

# LIFE AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

A Brief on the Chicagoland Katrina Relief Initiative

August 2006





**IT HAS BEEN ONE YEAR** since those terrifying hours on the morning of August 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina began dismantling New Orleans. Thousands were left homeless. Many were stranded with no food or water for days. The images of the aftermath cast a light on government agencies caught unprepared and the pervasive poverty that had been hidden in the shadows.

When families arrived in Illinois, they were welcomed, but they couldn't escape the trauma of their experience, the grief and loss of their homes and loved ones, and a need to rebuild from absolutely nothing. Grateful for the reception they had received, these vulnerable families began the difficult process of integrating into their new, hopefully temporary, communities. With leaders such as Heartland Alliance and United Way of Metropolitan Chicago,<sup>1</sup> the relief and recovery initiative in Chicago was launched quickly. A unique model of collaboration, generosity, and expert service delivery was developed, helping these individuals and families address their urgent and more long-term needs.





**THE GOAL** of Chicago's Katrina Relief Initiative was to provide a comprehensive resettlement, relocation, and community integration response after the immediate crisis for hurricane evacuees. Chicago's response is now serving as a model for disaster recovery in other cities around the nation.

This summary briefly outlines Chicago's response for the evacuees, who came to Chicago, what services they needed, and what we have learned to better prepare for future crises.



RICKY AND JUNE used their last dollars for the first flight leaving the Gulf Coast: it's destination, Chicago. Ricky and June were lucky to survive as they had been without food and water for ten days. Once in Chicago, they were fortunate to be the recipients of free housing as they struggled to navigate the complex FEMA system. June is currently working and Ricky stays at home due to his fragile health. Just two weeks ago, Ricky and June got word the son they had been searching for for over 10 months, was alive and well in Texas.



## HOW DID CHICAGO WELCOME?

### POINTS-OF-ENTRY

Chicago's 311 System, which was implemented in 1999, handles telephone requests from Chicago citizens for city services and information about city events and programs. It is a 24/7 one-stop shopping center for all non-emergency services. The City's hurricane response began with a high volume of local residents calling 311 to offer temporary housing to the evacuees. Over Labor Day weekend, the City had Heartland Alliance make calls to the more than 1,000 people who had made housing offers. In a matter of hours, Heartland was able to match evacuees with appropriate housing. Additionally, United Way tapped its extensive health and human services network to identify housing capacity in the City as well as across the metropolitan Chicago region.

311 became one of three primary ways in which evacuees could seek assistance. Following the Labor Day weekend, the City began taking Katrina related calls within the 311 system. These calls included people offering housing or donations as well as evacuees seeking service. Heartland staff were connected to the 311 database and took over management of the Hurricane related calls.

United Way also created an intake system which could be accessed via the United Way website or by calling a United Way call center, both of which were publicized via advertisements on the radio and in local newspapers, urging evacuees to contact United Way if assistance was needed.

After initial intake, the evacuee information was forwarded to Heartland Alliance.

The third way evacuees accessed services was through the Heartland Alliance voicemail and email address that were set up specifically to handle evacuees.



## EVACUEE WELCOME CENTER

### *DURING SEPTEMBER*

The City of Chicago assisted with a coordinated response by opening a Welcome Center for evacuees. This welcome center, located at a Chicago Park District site, Fosco Park, became a one-stop for all the services that the evacuees would need, and initially operated 24 hours per day. Agencies represented at the welcome center included the Chicago Department of Human Services, Chicago Housing Authority, Chicago Department of Housing, Chicago Transit Authority, Chicago Department on Aging, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Department of Public Health, the Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Public Aid, Illinois Secretary of State, Social Security Administration, the American Red Cross, FEMA, Salvation Army, Heartland Human Care Services, Heartland Health Outreach, and others. United Way provided hundreds of volunteers.

Evacuees were screened, Red Cross assisted with debit cards, and people were linked to other services as needed such as donated temporary housing, clothing, showers, meals, health screenings, enrollment in public schools, and expedited Food Stamps. FEMA representatives were present but only able to assist with registration by telephone to other FEMA representatives at the FEMA 1-800 number. The registration data from Fosco was entered into an intake system and transferred to a spreadsheet for tracking and follow-up by the service providers.

