a new message: only the second of those planes would be coming to Pittsburgh.

In the midst of the confusion, a preparatory meeting of the staffs of DHS and Goodwill Industries to share information was held at Goodwill’s headquarters on the South Side, attended by 40 people.

By this time, two crucial decisions had been made by the Cherna team—both profiting from lessons learned from the 2004 hurricane crisis when Ivan slammed floodwaters throughout Millvale, Etna, and Carnegie. The first was to set up a one-stop-shop in the former Annunciation chapel at the Pittsburgh Project—similar to the post-Ivan crisis setup at the Allegheny Campus of CCAC. The idea was to have the agencies come to the individuals in need, rather than have the evacuees sent all around a strange town to one separate agency after another.

A second and innovative move was to implement a case-management system of assigning a specific social service professional to each incoming family to escort its members around the room to the various institutional booths, such as the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) to reinstate cards and benefits, the Urban League for housing, Goodwill Industries for clothing and household needs, and local banks for establishing credit.

The crucial changes in 2005 (from emergency procedures used in 2004 following Hurricane Ivan) were implementing a centralized intake process, which provided an information system with which to track how cases were progressing, and the integrated case-management system. The latter offered the evacuees the best opportunity to receive all they would need to return to everyday life. The plan included having these case managers continue to serve as mentors of that family as long as it had needs



A National Guard multi-purpose utility truck brings supplies to the Superdome where tens of thousands of displaced citizens sought shelter. Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy (Photographer's Mate Airman Jeremy L. Grisham).

in Pittsburgh. That provision came from the experience of Jewish agencies such as the Jewish Family & Children's Service in helping Soviet Jewish refugees in recent decades, that it took three Pittsburgh families per refugee family to make resettlement work.

Agencies providing case managers included: Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging, a program within the DHS; Catholic Charities; Goodwill Industries; the Human Service Administration Organization; Jewish Family & Children's Service; Macedonia Family and Community Enrichment Center; North Hills Community Outreach; The Salvation Army; and the Urban League of Pittsburgh.

A representative from Rendell's office arrived to review the arrangements at the Pittsburgh Project site and was satisfied with them.

During the day, plans were also made at a meeting

at the DHS office for the Office of Community Relations to assemble and train 100 volunteers from faith-based institutions to serve as ambassadors/greeters to meet the expected planeloads with many wearing "Welcome to Pittsburgh" shirts. A key person would be former Wilkesburg Mayor Wilbert Young, because he is a native of New Orleans.

DAY 7

This was to be "The Big Day." But nothing came from the skies, except a late afternoon "standing by" call from FEMA.

The upbeat event of the day that surprised everyone was a wall-to-wall turnout of agency personnel and volunteers, probably 400 in all, for a midmorning meeting at the Regional Enterprise Tower in downtown Pittsburgh. The meeting was notable for showing the

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extent and strength of the plans already laid, and for the impressive display of eagerness of people present to shoulder assignments and get on with the task.

A *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* column first alluded to the 1990 Broadway play, *Six Degrees of Separation*, that revolved around the concept that a maximum of six degrees of separation exists between any two persons. It went on to declare: “The meeting demonstrated that in Pittsburgh the degrees of separation are much less than six because people know each other, their

capabilities and shortcomings, and therefore whom to trust. Those present described the exhilaration in the room and the selfless mood of cooperation among agencies that sometimes jostle each other for publicity and funding. It was Pittsburgh at its best, one agency head said.”

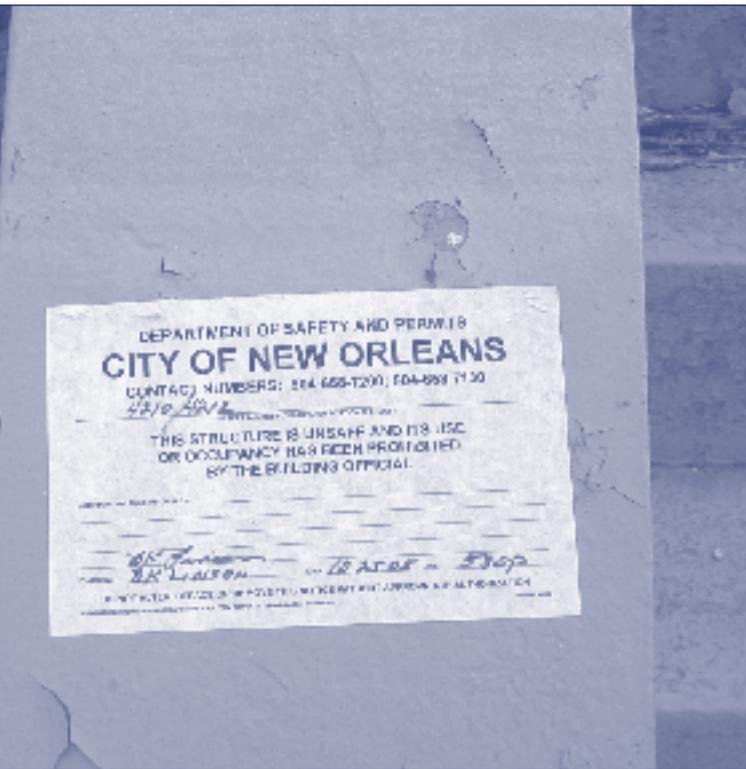
Meanwhile, the search continued for other resettlement locations that might be needed. These included the campuses of the CCAC, the University of Pittsburgh, the Gilmory Diocesan Center in Coraopolis, Pa., Boys & Girls Clubs around town, closed public schools, and closed motels.