LISA AND HER CHILDREN evacuated from McComb, Mississippi to Chicago, Lisa's hometown. Not only did Lisa have to survive the hurricane, but shortly after her arrival in Chicago, she became the victim of a stray bullet. Lisa was hospitalized and had a difficult recovery, but she is progressing well in spite of this additional set back. FEMA assistance did not arrive until late summer, but in the meantime Lisa had enrolled in the Transitional Jobs Program at Heartland. As a result of Heartland's assistance she now has a full time job and has moved her and her children, who are eagerly awaiting the start of the school year, into their own apartment.

**This collaborative one-stop model for accessing services is now being highlighted and replicated by the city and state for use with other populations and is being held up as a new model for disaster recovery response in other major cities around the country.**



# PUBLIC/PRIVATE PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

*STARTED IN EARLY SEPTEMBER*

United Way, along with Heartland Alliance, co-facilitated two organizing committees that met to craft the recovery process, and later, for fine-tuning and troubleshooting to ensure the work continued.

## Relocation Coordinating Council for Metropolitan Chicago

The Council, coordinated by Heartland Alliance, worked with members to develop a recovery plan for the evacuees that recognized that many would be struggling with lack of stable housing, trauma, culture shock, and lack of post-emergency resources. The Council convened through mid-November to ensure the service model was up and running.

## Service Provider Subcommittee<sup>2</sup>

A coordinator from Heartland Alliance worked with the Chicago Department of Human Services and United Way to identify partner agencies who needed to be involved, engaged them in the process, and kept communication open and flowing. This became the committee of the agencies providing the services to the evacuees, and served as a mechanism to identify trends and needs and distribute funds when needed. The weekly provider calls were critical for adapting the service response and solving problems. This Committee continued to convene weekly through the end of June 2006, and the partners continue to informally collaborate to this day.

### Services Provided to Evacuees

- Assessment and home visits
- Resettlement action planning
- Assistance with FEMA applications and ongoing navigation of the FEMA system
- Housing placement and retention
- Emergency housing assistance
- Household start-up subsidy
- Housing start-up (as needed: security deposit, first month rent, basic goods, utility start-up, essential furniture)
- Transportation
- Clothing
- Food
- Linkage to public benefits and assistance with applications (TANF, Section 8, Food Stamps, disaster unemployment insurance)
- Transitional jobs
- Community linkages (mental health care, senior assistance, healthcare, job referrals)

<sup>2</sup> This was originally called the Administrative and Solicitation Subcommittee.



## RECOVERY AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION SERVICES *STARTED IN SEPTEMBER AND FULLY OPERATIONAL BY EARLY OCTOBER*

In April, a notice was issued stating that FEMA funding for service provision to evacuees was ending retroactively on February 28, 2006.<sup>3</sup> However, the program continued uninterrupted through money raised by each service provider as well as significant funding from United Way through the end of June 2006. Services to the evacuee families with the greatest needs after June were no longer a part of the coordinated effort but all agencies continue to work together informally to provide ongoing service to evacuees.

Evacuees needed stable housing and to be linked with services— and this had to be done as quickly as possible. The partner agencies that came to the table needed to have the capacity and resources to provide services immediately. They needed housing expertise, housing resources, and experience with service linkage and case management.

The Chicago Department of Human Services (CDHS) contracted with Heartland Human Care Services to provide housing support services with everyone who came through the Welcome Center at Fosco Park. As the service intervention was developed, it was anticipated that FEMA would reimburse the City for at least some of the service costs, as they paid other resettlement programs around the country. **As of August 2006, FEMA has not paid the City anything for the services provided to the evacuees. For the duration of the program through June 2006, no government dollars were paid out to support evacuee services.** United Way provided grants and loans to cover the costs of select services, and the providers raised private donations to supplement the services. The United Way Hurricane Fund, totaling \$2.6 million dollars, has been the only source of large scale agency funding to the region to date.