DAY 8

The evacuee influx by air continued to be uncertain, but agencies began working on their assignments. Programming for the CONTACT Pittsburgh telephone help line was switched to fielding calls about Katrina. Almost immediately it was deluged with more than 1,500 calls of the “How can I help?” variety. Donations of clothing and household goods were pouring in. Because there was little space, they were diverted to Goodwill Industries for safekeeping. Trainer marveled at “the phenomenal response,” which eventually totaled six tractor-trailer loads.

Some agencies and volunteer groups expressed hurt feelings of “not being needed” because they had not been given frontline assignments, so there had to be some dialogue to assure them that not being tapped was no reflection on their abilities.

In the midst of this back-and-forth confusion, evacuees started showing up at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, surprising Pittsburgh officials with the realization that people were arriving on their own by car and bus. This made it clear that, paneloads or not, the resettlement center at the Pittsburgh Project site was going to be needed.



Thousands of structures were declared unsafe and occupancy prohibited by local officials. Photo courtesy of Lynn Coghill.

Preparations for the one-stop shop continued at the Pittsburgh Project. This included providing computer access and telephone lines for each booth, plus common fax, photocopying, and document shredding machines, as well as cell phones donated for the month by Verizon Wireless. Plans were made for The Salvation Army to provide on-site meals daily for the booth attendants and arriving families. City police supplied a plainclothes officer daily to provide security.

Volunteer healthcare professionals certified by Dixon would provide crisis intervention. Professionals from the Alma Illery Health Center in the Hill District, directed by Wilford Payne, would be on hand as well. A phone line dedicated to the ACCESS transportation service would allow workers to arrange for rides for evacuees to any place in the county. Chaplains were to be on hand regularly for those desiring spiritual support.

At Southpointe in Washington County, some of those attending an Elected Officials Retreat conducted by the University of Pittsburgh's Institute of Politics found themselves having to duck out of sessions to field cell phone calls. Cherna wasn't the only one. Gerri Kay of The Pittsburgh Foundation found herself continuing to receive calls from business executives offering specific help or anxiously wondering how they could become part of the picture. She was particularly impressed by the generosity of some of the offers, such as restaurants proposing fundraising opportunities and the LensCrafters chain offering free glasses to any evacuees needing them. Kay's usual response was that the authorities were trying to determine what the needs were, but in the meantime, businesses should prepare to disburse resources at whatever level with which they felt comfortable.

As for financial contributions, The Pittsburgh Foundation had set up two funds for donations, one for sending money to agencies on the Gulf Coast, the other for expenses associated with the Pittsburgh effort.

DAYS 9 TO 11

It was becoming evident that there would be no planeloads of evacuees arriving in Pittsburgh, causing somewhat of a letdown. Some found wry consolation in a story making the rounds that a FEMA planeload of evacuees scheduled to go to Charleston, S.C., had ended up in Charleston, W.V., instead. It was about this time that the national uproar over FEMA's handling of the Katrina crisis began to emerge.

Local officials are cautious in making comments on that subject. But it is clear that a good linkage with FEMA was never made. For one thing, it turned out that FEMA had no mechanism for processing paper applications for emergency assistance and no Internet question-answering connection. Applications for aid had to be made by phone, a problem at first because of jammed lines. Much time was spent assisting evacuees in obtaining help by phone.

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“Government workers sometimes get hardened over the years, but the atmosphere here was different.”

ONE VOLUNTEER WHO MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE



Pittsburgher Lynn Coghill (left), field education liaison and adjunct faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, spent three weeks helping with the disaster relief efforts in Louisiana. She is pictured here along with Megan Pacini, a mental health volunteer from New Jersey.

INTERVIEW WITH LYNN COGHILL

While hundreds of Pittsburghers were reacting to Hurricane Katrina by assisting evacuees as they arrived in the city, other Pittsburghers were responding to the catastrophe by personally going to the devastated regions to provide professional services.

One of the first from Allegheny County was Lynn Coghill, a 51-year-old mental health professional from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. As a volunteer in the Allegheny County Medical Reserve Corps working closely with the American Red Cross (ARC), she first was alerted on September 2 by an e-mail from the corps asking about her availability for volunteer service in the Gulf Coast region ravaged by the August 29 hurricane.

Coghill, a single mother with a 16-year-old son, asked herself, "At this point in my professional and personal life, can I be gone for three weeks?" (She learned her paperwork would include formally accepting that this was a "hardship assignment," with 12 different hardship conditions listed—everything from stressful working situations, and limited health care access, to questionable water, air quality, and housing conditions.)

She sent an e-mail on the subject to her friends and coworkers. "When no one objected, I completed the paperwork and faxed it on September 8 to the national Red Cross. Twenty-four hours later, they called and asked how quickly could I leave? I said, 'Forty-eight hours.'"

That set off a hectic round of activity. She was instructed to call the ARC's travel agent to obtain her prepaid ticket. On September 13, Coghill was notified she would be going to Baton Rouge, La., as the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport was closed, and she was given contact numbers in Baton Rouge. And she was advised to pack only the baggage she could carry herself



Entire buildings were ripped from their foundations by the powerful storm. Photo courtesy of Lynn Coghill.



Markings on homes identify whether survivors were found during rescue searches as well as the peak water levels. Photo courtesy of Lynn Coghill.

because of the possibility of electricity outages and limited use of elevators and escalators.

Coghill flew from Pittsburgh on Sunday, September 18, first to Houston and then to Baton Rouge. On the plane she wondered what lay ahead. She also could reflect upon her path to this point. An elfin, five-foot-four blonde, she had come to Pittsburgh with her then husband to become dancers with the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. Two years later, she retired from dancing and, seeking a new life, entered the Pitt School of Social Work, receiving a master's degree in social work in 1986. Her career started with inpatient psychiatry at Allegheny Valley Hospital, after which she became an outpatient mental health therapist with health insurance company HealthAmerica followed by private practice. That led to her present dual responsibility at the School of Social Work, which includes teaching and also lining up field education opportunities for students—matching them with social service agencies.

She transformed her earlier skills into performing liturgical dances, both at her church—the interracial, ecumenical Community of Reconciliation in Pittsburgh's Oakland section—and in other local churches. She also participated in a Scottish-theme concert to benefit victims of the 2004 Hurricane Ivan in Allegheny County.

Coghill originally volunteered in the mid-1980s as a critical-incident stress debriefer for Pittsburgh's emergency response personnel corps. Her assigned responsibility was to provide mental health debriefings to the city's first responders—police, firefighters, and medics. She deactivated her emergency responsibilities when her son Matthew was born in 1989, but returned to disaster work in 2004 after seeing advertisements appealing for healthcare volunteers.

And now she was arriving at the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport, meeting both chaos and order,



Boats in front yards were a common sight in hard-hit areas. Photo courtesy of Lynn Coghill.



Damage to homes and businesses was widespread. Photo courtesy of Lynn Coghill.

exhilaration and stress within systems not only still reeling from Katrina but also apprehensively awaiting Hurricane Rita. A van took her and others to the processing site in a former Lowe's store building, where they received badges, staff cards, and briefings on working with Red Cross people and Louisiana officials.

After a mental health briefing the next morning, September 19, Coghill was assigned to a team of four

going to New Orleans. The group rented a car and checked in at a Red Cross headquarters in a Best Western Motel in the Harvey section, across the Mississippi River from the Garden District of New Orleans. One team member agreed to stay there to staff telephones while Coghill and two others were assigned to live and work at the St. Matthew's United Methodist Church in Metairie, La., directly west of New Orleans. They found volunteers from all over (as far as Hawaii) young people, and many retired persons. People were given canvas vests and magic markers to write their names and home states on them. This move helped provide a rapport with clients, demonstrating that people's concern for their well being came from afar.

Coghill's mental health assignment extended both to volunteers and to residents. With the former, problems developed: "Some people weren't able to handle the stress. Some people took to drinking and were not able to get up for work the next morning. Women would cry; men would have angry outbursts. Our team would make recommendations—some to take a day off, while others had to be sent home, three from our site."

In one sense, her assignment included very little traditional mental health work. One resident who showed up on the doorstep of the church clearly needed psychiatric help; "Otherwise, it was mostly providing comfort and support and listening to people's stories. I would stop work earlier in order to shower and be ready to meet volunteers with 'How was your day?'"

Her day also included setting up cots, lifting crates of bottled water, and providing coloring books for children while their parents were in line for services.

In addition to these responsibilities, Coghill's team went out with the emergency response vehicles (ERVs), which were ambulances retrofitted to be hot food feeding stations. The food was cooked in outdoor kitchens

brought in by Baptist churches from Georgia. Maneuvering the ERVs through the debris-laden streets was difficult. “Broken glass everywhere, wires exposed, wind damage even when there had not been flooding.”

Life was not easy for the volunteers. Untrained volunteers were flooding into the centers, with the work force rotating from week to week as the “old timers” went home. “It was hard to sleep when we were 10 people to a room. I learned that women can snore just as much as men.” With one set of showers, a time period for each sex had to be established. Food was catch-as-catch-can, with no regular setup for feeding the volunteers. Coghill observed that even three weeks after the hurricane’s landing, FEMA wasn’t yet visible on the scene. The city was under martial law, with most stores open only from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The volunteers’ work days ran from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., giving them no time to shop for food or necessities when stores were open.

Matters weren’t helped when President Bush announced that residents in need would get Red Cross debit cards, good for \$2,000 in basic purchases. But the cards didn’t arrive, telephone application lines were jammed, and matters got tense. Volunteers in Coghill’s group took turns dialing early and holding the line for residents, with the understanding that no one would hang up, leaving the line open for the next person.

The volunteers were furnished with staff debit cards but were admonished not to brandish them in public, risking the likelihood of stirring resident anger. For once, showing cash was less dangerous than exhibiting a card.

At this point, the Red Cross, FEMA, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and other agencies organized into what they termed a “call center”—something quite different from the base for telemarketers who call you during the dinner hour. Rather, it was the same type of centralized location that Pittsburgh had established

weeks before, putting agency representatives in one place for the benefit of the clients.

As Hurricane Rita approached, the 100 volunteers at St. Matthew’s learned there were no plans to evacuate them. “I stayed up late that night to talk with people and to work with the shelter manager to do an evacuation plan, just in case. The official word was that we were not going anywhere. Although we made a registry of available cars and tried to figure out space requirements, we soon realized we didn’t have enough vehicles to get everyone out.” Nevertheless, Coghill recalls this dilemma as typical. “You had to be able to think independently and to use your own judgment in a very chaotic environment.”

After Hurricane Rita hit Florida (on Sept. 20) and Texas and the Gulf Coast (on Sept. 24), Coghill worked for 10 days in an evacuee shelter in Jean Lafitte, La., a fishing community in Jefferson Parish. Interstate 10 was shut down and some areas were flooded for the second time.

Shortly before Coghill’s three weeks ended, people in the St. Matthew’s neighborhood served a genuine Louisiana Cajun meal for the volunteers—a welcome gesture after the weeks of interaction.

Back home and on the job on October 10, Coghill says she realized how tired she was from the strenuous stint in New Orleans. But she found her experiences and the photographs she had taken to be highly useful in teaching her social work students.

Now that it’s all over, she says, “I’m glad I went. I would go again.”