Originally, CDHS was going to contract to provide services for evacuees in Chicago. However, it soon became clear that services were not up and running elsewhere in the region, resulting in a service gap for many evacuees. The City decided to fill the gap by giving approval to serve people who were in the suburbs — understanding that most of those evacuees either initially came through Chicago or the evacuees had the intention of moving into the city. City funds could cover services rendered, and United Way of Metropolitan Chicago was willing to fund services to those suburbs that fell within their service area.

<sup>3</sup> The service contract started with CDHS but was transferred to Chicago's Office of Emergency Management and Communications. The intent is for the City to be reimbursed by FEMA and FEMA set the February end date.



In addition to providing services themselves, Heartland Human Care Services subcontracted with four additional agencies who had the requisite capacity, expertise, and ability to provide services in the suburbs as well as the City: Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, Metropolitan Family Services, and Salvation Army. Heartland Human Care Services developed the housing relocation service model, created a tracking system, served as a referral clearinghouse to ensure that there was no duplication in services provided, and trained the other providers on what services they needed to deliver, paperwork requirements, and reporting requirements. Approximately 50 employees across the five agencies delivered the services. Additionally, The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law and the Legal Aid Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago provided legal expertise, when needed, for the evacuees.



Outreach to all of the evacuees who came through the Welcome Center at Fosco Park was done through a variety of ways. United Way and IDHS sent out a mass mailing to the evacuees on the Fosco list. In addition, the five partner agencies attempted four phone calls and sent out a minimum of one outreach letter to each family. In some cases, home visits were conducted.

In addition to outreach, services provided by the five agencies included the following:

- Assessment and home visits
- Resettlement action planning
- Assistance with FEMA applications and ongoing navigation of the FEMA system
- Housing placement and retention
- Emergency housing assistance
- Household start-up subsidy
- Housing start-up (as needed: security deposit, first month rent, basic goods, utility start-up, essential furniture)
- Transportation
- Clothing
- Food
- Linkage to public benefits and assistance with applications (TANF, Section 8, Food Stamps, disaster unemployment insurance)
- Transitional jobs
- Community linkages (mental health care, senior assistance, healthcare, job referrals)

## WHO CAME HERE AND HOW WERE THEY HELPED?

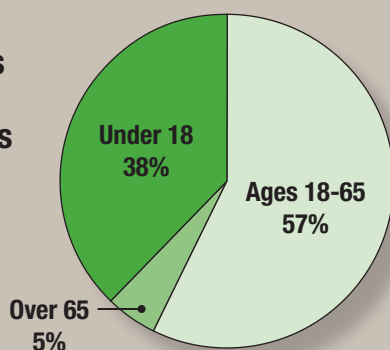
The majority of evacuees who arrived in Chicago had ties to the City. Many people had either been raised in Chicago or had relatives or friends who called Chicago home. For instance, Tamika\* moved from Chicago to Mississippi for college and settled there upon meeting her husband. When the hurricane struck, Chicago was the most logical option as her family could support her through the transition. Ruth\* and her elderly mother evacuated to Chicago where her sister welcomed them into her home. They continue to reside in the family home and consider it their permanent residence. Others chose to relocate to Chicago because they were unsatisfied with the services they received in other locations and had heard of the relief efforts in Chicago. Ervin\*, for example, first evacuated to Arkansas, next to West Virginia, and then to Nevada before finally settling in Chicago. Ervin is currently housed, working, and feels satisfied with the services Chicago offered.

Others who were evacuated to Chicago had very little choice. They boarded airplanes, escorted by the National Guard, and had no information about their final destination. Some were also picked up along the highway by buses sent by local Chicago churches. Initially many of the evacuees received services at emergency shelters and then either returned to the Gulf Region when it was safe or moved toward more permanent situations in the Chicagoland area.