DAY 12

When the Engagement Center at the Pittsburgh Project site opened for business Monday morning (September 12), 20 people already had registered by phone. By the end of the first day of official operations, 80 people had been served.

The Engagement Center operations and physical design, along with its intake process and case-management system, all were conceived and managed by DHS staff. Each day, DHS staff provided orientation to new staff and volunteers and supervised both the personnel and process that served more than 300 evacuees during the next three weeks.

As Katrina evacuees entered the center, they were welcomed by DHS staff and 21 agency booths forming a circle in the former Annunciation sanctuary that were staffed by experienced agency people ready to serve (see accompanying chart on opposite page.) Each family or individual was introduced to a professional case manager who would personally provide assistance that day and for as long as they had needs in Pittsburgh.

Cherna explained the philosophy embodied in the Pittsburgh approach: “We wanted to put ourselves in those people’s shoes. How would we want to be treated? People needed to be empowered—to have say-so over their lives.”

DAYS 12 TO 26

The first step for most evacuees who were welcomed to the Pittsburgh Project site was an interview with a county intake worker to determine the full scope of their needs. Sitting in on the interview was the case manager who would assist the evacuee in accessing the services gathered at the center and, in time, across the community.

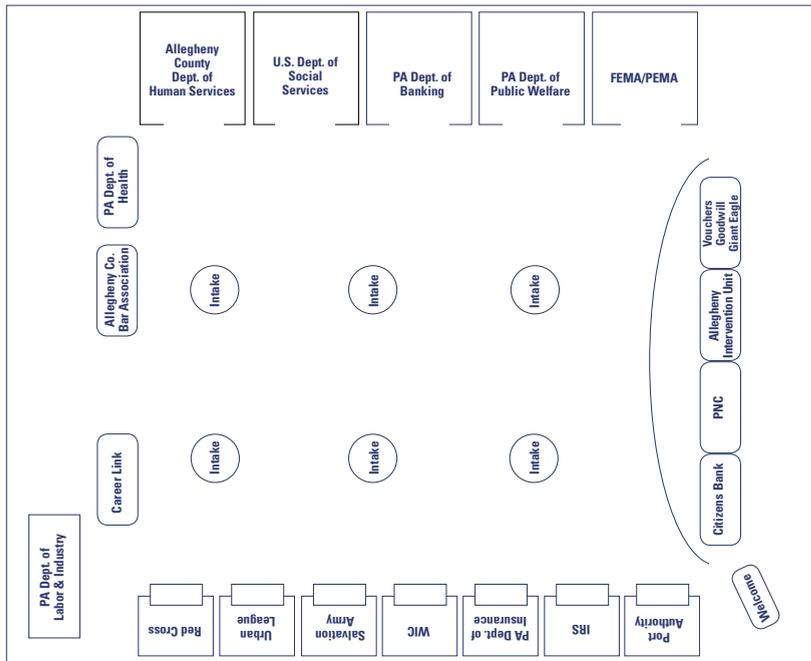
Many times, the next stop was the Social Security booth because many had lost their social security cards in the flooding of their homes. A verified social security number (SSN) is needed to open or access bank accounts, secure a job, and apply for a wide range of human services such as public assistance, health benefits, and housing assistance—offered at all levels of government.

Patricia Sullivan, the district manager for Social Security’s downtown location, explained the process. First, the person’s identification was checked. If the evacuee did not have identification but could supply enough information that matched the information already in SSA records, they were given a paper that verified their SSN and would be accepted and used by any organization. SSA representatives also completed the entries needed to issue a new SSN card and/or a Medicare card.

“Many people were due benefit checks at the time of the hurricane,” Sullivan said. “The U.S. Post Office held checks addressed to people in devastated areas in a central location and redirected those checks to people who filed a change of address with the postal service. We assisted several evacuees in obtaining those checks and also entered a change of address in our records.”

Many other evacuees had their monthly benefits deposited directly into their checking or savings accounts and had difficulty accessing their money because flooding and power outages had disrupted the computer systems used for electronic banking in the affected areas. SSA personnel were able to telephone the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) people who were trying to bring order to the banking chaos created by the hurricane and to obtain for the evacuees access to their money. There was a booth nearby of banking representatives who also assisted evacuees with banking issues.

Unusual cases arose. For example, one man required



This floor plan is the layout of the one-stop-shop Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center on the North Side. Evacuees were taken here so they could take advantage of the full range of services provided by various organizations in one location.

dialysis but had not enrolled with SSA for the medical benefits available for patients with end-stage renal disease. “We made arrangements for him to file an application in the Downtown office after he left the dialysis center,” Sullivan explains.

Another woman had been scheduled to file an application for retirement benefits in the Gulfport, Miss., office on the day of the hurricane. That office was temporarily closed because of hurricane damage. An SSA representative from Pittsburgh took her application by telephone while she was still at the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center.

An 83-year-old woman with multiple medical problems, whose home was destroyed, had traveled to Clairton, Pa., to stay with her sister. She needed to replace her medications, but her Medicare card was lost. The SSA representative was able to initiate the replacement of her Medicare card so that she could begin refilling her prescriptions.

A New Orleans family was most comfortable speaking Spanish and was apprehensive about dealing with so many organizations while having to speak in English. A Spanish-speaking SSA employee at the Pittsburgh Project was able to accompany the family to all of the booths offering services needed by this family and to serve as an interpreter.

The primary value of sending people to the Social Security booth early in the process was that it was important to verify identities and confirm that these were, indeed, people affected by the hurricane.

Sullivan says that even before the opening of the Engagement Center, “I began to receive a lot of calls about services from other federal agencies and I realized that, except for FEMA, the Social Security Administration was the only federal agency invited to participate in the Pittsburgh Project. There are many federal agencies in the Pittsburgh area that would bring a lot to this effort if asked to do so.”

So before the Pittsburgh Project opened, she arranged a meeting between county officials leading the planning effort and representatives from FEMA; PEMA; George Buck, executive director of the Pittsburgh Federal Executive Board, a voluntary organization of federal agency heads in the Pittsburgh area; and herself to explain how many federal agencies located in the Pittsburgh area could assist in the county initiative.

Buck's organization was able to aid in involving the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in housing matters; the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; the Internal Revenue Service; the Pennsylvania Air National Guard, which offered to have four planes available if necessary; and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. As Buck explained, "People were anxious to volunteer because the best part of our job is when you can directly help people and thus give a better image of the federal government. For some, this was the highlight of their careers."

Another early stop for the escorted evacuees was at the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare booth to apply for cash assistance, food stamps, and/or medical assistance. Site manager Ray Miller explains that guidelines for those who can receive assistance have been modified, with the department trying to provide benefits for evacuees within 24 hours of their applications. "Most everybody that's come here has no income or resources," Miller told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "Pretty much everybody has been eligible for cash assistance."

A family of four could receive up to \$497 a month in cash assistance, plus \$497 in food stamps. These benefits were distributed in the form of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards that can be used at ATMs and supermarkets.

Similar help was available from a case manager who

distributed, based on need, telephone calling cards and gift cards for food, pharmaceuticals, and—courtesy of the Giant Eagle—GetGo gasoline. Salvation Army vouchers were available for retail purchase of items such as diapers and other necessities. Goodwill Industries also provided vouchers for use in their chain of stores, plus racks of used clothes at the Pittsburgh Project center itself. The toiletry kits that had been assembled earlier by Boy Scouts were available, as were food boxes with staples from the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Finally, bibles donated by three local churches—Macedonia Baptist, Mt. Ararat Baptist, and Calvary Episcopal—as well as rosaries from a Catholic bookstore, were available through the Pittsburgh Project to those evacuees who asked for them.

Help for people needing birth certificates who did not have valid photo IDs was available at a state Department of Health (DOH) booth. Janice Tummavichakul, administrative assistant/supervisor of the Division of Vital Records of the DOH, drove from her office in New Castle, Pa., to lead the efforts in this area. She also spent time

“... evacuees coming there were surprised at the Pittsburgh welcome and kindness. They were gracious about what was offered them.”

in Philadelphia helping Katrina evacuees at the Project Brotherly Love shelter in the John Wanamaker Middle School.

Tummavichakul said “judgment, discernment, and discretion” were needed. She stayed in touch with her counterpart agency in Louisiana to verify and update statistics where possible, issuing not only birth certificates but death certificates where a spouse or parent had been lost. Like others at the site, she heard many tales of hardship, particularly from those who had lost everything. Tummavichakul was impressed by the compassion shown by professionals. “Government workers sometimes get hardened over the years, but the atmosphere here was different,” she found.

Another agency that found it necessary to have links with Louisiana was the Allegheny County Bar Foundation—for an unusual reason. An explanation comes from Lorrie Albert, who as the foundation’s pro bono coordinator, managed the legal booth at the Pittsburgh Project. Louisiana is unique among the states in that its legal system is based on the Napoleonic Code instituted in France by the great emperor in 1804. So advice for Louisianans predicated on the English-based common law used in the other 49 states would have been incorrect. Pittsburgh lawyers used the Emergency Disaster Manual prepared by the Louisiana State Bar Association via a hotline established by that organization.

Common law comes from early English history, before there were parliaments or congresses, when judges decided legal cases according to what they felt most persons would think was right. Lawyers learned common law by reading reports in which judges had given reasons for their decisions.

So when Katrina-related questions about employment, homeowners’ property rights, landlord/tenant matters, bankruptcy, divorce, child custody, and guardianship

came up, Pittsburgh lawyers used the hotline to lawyers in Baton Rouge to provide proper answers for Louisianans. For Mississippi evacuees, the English common law was apropos. But because each state has its own version of common law, attorneys in one state cannot give out specific advice to anyone from another state where they are not licensed. Thus, Pittsburgh attorneys would defer to Mississippi volunteer attorneys where necessary, Albert explained.

A major and immediate problem for many evacuees was housing. Under Cherna’s plan, this responsibility was lodged with the Urban League of Pittsburgh. The league has had a track record, not only for handling housing and food matters during the 2004 Ivan crisis, but also because it has a housing counseling contract with the DHS, under which it serviced 17,312 persons last year on such matters as budgeting, settling disputes with landlords, security deposits, and other rental needs, as well as finding suitable housing for families to be reunited with their children after foster care placement. Also, Esther Bush was able to engender informational liaisons with Urban Leagues in the stricken Gulf Coast areas, as well as with National Urban League President Marc Morial, former mayor of New Orleans.

Some Katrina families stayed at the Pittsburgh Project’s dormitory on the site, while others resided with family or friends temporarily as the Urban League assisted them in finding permanent housing. The Urban League, working as a provider through the DHS, placed 55 families (135 adults and 67 children) in stable housing. Of these, 48 families now make their home in Allegheny County. Grants covering the first month’s rent and security deposit totaled \$57,467 as of December 1, 2005.

The league’s Hunger Services programs provided supplemental food allotments and food vouchers approaching \$1,000.

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In addition, league staff took calls from landlords offering available housing, scattered among hundreds of telephone inquiries from residents, groups, and businesses from Allegheny and surrounding counties, offering to donate furniture, household goods, and other assistance. One example cited by Bush: her own beautician, Debra Russell, offered “to do heads free.” Russell also recruited other beauticians and barbers to service evacuees, helping them to retain a sense of self-worth. That task later was turned over to the University of Pittsburgh Center for Minority Health at the Graduate School of Public Health because its director, Stephen B. Thomas, already had reached out to beauticians and barbers as natural allies in a variety of community education efforts.