### EVACUEES BY THE NUMBERS:

- Illinois received an estimated 9,000 evacuees, the largest number of evacuees outside of the South.
- It is estimated that over 7,000 evacuees from 3,500 households came to the Chicago area immediately after the disaster.
- 5,800 evacuees (2,900 households) were formally processed through the Chicago recovery effort.
- From September 2005 through June 2006, over 1,200 households received intensive services from the Chicago effort. These are households, for the most part, who decided to stay in Chicago and resettle here, though families who chose to return to the Gulf Region were also assisted by the Initiative.

**Ages of evacuees who received intensive services**



- As the coordinated effort ended in June 2006, just over 500 households were still receiving services.

\* indicates name was changed to provide anonymity to the evacuee.

## EVACUEE SERVICE UTILIZATION AND OUTCOMES:

**From September 2005 through June 2006, approximately 700 of the 1200 households reached their resettlement goals including stability in housing and income.** The results from these services include the following:

**Crisis resolution:** ensuring participants and all members of the household were working to heal and put their lives back together. This included navigating FEMA, assistance obtaining identification, linkages to trauma counseling, or returning to state of origin.

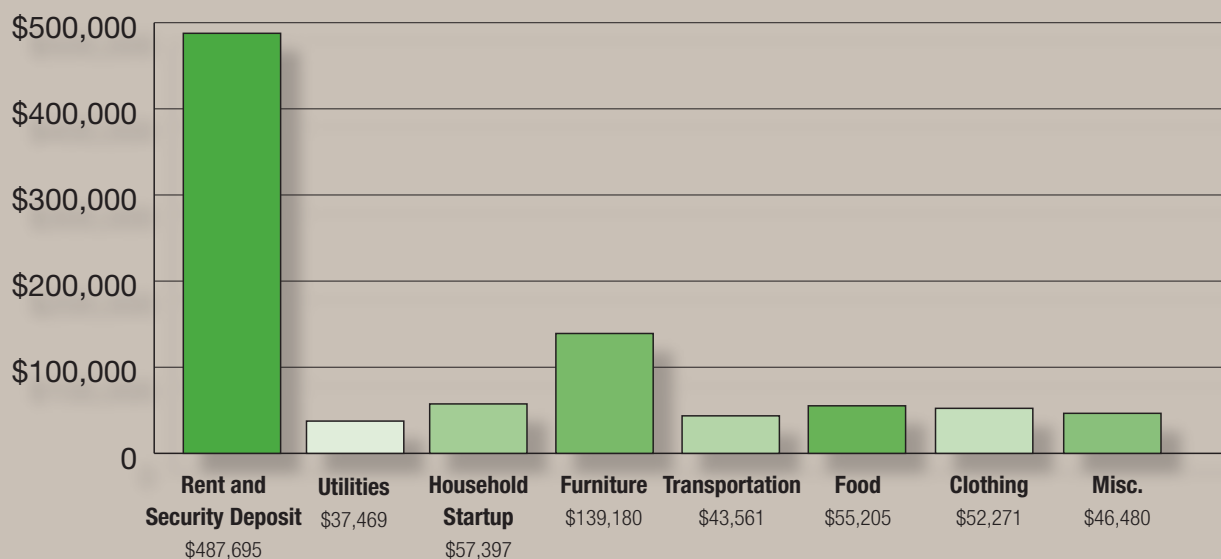
**Stability:** ensuring participants had access to stable housing, household start-up items, education, and support services as needed.

**Income:** ensuring that participants were employed and/or receiving any public benefits for which they are eligible.

**Community integration:** ensuring that participants received community information and were provided with an introduction to important Chicago services.