Resettlement for many families raised the question of transportation. At that point, case managers would take a client to the Port Authority Transit (PAT) booth. Elicia Sutton, information administrator for PAT, says that once there was documentation as to where the client would be staying, monthly bus passes for September and October would be issued. The cost eventually would be reimbursed by FEMA, she explained.

Two organizations historically present in catastrophe situations, The Salvation Army and the American Red Cross, also had booths.

Ryan Miller’s responsibility for the Red Cross was to issue checks, where justified, for immediate needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. This also involved working with the Pennsylvania Department of Banking and local banks to set up checking accounts for people, especially those with long-term banking needs such as depositing FEMA checks when they eventually arrived.

Working off-site from the agency’s Downtown office created some problems because checks were being issued from both locations. But having a presence in the same room as other agencies was ideal in providing a

collaborative cross-checking of the validity of applicant needs, Miller found. He needed to be sure the person or family was from a damaged area in Louisiana or Mississippi and what other assistance already had been received.

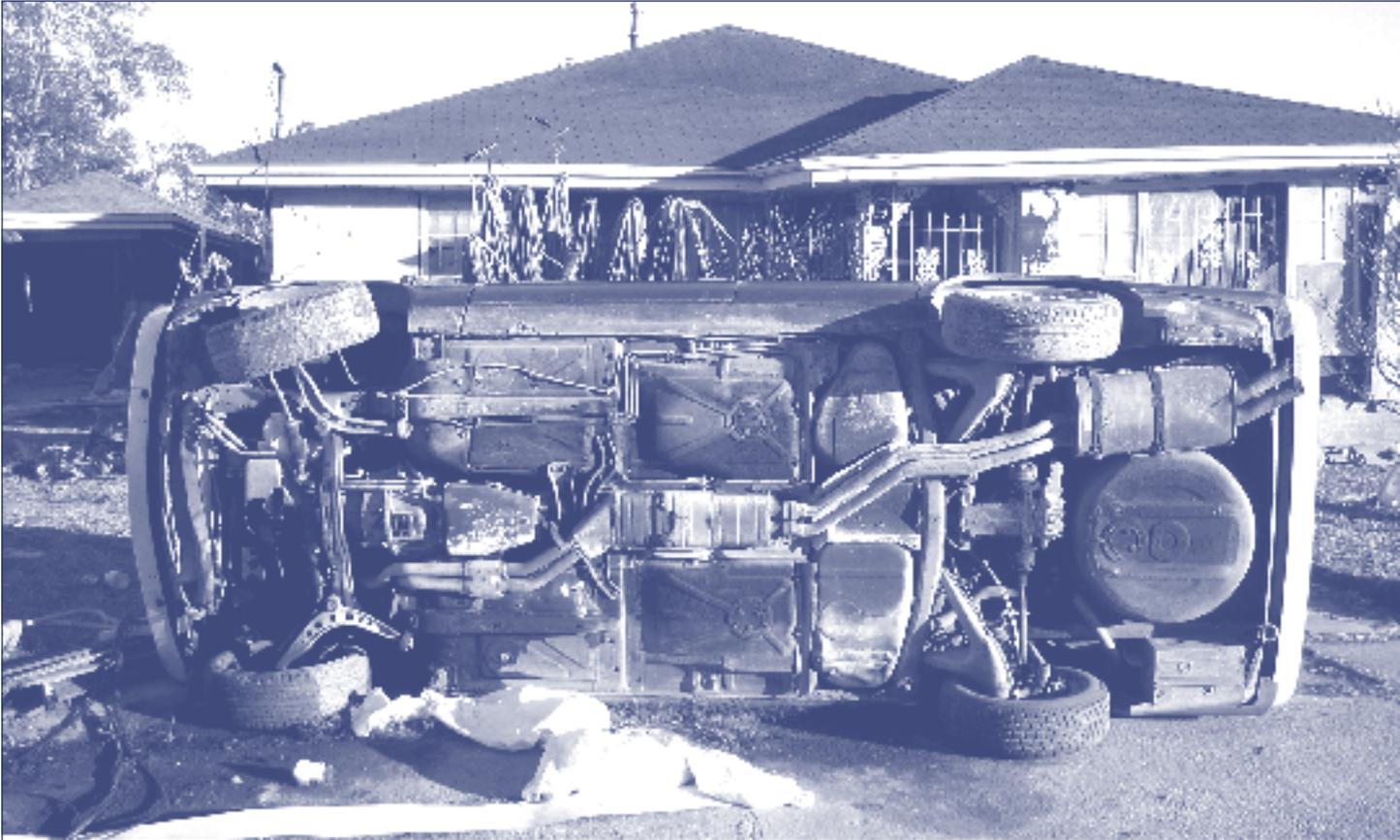
As a result of many years of experience, Miller said, the Red Cross gives a standardized check according to the size of the family rather than trying to determine how much is needed for food, how much for shelter, and so on.

In general, recipients were quite receptive, Miller said. To the few who griped, “We had to explain that we were not an insurance company. We can’t rebuild an entire house.”

Miller pointed out, “The collaboration with other agencies is essential to provide a wide and comprehensive approach to recovery. The Red Cross takes care of immediate emergency needs by providing an initial amount of money to take care of those needs. Often much more is needed; no one agency can rebuild all that was lost. The importance of partnerships with agencies such as The Salvation Army is exemplified when families are not covered by insurance.”

For The Salvation Army, Pittsburgh’s Katrina effort was different in one respect. Ginny Knor, the agency’s Western Pennsylvania Division director of marketing explains, “We were dealing with people who never had to ask for care in their lives. We had to be more aggressive to encourage people to do so.”

Knor said that in disasters there is “a sort of gentleman’s agreement” with the Red Cross, that it will offer the immediate aid a family would need in the first two or three days, with The Salvation Army coming into play after that with long-term needs such as utilities, clothing, food, and shelter.



Overturned cars littered the streets (and yards) in many areas. Photo courtesy of Lynn Coghill.

Activity was brisk enough that The Salvation Army had to hire temporary workers to answer calls asking for help or inquiring about aid. "Churches and community groups pitched in. It's very humbling that people put their trust in us as conduits," Knor said. "All faiths, all races. Lots of times it is people with the least income who give the most proportionately."

The gifts from the The Salvation Army's 28-county half of the state totaled \$2 million for Katrina aid, a sum particularly remarkable following the \$2.7 million donated for Hurricane Ivan victims in 2004.

Wes Kerlin, director of social services for the agency who manned the booth at the resettlement center, said evacuees coming there were "surprised at the Pittsburgh welcome and kindness. They were gracious about what

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was offered them. And we were surprised that they were not more emotional after what they had been through.”

Kerlin said he was impressed by the system of case managers “sticking” with the clients. “This was much different from Ivan.”

Jane Downing, senior program officer at The Pittsburgh Foundation, echoes this observation—that Pittsburgh, because of experiences with Ivan and other emergencies, has learned the need for follow-through beyond what agencies geared to a short term, emergency response can be expected to provide.

Money was a problem even for evacuees who had bank deposits back home. Two local banks—Citizens Bank at first, and PNC Bank later—set up professionally staffed booths. Katina Lee, Citizens Bank Bellevue, Pa., branch manager and a full-time volunteer, explained some of the challenges and procedures.

One problem was reestablishing a person’s direct-deposit capability back home for receiving FEMA checks and other funds. And reestablishing the validity of lost credit cards was an issue because most people had no idea what their account numbers were. Sometimes Lee was able to make arrangements for using the cards, with the personal identification number (PIN) number to be mailed in later.

In a great many cases, a person’s bank branch back home had been wiped out by the hurricane. Often Lee was able to work through the Pennsylvania Department of Banking to locate equivalent bank branches outside the flooded areas. The state agency also was able to connect with its sister banking department in Louisiana to learn about banking services and regulations in that state.

Lee was also involved in helping some people set up bank accounts here in Pittsburgh. “We had arrangements with management people. We’d arrange for

transportation to the bank and would call ahead that so-and-so was coming.” Like so many others at the Pittsburgh Project center, Lee said everyone worked to establish networks. “People who had worked at other emergency shelters said this was the best that they had seen.”

Another concern for many evacuees was unemployment compensation for lost jobs, including work at businesses wiped out by Katrina. In Pittsburgh, the Unemployment Compensation program of the state Department of Labor and Industry played a dual role, as described by Sandra Smith, director of the department’s Unemployment Compensation Service Centers.

First, the department sent people to Pittsburgh from its eight centers scattered across the state. Working with their counterparts in the Gulf States, these professionals helped evacuees establish credentials and fill out unemployment compensation (UC) forms. Second, Smith explains, her department used its state call center to handle calls and adjust claims to ease its overburdened counterpart in Mississippi (Louisiana got its help from California and Texas). She chuckles about accents: “They knew we were not from Mississippi.”

Later, the department sent four examiners to Jackson, Miss., to help directly for three weeks. Harriet King, from the call center in Duquesne, Pa., describes interviewing both employers and claimants, many of whom had lost all of their relevant papers. Banks were gone, complicating the direct-deposit system for UC checks. Because of destroyed post offices and the uncertainties of the mail system, couriers were used between Jackson and the coast. King went with a courier one time and saw firsthand “the tough times people were going through. But overall it was a rewarding experience.”

UPMC also sent professionals to the South. Through its connections with the U.S. Department of Defense,

it dispatched nurses to the Air Force's Wilford Hall Medical Center in San Antonio, Tex., and under the same arrangement would have sent them to the Keesler Medical Center in Biloxi, Miss., except that it was closed because of Katrina damage.

The state Department of Health also provided direct intervention in the form of ambulance crews—25 sent from Pennsylvania to the Gulf Coast in three different rotations. As explained by department spokesperson Richard McGarvey, Pennsylvania is one of the few states with a surge-capacity ambulance system. It involves grouping a cluster of nine to 15 ambulances from a given area with standard vehicles and crews but specifically designated as a standby group complete with a backup communications truck, available to go anywhere in the state where there is an emergency. The system was established in Pennsylvania in 2002 in recognition of the fact that this is a flood-prone state. But Katrina was the first time the Pennsylvania ambulances had been deployed to another state.

Beyond immediate necessities, a major concern for many evacuees was the matter of jobs, both short-term to acquire income and long-term for those who decided to remain in Pittsburgh. The city-county centers of the CareerLink agency assisted in this area. As the foundation of the Pittsburgh area workforce development system, CareerLink provides employers and job seekers with a one-stop service center, workshops, and such innovations as Language Line, providing access to translators of 150 languages.

At the Engagement Center, the object was to aid anyone prepared to look for employment in this region. The CareerLink booth could help evacuees with: access to computers and Internet hookups; searching through help-wanted advertisements and labor market and career information; registering in job systems; workshops and

intensive training sessions; and advice on resume writing and interview techniques. In these efforts, CareerLink partnered with Goodwill Industries, the Bureau of Workforce Development Partnerships, Life's Work of Western PA, the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, and various city and county agencies.