**The flexible recovery assistance provided by the Initiative, such as emergency rental assistance and household start-up gift certificates, was central to stabilizing the evacuee households.**

### Evacuee Recovery Assistance by Spending Category

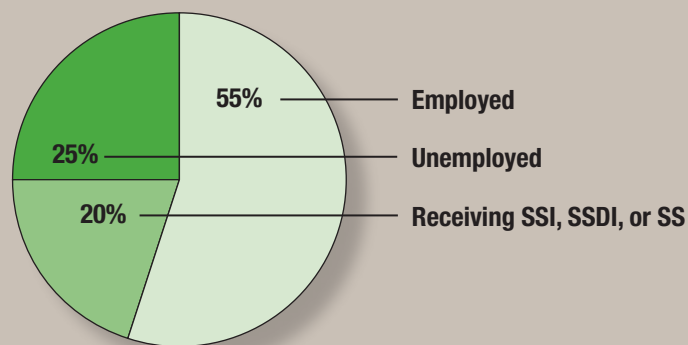




## HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND HOUSING STABILITY WERE A HALLMARK OF THIS INITIATIVE.

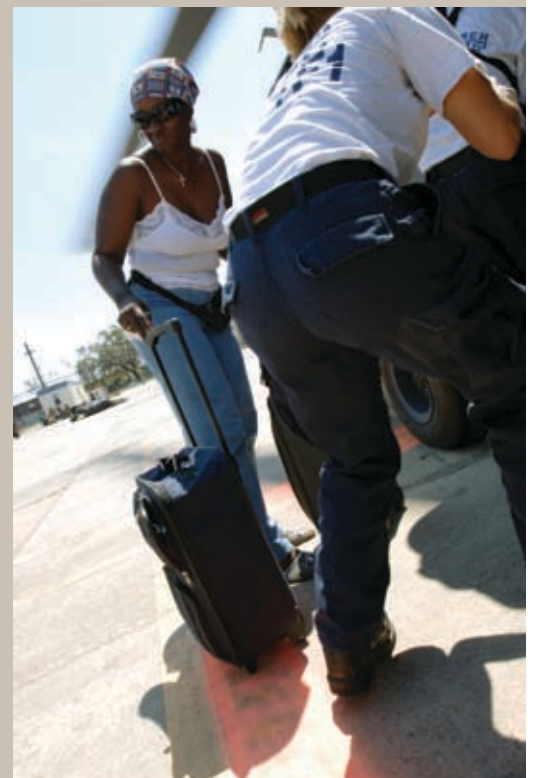
The majority of evacuees in Chicago landed in tenuous housing situations. Approximately 65% of the families evacuated to Chicago were at imminent risk of homelessness. Homelessness was prevented for all of them as a result of the recovery and community integration services, particularly the emergency rental assistance, assistance in expediting the FEMA process, negotiation with landlords, assistance in transferring housing vouchers, and other critical aid.

### Of the evacuees still residing in Chicago



**An intensive transitional jobs employment program has been added to serve those who are still unemployed.**

MARIE left the devastation of New Orleans for Chicago as the majority of her family lives in the area. But before her departure, she returned to her home in New Orleans to salvage her personal belongings. Her cat, who survived the storm, was anxiously awaiting her return. Upon her and her cat's arrival in Chicago, Marie encountered a variety of struggles including being forced to move from free housing. Ultimately, Marie found a place to call her own as well as a job at the University of Chicago. As Marie begins to feel at home in Chicago, and continues to receive FEMA rent assistance, her dreams of returning to New Orleans are no longer on the forefront of her mind.



## WHO IS LEFT AND WHAT DO THEY NEED?

While the emergency recovery phase has been successfully completed, more long-term service is still necessary. As the coordinated effort ended, just over 500 households were still receiving services for a variety of reasons.

A group of evacuees have had trouble adjusting to and securing employment in Chicago's labor market: the economy of Chicago differs greatly from that of the Gulf Region, a major adjustment for many evacuees.

- Evacuees who lived in the South were often able to sustain themselves by working periodically. Not only is this type of work more difficult to find in Chicago, it is also less likely to be enough income to maintain a household with Chicago's cost of living.
- People often relied on social networks to find employment, and these networks are not as strong or are non-existent in Chicago for many evacuees. One evacuee, Antar\*, had a job in New Orleans restocking cassette tapes in convenient stores and gas stations because a fellow Algerian connected him to the job, a relationship no longer available to him in Chicago.
- Many southern states are "right to work" states, meaning people can find work even if they are not a part of a union. Licensure was also not as stringent. For example William\*, who owned his own carpentry business in New Orleans, could not find work in Chicago because he lacked union membership and difficult-to-obtain licensures.
- The types of jobs available in Chicago are also very different than those in the South, such as those jobs related to ocean industry (boats, fishing, shrimping, etc.). Raymond\*, a professional fisherman, earned money in New Orleans each day based on the pounds of fish he caught. He has been unable to translate that skill to work available here in Chicago.
- A group of current evacuees in services are struggling with barriers to finding or keeping a job. These barriers include lacking formal job histories, having criminal records, limited job skills, and not having a high school diploma or GED.

\* indicates name was changed to provide anonymity to the evacuee.

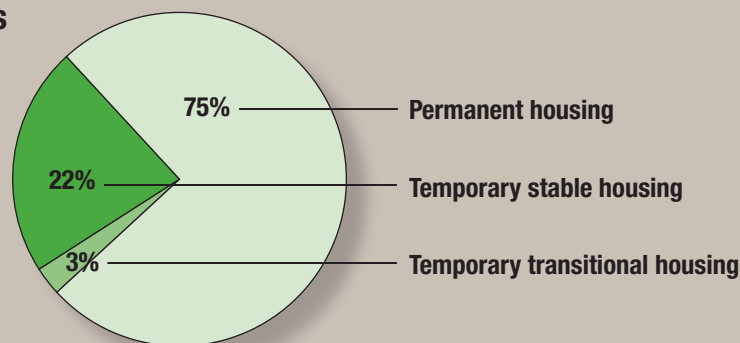
As FEMA assistance ends, people will be fully responsible for their own rent. **A specialized program has been made available for those experiencing the most difficulty finding jobs.**

Heartland Human Care Services received funding from United Way to provide transitional jobs for up to 125 evacuees that need extra assistance with employment, and direct job placement services for those that did not. Transitional jobs is a workforce strategy designed to overcome employment obstacles by using time-limited, wage-paying jobs combining real work, skill development, and supportive services to transition participants successfully into the labor market. Since March 2006, 49 people have been placed in a transitional job and 75 percent of them have moved into unsubsidized jobs. Approximately one-fifth of the participants in the transitional jobs intensive response have no high school diploma or GED.

### **Finding and securing stable and affordable housing is proving to be a formidable challenge for some evacuees:**

The majority of the current evacuees in services reside in permanent housing, meaning the evacuee household has a lease in their own name. However, not all of these situations may be affordable or sustainable over the long-term, particularly without various forms of support. Over one-fifth of the current evacuees reside in temporary stable housing with friends or family but are seeking to move into their own apartment or house. The rest are in temporary housing which is typically a hotel or temporary transitional housing but are seeking to move to a more appropriate and long-term setting.

#### **Housing status of evacuees still receiving services**



While most people were initially able to find housing, many later realized that it was not affordable based on their incomes. They are now forced to find housing they can afford and must move once again. The providers are continuing to locate affordable units, negotiate with landlords, move evacuees out of inappropriate housing, and assist financially with the transition.



**EVACUEES with prior histories of homelessness, mental illness, chronic health issues, drug use, and incarcerations are requiring a longer length of time in services.**

Some evacuees continue to struggle with issues that were present prior to the hurricane. These issues require a more intensive and longer-term intervention. These evacuees are being linked to treatment settings, the transitional jobs program, legal services, and other services as appropriate.

**For many evacuees there remains a high level of uncertainty about what FEMA assistance is available to them in the short and long term.**

The FEMA process continues to be an arduous battle that requires the support of ongoing case management services. Many evacuees have received some rent and/or personal property assistance for items destroyed in their homes, but continued rental assistance is certainly not guaranteed and requires the continual submission of documentation for quarterly re-certification.

**Evacuees who have had difficulty proving their eligibility for FEMA assistance are still arriving in Chicago.**

The five partner agencies continue to offer services to these vulnerable evacuees.

MILDRED, an 86 year old widow, was evacuated from New Orleans and came to stay with her cousin who lived in the South Shore area. She was recovering from breast cancer and needed continued medical treatment. Mildred's case manager connected her to a provider with an office close to her home in order to further her recovery. At the same time, Mildred worked diligently on her own and with her case manager to maneuver through the bureaucracy to secure the transfer of her Section 8 voucher from Louisiana to Illinois. She is now living comfortably in her own apartment. She has also been connected to a home aid that visits her regularly to ensure she can continue treatments.



## WHAT LESSONS WERE LEARNED?

- 1.** Timeliness in the response is essential. Local leaders across business, government, and non-profit sectors did not wait for FEMA to do what needed to be done. They responded immediately to craft an evolving response.
- 2.** Relief and recovery efforts depend on an effective role played by government. All levels of government must plan to work collaboratively and in a coordinated effort. Government must be prepared to make decisions quickly, operate during chaos and know how to manage that at the local, state, and federal level. Government must know the needs of different communities and how that will affect the impact of the disaster as well as the response efforts. The City of Chicago displayed how government can respond effectively and immediately in its strategic use of existing resources and its strategic partnering with skilled non-profits.
- 3.** Partnerships are critical to creating a rapid response and ongoing success. The public/private partnership was absolutely critical to Chicago's success. Maintaining open and constant formal and informal communications across partners is a key to the partnership's success.
- 4.** Non-profit capacity is essential for realizing a rapid response. The non-profit agencies that were central to Chicago's success had the capacity and resources to add and reassign staff quickly in order to provide services immediately, and had needed housing expertise, housing resources, and experience with service linkage and case management.
- 5.** Considerable financial risk was born by the non-profits and the City who committed to serve the evacuees. This risk and uncertainty is inherent in the recovery response as a result of government inflexibility and lack of responsiveness, primarily at the Federal (FEMA) level. It is unacceptable to place this financial burden onto non-profits who have limited financial flexibility.
- 6.** The timely infusion of significant private dollars were essential to crafting an effective response. The private dollars raised by United Way and the non-profit providers allowed the initiative to hire and train case workers and get them out in the field by October, six months before FEMA had a case management program to refer evacuees to. Without the support and leadership of United Way and private donations to the various agencies, the non-profits would have been extraordinarily limited in their ability to respond to and divert a pending social disaster.

**7.** Creative leveraging of resources and expertise that were already in place, without overtaxing systems, allowed the response to be rapid. By using the City's 311 call center and a large, modern Park District site, the initial response was immediate. The partner agencies that provided the resettlement services brought to the table resettlement experience, emergency management experience, housing expertise and resources, and employees trained in case management, so the learning curve and start-up time was short.

**8.** There is a group of critical services needed in order to effectively respond to the needs of evacuees. Vital services include rapid intake and referral to providers, intensive outreach, service linkages and case management, direct financial assistance particularly for housing, housing placement, and employment services on a spectrum of job placement to the intensive transitional jobs model.

**9.** The use of an information tracking system that is accurate, flexible, and user-friendly is central to an efficient recovery effort. This will enable responders to do their jobs more efficiently and will reduce access barriers for evacuees. Just such an information system helped prevent duplications and misuse of funds within the Chicago Initiative.

**BOUALEM**, an Algerian immigrant, had been visiting his wife in Algeria shortly before the hurricane struck. He had been back in the US only a short time and had little time to prepare for the storm. He sustained a variety of injuries during the hurricane and steep medical bills followed soon after. Ultimately, with his case manager's help, the medical bills were forgiven and now Boualem is able to save money while working to support his family. He is currently in school and counting the days until he can bring his wife to join him here in Chicago. While Boualem has been able to begin a new life here, it has been with very limited FEMA assistance.





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### **Organizations Instrumental to the success of Chicago's Katrina Relief model**

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Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights

Heartland Human Care Services

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Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

Metropolitan Family Services

Salvation Army

United Way of Metropolitan Chicago

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### **Photo credits**

Tony Armour p. 3, 7

FEMA p. 1, 2, 5, 10, 13, 15

**TO THE EVACUEES**

**Your strength and perseverance  
in the last year has inspired us all.**

**We wish you well.**



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