Whatever the track record of FEMA elsewhere, its presence at the Pittsburgh resettlement center added to the collaborative effort and results. Staffing the FEMA booth was Jon Janowicz of Philadelphia, a senior civil engineer from the human services branch of FEMA's Recovery Division.

Janowicz's responsibility was to assist evacuees with making their official registration for federal grant assistance. Offered to eligible applicants, grant assistance was to cover the expenses of immediate needs arising from the evacuation first, and then for rental assistance, home repair, and other needs. FEMA checks for immediate needs usually were for \$2,000 per family. "By no means enough," Janowicz said, but the grants were never intended to meet more than immediate, desperate needs. "No one should expect a FEMA grant to return to them the monetary equivalent of what they lost or suffered."

The official also found himself caught in the toils of bureaucracy when seeking answers. Often he would resort to networking with colleagues he knew could help. Janowicz said he would ask if there was some place he could have received assistance without bothering them. "Well, no," was generally the answer. Clearly, the problems of Katrina were bigger than anyone could have imagined.

DAYS 26 TO 30

The original plan had been to operate the center for two weeks. Ghubril and the Pittsburgh Project staff had held a party with a New Orleans festival theme on

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September 22 for all who had been involved in the concerted effort at that site. But in response to the numbers of people in need continuing to arrive, Cherna and the agencies involved decided to keep the center open for another week.

The center had 332 intakes by the time it closed September 30, and an additional 132 evacuees have registered with DHS since then, bringing the total number of individuals served to 464 at the time of this report.

With the closure of the Engagement Center, two summations of the entire project are worthy of note. One comes from a DHS newsletter, written by Director Marc Cherna:

“The success of the Allegheny County response to the hurricanes in the Gulf Coast region could not have happened without the expertise, diligence, and compassion of all of the DHS and Allegheny County staff involved, the volunteers and organizations that gave their time, and the federal, state, and local agencies and service providers who donated their expertise on-site at the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center and from their offices. This was one of the most gratifying projects I’ve been involved with. I’m so proud of everyone who stepped up and performed above and beyond what anyone could have expected. The generosity of this community was incredible. Seeing the appreciation of the displaced persons made it all worth it. The smallest deed was met with such enormous gratitude and appreciation. Individually and as a community, we received much more than we gave.”

The other reflection on the Pittsburgh story comes from an outsider who also worked on the inside, Philadelphian Jon Janowicz of FEMA. His assessment:

“The collaboration was phenomenal. Saleem [Ghubril] and Bob [Stumpp] really pulled it off. It was an excellent county-driven operation, and a model for what happens in the future.”



Local residents were forced to set up campers and tents in local parks as cleanup efforts continued weeks after the storm. Photo courtesy of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Without undue boasting, we may conclude that Pittsburgh's response to the 2005 Hurricane Katrina crisis was a bright spot nationally amid a swirl of mistakes and controversy at every policy level.

Before detailing some of the reasons for that success, let us single out some of the procedures and lessons that may be applicable elsewhere in such emergencies.

First, the concept of a one-stop shop—a central location where governmental and non-governmental agencies can have trained personnel available to help

evacuees (or refugees)—is extremely beneficial. Locally, it was designated as the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center. The concept of having centralized services available for clients—rather than the client having to run all over town to the various agency offices—enables agencies to effectively meet the needs of desperate people. The one-stop shop also makes for interaction among the professionals of the separate agencies present in addressing the multiple problems of a given client.

Second, the idea of assigning case managers—a specific professional for each individual or family arriving at the intake desk—also is extremely important. That manager not only guided the clients to the appropriate agency booths on their first day in Pittsburgh, but also is available to help throughout their Pittsburgh stay, for as long as he or she is needed.



Volunteers assist evacuees at the Astrodome in Houston, Texas.

The smooth Pittsburgh operation benefited from lessons—positive and negative—learned during the 2004 flooding of several creek-bank municipalities in Allegheny County caused by Hurricane Ivan.

To be sure, the Pittsburgh plan did not undergo the ultimate test of the anticipated planeloads of evacuees from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. But the preparations for that eventuality seemed ample. Moreover, these plans worked well for the surprise development—the hundreds of evacuees who arrived in Pittsburgh on their own, by car or bus, and who often were just as much in need of emergency assistance as those in the expected flights.

Looking toward an unwelcome “next time,” local officials say privately they hope for better rapport with both FEMA and PEMA. That is, during the Katrina crisis, they often wished they knew what to expect from FEMA and what they expected of us.

What Pittsburgh demonstrated that might be the envy of other communities was the ability and willingness of governmental and nongovernmental agencies alike to work together. It took one person, Edith Shapira, to set the “train” in motion, but after that the momentum was breathtaking and heartwarming. People here know each other’s capacities, something which enabled officials at Goodwill Industries and in the DHS to quickly draw up plans assigning specific duties to particular agencies. Pittsburgh’s organizations fell in line behind Marc Cherna, head of DHS. The buildings and atmosphere of the Pittsburgh Project proved to be an ideal location for the Pittsburgh Project Engagement Center.

The wealth of medical and social services resources available in Pittsburgh was amply demonstrated, as was the ability to harness various resources for the common good. Pittsburgh’s citizens should be proud of what their tax dollars, United Way donations, and other charitable contributions produced.

Again and again, people involved in the Pittsburgh response to Katrina testified to the excitement of those intensive days of work. “The best days of my working life,” said one volunteer. “This is what I went into social work for.”

It was this spirit and the administrative planning that, in the words of one participant, “showed Pittsburgh at its best.”

FRONT COVER: Satellite image of Hurricane Katrina provided courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Satellite image of Hurricane Katrina provided by the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies.