

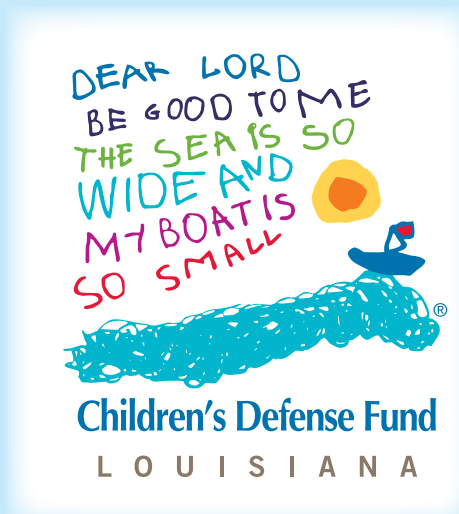


**WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE  
AFTER A DISASTER:**

Stories from Internally Displaced  
Children and Families of Hurricane Katrina  
and Their Lessons for Our Nation

A KATRINA CITIZENS LEADERSHIP CORPS REPORT  
COMMISSIONED BY THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND'S  
SOUTHERN REGIONAL AND LOUISIANA OFFICES

FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION



## O GOD, FORGIVE AND TRANSFORM OUR RICH NATION®

*O God, forgive and transform our rich nation where small babies and children suffer from preventable diseases and sickness quite legally.*

*Forgive and transform our rich nation where small children suffer from hunger quite legally.*

*Forgive and transform our rich nation where toddlers and school children die from guns sold quite legally.*

*Forgive and transform our rich nation that lets children be the poorest group of citizens quite legally.*

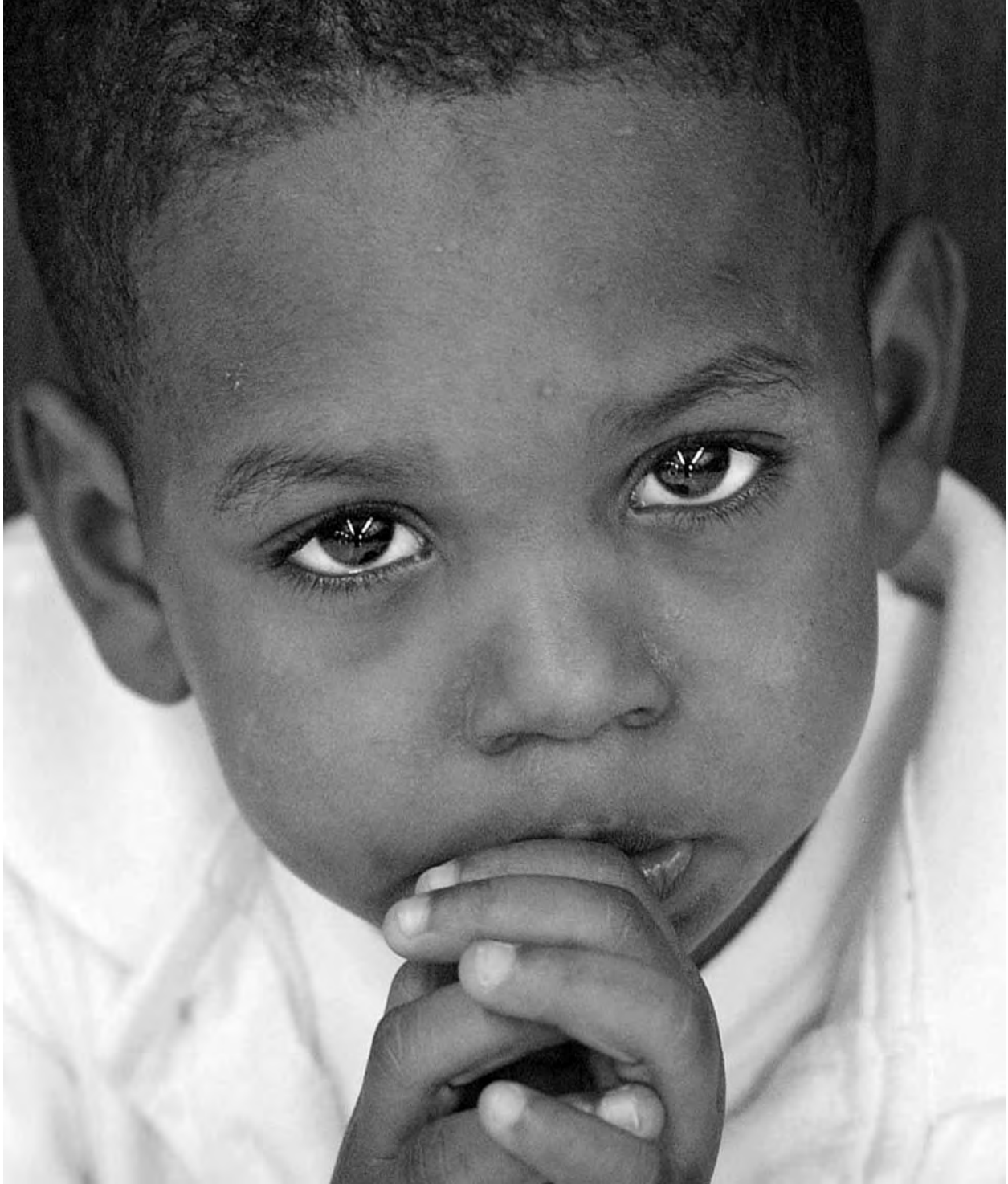
*Forgive and transform our rich nation that lets the rich continue to get more at the expense of the poor quite legally.*

*Forgive and transform our rich nation that thinks security rests in missiles and bombs rather than in mothers and in babies.*

*Forgive and transform our rich nation for not giving You sufficient thanks by giving to others their daily bread.*

*Help us never to confuse what is quite legal with what is just and right in Your sight.*

*Help us as leaders and citizens to stand up in 2009 for all Your children and give them the anchor of faith, the rudder of hope, the sails of health care and education, and the paddles of family and community to navigate the tumultuous sea of life and land safely on the shore of adulthood.*



*A young Katrina survivor finds little to smile about.*

---

**WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER**

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**W**e are grateful to Monique Harden, Esq. Director, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, and Tracie L. Washington, Esq. Director, Louisiana Justice Institute, who have served as Senior Consultants and authors of this report.

We are also appreciative of the leadership and guidance of Dr. Fleta Mask Jackson who worked with the Senior Consultants and contributing researchers in defining critical recovery issues faced by children and their families. The expertise and guidance will go a long way in helping Katrina's children and families in regaining hope and stability in their lives. For more information on CDF's Katrina related activities including the CDF Freedom Schools® program contact:

**Oleta Fitzgerald**

Director, CDF- Southern Regional Office  
2659 Livingston Road Suite 200  
Jackson, MS. 39213  
601.321.1966  
ofitzgerald@childrensdefense.org

**Mary Joseph**

Director, CDF-Louisiana  
1452 N. Broad St.  
New Orleans, La. 70119  
504.309.2376  
mjoseph@childrensdefense.org

**Dr. Jeanne Middleton-Hairston**

National Director of CDF  
Freedom Schools  
Children's Defense Fund  
25 E. Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202.662.3546  
jhairston@childrensdefense.org

Credits for pictures: Katrina Project-Perkins Photography, Broderick Webb



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Acknowledgements** .....2

**Dedication to Dr. Peter Dangerfield, Jr.** .....4

**About the Katrina Citizens Leadership Corps** .....5

**Foreword by Marian Wright Edelman** .....6

**Executive Summary** .....7

**The Standard of Care for Rebuilding the Village  
After Disaster & Displacement** .....9

**The Traditional Promise: You Will Fare Better Than Your Parents** .....12

    Displaced Family Providers – Struggling to Fulfill the Traditional Promise

    Displaced Children – To Whom the Traditional Promise Is Made

**Growing Up Displaced from Your Village** .....17

    Homeless & Jobless Families

    Yearning to Learn

    Healing Body & Mind

    Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline®

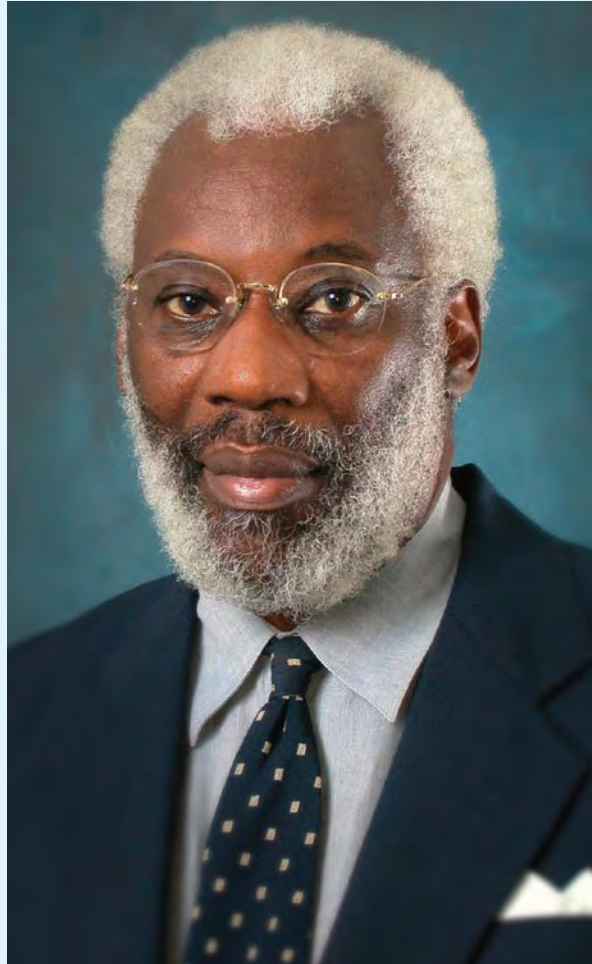
    Dear Mr. President: Displaced Children’s Letters to President Obama

**Recommendations for Rebuilding the Village** .....38

**Katrina Citizens Leadership Corps Membership** .....40

**References** .....41

## DEDICATED TO DR. PETER DANGERFIELD, JR.



### Dr. Peter W. Dangerfield, Jr. *1943-2008*

For 28 years Dr. Dangerfield served as director of the city's anti-poverty agency, Total Community Action, Inc. He was both an advocate and administrator for the poor and underserved of New Orleans, implementing innovative programs to reduce poverty and promote self-determination and self-sufficiency.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina Dr. Dangerfield turned his attention to repopulation and rebuilding and co-authored *Voice of the Poor: Citizens Participation for Rebuilding New Orleans*. His resolve to make the reduction of poverty an economic development priority was shown through his strengths as he researched best practices and advocated for the poor oftentimes from his hospital bed to adopt an official poverty reduction policy.

## ABOUT THE KATRINA CITIZENS LEADERSHIP CORPS

In 2007, with support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Southern Regional and Louisiana offices of the Children's Defense Fund organized Katrina Citizens Leadership Corps (KCLC) to mobilize residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region to restore and reclaim the hundreds of thousands of lives devastated in the displacement triggered by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The membership of KCLC is comprised of over 250 Gulf Region residents physically displaced in Houston, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; and Jackson, Mississippi; as well as Gulf Region residents who have managed to return to New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi. Like many other returned residents, they continue to have needs associated with their displacement.

A regionwide Katrina Citizen's Leadership Corp was organized to guide the development of this work. Members are citizen leaders with a great deal of practical knowledge in education, health and mental health, housing and public utilities, transportation, employment and youth services. In addition to the regionwide corp, local Katrina Citizen's Corps more heavily made up of affected citizen evacuee populations were formed in Atlanta, Houston, Jackson, the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and in Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

At the onset, KCLC sought to prioritize strategic approaches for addressing the entangled issues confronted by residents displaced by the hurricanes through the delineation of targeted issue areas. Initially, KCLC members articulated their own experiences, shared common and unique observations, and pooled their vast expertise to identify seemingly intractable obstacles to recovery. KCLC's work has evolved from problem identification to building consensus on strategic and intersecting recommendations for ending the displacement of Gulf Region residents. The task of KCLC is to develop broad strategies for achieving

recovery that are based on recommendations and action plans tailored to both the individual and group needs of displaced residents. KCLC endeavors to effect broader, more sustained structural change that can resolve the persisting injustices endemic to the Gulf Region and provide similar resolution for all U.S. citizens affected by disasters before and after Hurricane Katrina.

For this report, a team of experts — from various fields — was assembled to produce a series of reports on the targeted issue areas. Those documents, separately and collectively, form the basis of the Recommendations presented in this report. This report is representative of the collective knowledge and expertise of the KCLC. (Because housing issues are such an intractable challenge faced by citizens wanting to return home, a separate housing report, commissioned by KCLC from the Stennis Institute of Government at Mississippi State University, is issued as a separate companion report to this one.

*“While recovery is the broader rubric under which efforts to assist returnees is organized, Katrina has created an even larger impetus for improving the conditions of impoverishment under which significant numbers of young, old, ill, mentally ill and homeless struggled before Katrina. The storm exposed the rampant disparities eroding their lives.”*

—Fleda Mask Jackson, Ph.D.,  
Ama R. Saran, MSW  
*New Orleans and Gulf Coast Region  
Post-Katrina: Reclamation as Recovery*

# FOREWORD

## BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

In 2007, I wrote that Katrina's children and families were still waiting for their country to come to their rescue with life and hope, giving health and mental healthcare and a secure place called a home. Now nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina flooded their homes, schools, neighborhoods and took away their family members, pets, sense of security, trust in their nation and belief in their future, tens of thousands of children, teenagers and Katrina survivors are languishing in a purgatory of uncertainty.

Thousands of Katrina's children are still scattered across our nation, wondering whether they will be able to return home. Many who remained in their devastated communities find themselves homeless or temporarily living in overcrowded conditions or on borrowed time in unsafe FEMA trailers while housing reconstruction moves at a snail's pace, prices soar, and violence flares.



*What It Takes To Rebuild A Village After A Disaster: Stories from Internally Displaced Children and Families Of Hurricane Katrina and Their Lessons for Our Nation* seeks to align the standards accepted by the United Nations for internally displaced people abroad and bring those standards home to the U.S. so that children and their families will not continue or ever again experience the trauma associated with Katrina.

In this report, you will hear directly from children and their families on how their lives have been negatively affected indefinitely and immeasurably because of broken promises. Children need a stable place to stay and call home, a quality education, physical and mental health care and safe environments where they can thrive and prosper.

This year Congress and the Administration can ensure a national health safety net for all children with child appropriate health and mental coverage wherever they live. Many Katrina children are still suffering untreated post traumatic stress disorders.

It's time to say to our children, "We care for each of you." I hope this reminder that Katrina's children and their families are still waiting, still suffering, still looking to adults in our nation for protection and succor will make us all act now.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marian Wright Edelman".

Marian Wright Edelman  
*President, Children's Defense Fund*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If it takes a village to raise a child, what happens to children and their village when disaster strikes and the resources necessary for protecting the village against future disasters as well as rebuilding the homes, jobs, schools, child care centers and hospitals in that village are not forthcoming? This question is being answered through the lives of tens of thousands of children and their families who became displaced in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

No other American natural disaster, in recent times, has drawn such ongoing worldwide attention to the long, unremitting legacies of racism and structural poverty than the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. Race still matters with deadly consequences. Without transportation and monetary resources for temporary lodging away from home, significant numbers of African Americans were excluded from federally approved disaster response plans premised on the flawed assumption that residents could self-evacuate prior to the hurricane. More than three years after the storm, structural racism had grown

through the Bush Administration's response to the disaster. Deeply flawed governmental policies and practices developed soon after the storm include the demolition of affordable housing, inadequate home repair grants, public school and public hospital closures, and racial inequities in flood protection. Many people of color and the poor who survived Hurricane Katrina have found that recovery, like evacuation prior to the storm, has tremendous barriers.

It is time for a change in how our government responds to disasters. In letters to President Obama that are excerpted in this report, displaced children share their vision of what this change should be. These letters underscore the fact that displaced children from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast desire to be more than mere bystanders to the recovery of their communities. Turning the hopes and aspirations of children into reality requires laws and policies that meet their needs for family stability, housing, quality education, holistic health care (including culturally relevant mental health counseling), a sustainable environment, and secure places where they can play, explore, and develop their leadership — the basic components of a nurturing village.

Gulf Region residents struggle to overcome the obstacles to rebuilding their village, an experience that is shared among some 25 million internally displaced people around the world. However, for a significant number of displaced persons in foreign countries, our government promotes a different standard of care that recognizes housing, education, health care, employment opportunities, and participation by displaced persons in governmental response to a disaster as vital to rebuilding communities and ending displacement. This standard of care is established by the *United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* and the U.S. State Department's *USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy*, a foreign aid policy that is based on the Guiding Principles. Both



---

### WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

of these policies establish measures to adequately address the needs of displaced people. These policies prohibit post-disaster plans by governments that unjustly prevent the return of people of color and other marginalized groups to their communities. These policies also include protections for women and children against abuse and exploitation during displacement when the social safety net has been torn away. **The need for our government to adopt and implement these policies in America is critical to remedying the destabilizing effects of displacement suffered emotionally, physically, and financially by Gulf Region residents and ensuring that all people in America no matter who they are or where they live have the right to recover from a disaster.**

Notwithstanding tremendous difficulties, Gulf Region residents have made significant achievements in organizing their communities to repair and build homes, health clinics, small businesses, churches, parks, and community centers. New advocates have been borne out of a crisis to work with experienced advocates for coastal restoration, flood protection, and effective policies on environmental justice and climate change. Coalitions work to push for governmental accountability and voting rights, affordable housing, and better schools. Residents have helped to shape culturally relevant mental health services in schools, neighborhood centers, churches, and professional health settings. The movement-building that is taking place in the Gulf Region builds on the extraordinary self-sacrifice and support of ordinary people during the storm. A survey conducted by the Kaiser Foundation showed that the second highest response to the question of who rescued you during the storm was “a friend or a neighbor.”

According to the Kaiser survey, evacuees expressed hopefulness about their future despite the trauma immediately after Katrina. This sustained hopefulness is evident in efforts to address the concerns of children, the quintessential illustration of the future. The opening of a flourishing Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School® site in New Orleans is emblematic of the commitment to stabilize the lives of children through enrichment programming, health and mental services, and offering much needed

support for the families confronting the lingering issues of housing and employment, among the critical constellation of other concerns. As one mother, whose children are enrolled in the *New Orleans CDF Freedom Schools* programs affirmed, “I just don’t know what I would do without it. It is what my children need.”

The needs of displaced children should constitute a priority in moving our country to reject disaster response policies that prolong displacement, and instead establish a new standard of care that:

- adopts and implements the *United Nations’ Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* as the standard governmental response to a natural disaster that results in population displacement;
- establishes safeguards against displaced people becoming homeless or jobless;
- supports the development of displaced children through quality education and social services;
- ensures that displaced people can access holistic health care services, including trauma counseling; and
- dismantles the pipeline to prison by ensuring that every 4th grade student, not limited by special learning needs, is prepared to read at grade level or higher, and steering schools away from prison-like design features and equipment installation.



## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

# THE STANDARD OF CARE FOR REBUILDING THE VILLAGE AFTER DISASTER & DISPLACEMENT

KCLC learned through this work that the barriers to recovery experienced by corp members and their families, friends, and neighbors were so entangled as to make most attempts toward recovery, and especially for those who were most vulnerable, nearly impossible.

Governmental responses to Hurricane Katrina have been roundly criticized by Americans and people around the world for the failure to protect lives, provide urgently needed humanitarian services, and remove bureaucratic obstacles that prolong the displacement of people from the Gulf Region. Underlying these criticisms is the expectation of a standard of care that is not currently required by the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, a federal law that is implemented by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”). Notwithstanding the human suffering experienced and witnessed in the days following Hurricane Katrina, the response provided by then President Bush, however appalling, does not violate the Stafford Act. Likewise, the numerous governmental barriers to recovery — from the demolition of affordable housing, lack of employment, inadequate home repair grants, closing of schools and hospitals to racial inequalities in flood protection — are allowed under the flawed statute.

The Stafford Act places almost all disaster response, including emergency medical assistance and the reduction of life-threatening risks, at the discretion of the President of the United States. The Stafford Act also explicitly denies an individual harmed by a natural disaster the legal right to claim assistance or compensation for loss. The Stafford Act obligates state governments to undertake the primary responsibility for natural disasters. With varying success, state governments respond to the task of disaster recovery by negotiating with FEMA and lobbying Congress to waive requirements of the Stafford Act. Under the Stafford Act, people affected by natural disasters are subjected to widely different

governmental responses as chosen by presidents and negotiated agreements on waivers. In an effort to explain the governmental obstacles to recovery after Hurricane Katrina, an official in the State of Louisiana Homeland Security Office blamed the Stafford Act: “It’s not the city. It’s not the state. It’s the Stafford Act. The system sucks.” After much deliberation, the KCLC also finds that flaws in the Stafford Act have in many ways inhibited full recovery for many vulnerable families affected by disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

An alternative standard of care is established by the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, which define internally displaced persons as individuals who have been forced to flee their homes and communities as a result of a natural or human-induced disaster, but have not crossed a national border. Under this standard, displacement is not merely defined by physical space but by need. Thus, displacement ends when one no longer has needs associated with his/her displacement.

Furthermore, the *UN Guiding Principles* establish the duties of national governments and the rights of displaced people for the purpose of ending displacement and ensuring the recovery of people and communities. The duties of national governments range from preventing or at least mitigating the conditions that can cause displacement, prohibiting any form of ethnic cleansing that alters the racial, ethnic or religious composition of an area where displacement occurs, and providing specific assistance to displaced persons that includes, but is not limited to, housing, education, and health care. The rights of individuals include, but are not limited to, voluntarily choosing to return home, integrate in the area where evacuated, or resettle elsewhere in the country, as well as a right to humanitarian assistance, such as housing, food, health care, education, and other social services for the duration of their displacement.

The analysis that follows, prepared by Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, shows the stark differences between the Stafford Act and the *UN Guiding Principles* that rest on the conflicting perspectives on whether a person harmed by a natural disaster should have the right to recover.

The U.S. Department of State has chosen the standard of care in the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* as the basis for our nation's

foreign aid policy. The October 2004 *USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy* has been adopted because, according to the State Department, "USAID supports the goals of these principles, and will encourage its partners and host governments to use them as a practical reference." Pursuant to this policy, the U.S. Government provides a three-phase plan of action for ending displacement.

Recovery Issue	Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act	United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
<b>Should the federal government have primary responsibility for disaster recovery?</b>	No. States have primary responsibility for disaster recovery. The federal government's responsibility is limited to matters under exclusive federal control as established by the U.S. Constitution or federal law. All other federal responses to a disaster are discretionary acts that are completely immune from lawsuit. (42 USC §5191 & §5148)	Yes. National governments have the primary duty to prevent or at least mitigate the conditions that can cause displacement, as well as provide protection and humanitarian assistance to people who are displaced by a natural or human-induced disaster. (Principles 3, 5 & 25)
<b>Should people who have been displaced by a disaster have a right to humanitarian assistance and assistance to either return home or resettle?</b>	No. Individuals do not have a legal right to assistance. The federal government is not even required to provide essential assistance, which includes emergency medical care, reduction of immediate life-threatening risks, and housing. (42 USC §5170b)	Yes. All displaced persons have the right to request and receive protection and humanitarian assistance from governmental authorities as well as the right to voluntarily return or resettle in safety and with dignity. (Principles 3, 25 & 28)
<b>Should displaced people be protected from governmental actions that result in discriminatory impacts?</b>	No. Federal courts have limited the prohibition against discrimination to an intentional act of discrimination, not an act that results in a discriminatory impact. ( <i>Sandoval v. Alexander</i> , U.S. Supreme Court, 2001)	Yes. Displacement that is aimed at or results in "ethnic cleansing" or altering the racial, ethnic or religious composition of an affected people is prohibited. Displaced persons have a right to governmental assistance and protection that does not intentionally discriminate or result in a discriminatory impact. (Principles 4, 6, 18 & 24)
<b>Should displaced people have the right to housing, education, and health care?</b>	No. Housing assistance, temporary educational facilities, and health care services are provided at the discretion of the federal government. (42 USC §5174(b), §5174(c) & §5170b.a.3.D)	Yes. Displaced persons have the right to housing, education, and medical services that requires the government to provide temporary housing for the duration of the displacement, support for the rebuilding of permanent homes; educational and training facilities, and medical services, including mental health care and social services. (Principles 18, 19, 23, 28 & 29)

**WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER**



## USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy

### Phase 1: Humanitarian Assistance

- Provide housing, food, water, sanitation systems, and health care
- Provide access to education, vocational training, legal documents, trauma counseling, locating families, microcredit, and improving self-reliance

### Phase 2: Return & Transition Assistance

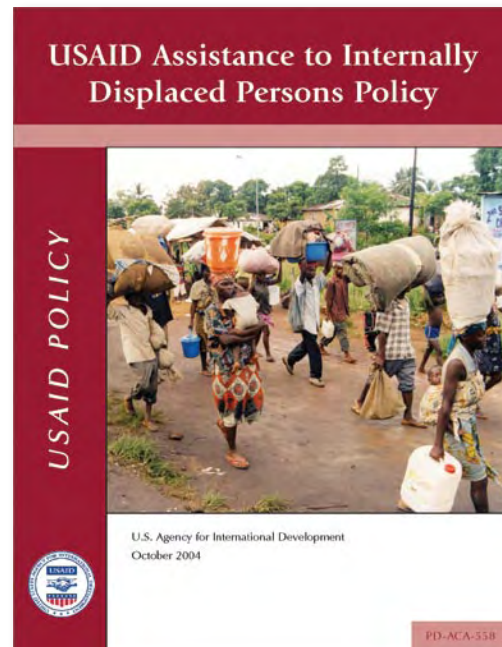
- Provide transportation to return home
- Help to reclaim land and rebuild homes and businesses
- Support for establishing accountable government and participation of internally displaced persons in public affairs
- Provide safeguards that protect the rights of female-headed households

### Phase 3: Long-Term Development Assistance

- Construct infrastructure, health systems, and schools
- Develop modes of transportation and transportation routes
- Provide access to vocational training and business loans

The State Department's policy is consistent with the international work undertaken by different administrations of the U.S. Government. Since several years prior to Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Government has led the way for the United Nations to develop the *UN Guiding Principles* as the standard of care for people who are uprooted from their communities by a natural or human-induced disaster. As a member of the United Nations, the U.S. Government co-sponsored resolutions that recognize the *UN Guiding Principles* as "an important tool for dealing with situations of internal displacement" and welcome the fact that an increasing number of countries "are applying them as a standard."

Both the *UN Guiding Principles* and the USAID policy recognize housing, education, health care, and employment opportunities as vital to rebuilding communities and ending displacement. Without these measures to adequately address the needs of



displaced people, recovery is unlikely. People of color and other marginalized groups typically encounter the injustice of post-disaster plans that remove them from their communities. Women and children are more likely to face abuse and exploitation during displacement when the social safety net has been torn away. Such adverse conditions are exacerbated by prolonged displacement, which as recognized in the USAID policy, creates significant setbacks in a person's education, health care, and livelihood that can have detrimental effects on future generations. The ramifications of prolonged displacement are dire especially for African American children and families in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, who have experienced the injustice of racial inequities in disaster response plans and suffer abuse, neglect, and exploitation as a result of the social breakdown.

Displaced children and adults of the Gulf Region need a standard of care that ensures their recovery. Such a standard already exists in the form of the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.

KCLC has served to distill the concerns and recommendations of the Gulf Coast's internally displaced residents. Their lessons for our nation endorse a change to our standard of care and for our government's response to a natural disaster or emergency that uproots people from their communities.

---

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER



## THE TRADITIONAL PROMISE: YOU WILL FARE BETTER THAN YOUR PARENTS

An enduring creed of American society is that, through hard work and perseverance, mothers and fathers can ensure a better life for their children. For most of our history as a nation, families strive to fulfill this traditional promise. But prolonged displacement from one's home and community can break this traditional promise.

More than three years ago, Hurricane Katrina disrupted communities in the Gulf Region, displacing approximately one million residents, and leaving families and individuals without the supportive social networks they have relied upon for generations. Unlike other natural disasters in the United States, Hurricane Katrina forced people to leave their communities indefinitely.

How can displaced people even aspire to the traditional promise without the village — when basic family support, social services and opportunities are cut off? What does it take to rebuild the village in a way that the traditional promise can be fulfilled in the aftermath of a disaster? These questions cannot be answered without an understanding of the hardships faced by displaced New Orleanians and Gulf Coast residents, who are the providers and protectors of their families and the children to whom the promise is made.



### Displaced Family Providers – Struggling to Fulfill the Traditional Promise

Displacement erodes family stability and cultural traditions. Katrina survivors have a commonly shared passion for the unique cultures of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast that have been developed by their families over many generations. Separation from one's family members and culture are losses that compound the stress experienced by displaced family providers, especially the elderly, who struggle to adjust to life away from the places they call home.

*Although significant strides toward recovery have been made, one of the most serious problems facing communities is the rebuilding of the housing destroyed by Katrina.*

—Judith Phillips, PhD.

“I am the senior leader of my family and the one responsible for keeping everyone together spiritually and emotionally. Katrina happened and scattered my family from Texas to Georgia,” said Ms. Christine Smith, a grandmother who now lives in Lithonia, Georgia. “The initial adjustment at age 69 was very frightening for me. New Orleans culture was missing along with my family members when I moved to Lithonia, Georgia. To adjust with part of my family living in New Orleans and the other family members living in Georgia is very difficult,” she said.

Gilbert Cook, a father of three, moved his family five times before settling in Georgia. “Every time we move it takes a toll on my family,” he said. “Because they know what it felt like to be home in New Orleans where they were rooted in family and tradition. I still find myself getting sad when I think about New Orleans and my family who I miss

### WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

dearly.” Mr. Cook says that finding a permanent job and affordable housing continue to be his biggest challenges.

Family stability requires access to affordable, permanent housing. Many displaced families interviewed for this report described the stress of having to pay significantly higher rent, which leaves them with insufficient income to pay for child care centers and schools or the costs of medical emergencies. Others discussed the anxiety they feel with impending foreclosures and the expiration of rental assistance provided by the government.

Maude Perryman, a 65-year-old grandmother, asks, “Where do I go from here?” She has relocated to Jackson, Mississippi, where she is raising four grandchildren without any assistance and without the support of her village. One of her grandchildren is mentally ill. She is currently facing foreclosure on her home, and her lien holders have told her that they need \$8,000 up-front or she and her family will be out on the streets. There is no social safety net.

Zaneta Jones’ family struggles each month to pay for food, education, and health care. She, along

with her family — her husband and 4-year-old son — moved several times after Katrina, ending up in Snellville, Georgia. “We live paycheck to paycheck, and in between the checks, it is extremely tight and difficult financially,” she said. Zaneta takes night-school classes in cosmetology and earns a little money by styling hair in her home while caring for her young son. Although her husband works, his income is not enough to meet their needs. Zaneta would prefer to enroll her son in a learning child care facility, but the tuition is too expensive. The family’s only car has frequent mechanical problems that they cannot afford to repair. Temporary Medicaid benefits issued to adults after Hurricane Katrina have been terminated, leaving Zaneta and her husband uninsured and in fear of a medical emergency. “My husband’s check and my little contribution are hardly enough to keep us afloat. We struggle to keep the car running, pay utility bills that are higher than we had in New Orleans. The rent takes up most of the money my husband earns for the month.”

April Smith lives in a house in Stone Mountain, Georgia, that she can only afford with a voucher she receives from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). She worries that when the program ends she will be forced to find another place to live. “They never send me any letters or keep me informed about the status of the program,” she said.

An additional obstacle to permanent housing is the difficulty that displaced people have in finding steady employment. Stacey Matthews, who evacuated from Hahnville, Louisiana to Lithonia, Georgia is dismayed about the upcoming termination of HUD’s Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), which was scheduled to terminate at the end of February 2009, but was recently extended for an additional two months. “I feel excited about possibilities I have here in Georgia,” said Ms. Matthews. And although she’s hopeful, she recognizes that “it’s not always easy.” In October 2008, she was laid off from her job and has not yet found another job, which puts her in jeopardy of losing her apartment when DHAP ends. “I hate to have to uproot my babies again,” she said. “I think they should extend it until May at least. This way kids can finish the school year.”

*But a conversation I had with one woman captured the realities that are settling into these families as they face the future. She told me “We had nothing before the hurricane. Now we got less than nothing.” We had nothing before the hurricane. Now we got less than nothing.*

*In the coming weeks, as the images of the immediate crisis fade and this chamber becomes consumed with other matters, we will be hearing a lot about lessons learned and steps to be taken. I will be among those voices calling for action.*

—September 6, 2005

Statement of Senator Barack Obama  
Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts

Julian Smith, who relocated to Stone Mountain, Georgia, is also hopeful. “With the grace of God and others, we will survive,” he said. But at this point, he explained, he can’t make it. “I don’t make enough money to support my family and our living situation.”

David Graham, another evacuee living in College Park, Georgia, also expressed hope despite his financial strain. “By the grace of God I still manage,” he said. It took him two years to find a job in Atlanta, but “I still struggle to pay bills.”

Bandaka and Lyle Soule evacuated to Jackson, Mississippi, due to Hurricane Katrina. Lyle drove trucks in New Orleans, and was able to find similar employment in Jackson. While driving on his truck route, Lyle had a medical emergency. The doctors found a tumor on his optic nerve that caused him to be permanently blind. Doctors explained to Lyle that the stress of Hurricane Katrina caused the cancerous



lump to grow rapidly. Lyle was the only financial provider for his family of three. He was referred to the Mississippi School for the Blind where his case worker enrolled him into Medicaid and also found funds through Hurricane Katrina Assistance for his schooling and medical needs. Lyle’s wife Bandaka finally secured employment after several long months of no income. The family has recently become accustomed to their new life, however, every day is still a struggle.

Shirley Scieneaux, a senior citizen from New Orleans, has tried to make the best of her displacement. She lives in an apartment and is active in her church in Lithonia, Georgia. But like many older displaced New Orleanians, Shirley has found it difficult to adapt to the cultural differences, to the point where her health has deteriorated. In New Orleans, she developed relationships with her health care providers, who saw her as a friend, not a client. In Georgia, she hasn’t found a doctor with whom she feels comfortable.

Like many Katrina survivors, Cora Murray has resolved to make the best of her situation. “With prayer, I will make it,” she says. But her story is riddled with hardship. When the levees in New Orleans broke after Katrina, Cora was visiting relatives in California. Her husband was first evacuated from a New Orleans nursing home to a facility in Baton Rouge, and was later sent to a facility in Georgia, where Cora moved and lived with her daughter for a short time. “I needed my privacy,”

*Many small offices, non-profits, and small businesses that afforded employment opportunities for seniors have not reopened. Programs that utilized volunteers such as hospitals and schools are closed. In addition, the amount of time required by seniors to rebuild their lives has reduced the spirit of volunteerism. Therefore, the government must (1) provide assistance to small business owners to get financing to reopen businesses and provide employment opportunities for seniors; and (2) develop a peer counselor volunteer group of seniors who are capable of assisting other seniors who need help accessing resources to rebuild.*

—Arthemese Bloxon-Melancon, LCSW, DCSW

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

she said, so she rented an apartment, but still she fell into depression and was put on medication for it. A year later, her husband died. Only then could she bring him back home to be buried in a family tomb in New Orleans.

Family separation, unaffordable rents and home mortgages, unemployment and under-employment, medical emergencies, and moving multiple times are not only destabilizing displaced families, but can extinguish the promise that children will fare better than their parents. The gains made by parents to secure a better future for their children are eroded by the condition of displacement that makes each day a struggle.

### **Displaced Children – To Whom the Traditional Promise Is Made**

Among displaced New Orleanians and Gulf Coast residents, some of the most important voices are those of the younger generation: the children removed from familiar communities and schools and forced to rebuild lives elsewhere. While some of these voices express hope, others remind us that there is still much work needed to be done to place our children on the right track for a brighter future. Some children and their families feel torn: they grieve for their lost homes, their friends, and their culture, but they don't want to leave the better schools and communities they have experienced while displaced.

Kierston Johnson, a high school student whose family evacuated from Hahnville, Louisiana, for Lithonia, Georgia, feels as though her life is better in the Atlanta area, which offers more programs for children her age. "I like the schools here too because they got more stuff to get into," she said. "At my high school we have a barber shop, hair salon, auto shop, TV station, nursing, visual arts, and programs that take you outside the school and get you involved in the community." She also likes her neighborhood better than the one she left in Hahnville, which "was hard for me," she said. "In the neighborhood we live now, nobody is selling drugs on the corner all night. I have not seen any crackheads since we been here."

April Smith, a young woman who relocated to Stone Mountain, said that she sees more opportunity in Georgia. "I was able to attend college and I have already graduated," she said. She also sees wider opportunities. "I feel I have a better chance to start my own business here," she said. "I love that when I go to the doctors or school, all I see are faces like mine. Back home it was rare to see African Americans in those types of positions."

But the readjustment has been a challenge for many children from New Orleans who were displaced. "I have been having a lot of difficulties ever since I evacuated from New Orleans," said Terrian C. Jones, whose family ended up in Snellville, Georgia, after many moves. "I have gone to many different schools. (Just) when I got used to a school, the teachers, and friends, we had to move to another house," he explained. Terrian hasn't adjusted to the new location and wants to go home — "hopefully very soon."

Student Jhari Johnson of Lithonia, Georgia, has also moved often. "Going from place to place does not give me time to get to know anyone," she said. Yanked out of her community, made up of people who had a shared history, she finds her new community almost foreign and can't always relate to the people there. "Down here, it's harder to trust others."

But children whose families have managed to return home after Hurricane Katrina have also faced difficulties. They live in a city where much of what



---

## **WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER**



they knew was destroyed. Their parents struggle to obtain steady employment and live in inadequate housing without enough food.

After a three-mile walk to the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center during the days following Katrina, Teddy's family ended up in Houston, until the shelter there closed, forcing them to camp for awhile under a nearby bridge. They returned to New Orleans, but found that their rental apartment and all of their possessions had been destroyed. So they rented another apartment from the same landlord but had no food and slept on the floor. The grim conditions have taken a toll on Teddy, who has become withdrawn. His teacher reports he is very quiet in school and rarely speaks.

These are the stories of the Katrina diaspora. Their poignant struggles with employment, cultural adjustments, health care, school systems, child care, and housing are struggles that cannot go unnoticed as we try to rebuild homes and communities, which cannot be rebuilt without them.





## GROWING UP DISPLACED FROM YOUR VILLAGE

If it takes a village to raise a child, what happens to that child when the village is destroyed, and the resources necessary for rebuilding the homes, schools, child care centers, and hospitals in that village are not forthcoming? This question is being answered through the lives of tens of thousands of children who became displaced in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. They now share a fate that has been experienced globally by 25 million people who our government and the United Nations have sought to protect through a standard of care that is missing from the governmental responses to Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters.

Displaced children from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast desire to be more than mere bystanders to the recovery of their communities. They wish to be actively engaged in creating the vision for their future and the places they call home. Turning their vision into reality requires laws and policies that meet their



needs for family stability, housing, quality education, health care, a sustainable environment, and secure places where they can play, explore, and develop their leadership — the basic components of a nurturing village.

As discussed in this section, the negative consequences of displacement, which widen and deepen the cycle of poverty and structural exclusion, can be ameliorated with the implementation of the standard of care established by the *UN Guiding Principles* and the USAID policy. This section concludes with the excerpts of letters written to President Barack Obama by displaced children of the Gulf Region.

### Homeless & Jobless Families

Florida's family was separated after Katrina. She was evacuated to Memphis, Tennessee with her daughter but she was unable to reach her young sons, who were left behind with other family members in New Orleans and were eventually evacuated to Texas. The family is now back together in New Orleans, but they face daunting challenges. Florida was working as a security guard prior to Katrina. Upon her return to New Orleans, she was re-hired but unable to keep the job because of days missed as a result of her son's asthma attacks, which are now worse and more frequent than they were before the storm. Florida later found employment at McDonald's, but her income was not enough to pay the bills even on a good week. Florida is currently not working since she just had a baby after a difficult pregnancy that prevented her from working.

The effects of poverty are debilitating on any community and exacerbated in the South, where tax bases are often insufficient to support necessary institutions that undergird a social safety net. In the South and along the Gulf Coast, many working residents are uninsured. Communities are plagued

---

### WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

by crime, failing schools, underemployment, and environmental hazards. All of these conditions create vulnerable communities with intergenerational poverty that has worsened in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Before Katrina struck, 38 percent of New Orleans children lived in poverty, which is more than three times the nation's official poverty rate for the year 2007. The Gulf Coast states make up one-third of the nation's population, yet it is the poorest region in the country, where more than 15 percent of the population lives in poverty.

- The poverty statistics for children and families illustrate the fact that there is a tremendous amount of work to be done to bring stability to their lives. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than half of the nation's 24 million children under the age of 6 live in low-income households.
  - 43 percent, an estimated 10.6 million children, live in low-income families.
  - 21 percent, an estimated 5.2 million children, live in poor families.
- But the official federal measurement for poverty is woefully inadequate. In 2008, only half of the income necessary for families to meet their basic needs was reflected in that measurement, the federal poverty level is set at \$21,200 annual income for a family of 4; \$17,600 annual income for a family of 3; and \$14,000 annual income for a family of 2.
- Between 2000 and 2007, the number of poor children increased by 15 percent. The poverty rates are greater for younger children.
  - 43 percent of children under 3 years of age, an estimated 5.4 million children, live in low-income families.
  - 43 percent of children 3 and 4 years of age, an estimated 3.5 million children, live in low-income families.
  - 42 percent of children age 5 years, an estimated 1.7 million children, live in low-income families.
  - 39 percent of children ages 6 through 11

years, an estimated 9.3 million children, live in low-income families.

- 35 percent of children ages 12 through 17 years, an estimated 8.9 million children, live in low-income families.
- Despite the stereotypes that stigmatize poor people as “lazy” and “unwilling to work,” the fact is that poor families do work. Most low-income children live in working households.
  - 51 percent of children under age 6 in low-income families; an estimated 5.4 million children, have at least one parent who works full-time, year-round.
  - 29 percent of children under age 6 in low-income families; an estimated 3.1 million children, have at least one parent who works part-time or full-time, part-year.
  - 20 percent of children under age 6 in low-income families, an estimated 2.1 million children, do not have an employed parent.

The Katrina Citizens Leadership Corps collected the stories behind these statistics, which underscore the principal challenges facing displaced residents of the Gulf Region: high unemployment, scant economic opportunities, and the lack of affordable housing.

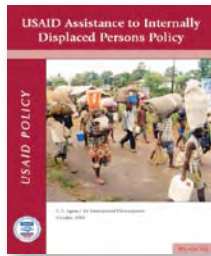
*The National Center on Family Homelessness identifies America's children as living in abandoned cars, under bridges, and in crowded shelters. Usually they are with their mother. In New Orleans, there has been a rise in homeless teens.*

—Beverly C. Favre, Ph.D.

## Challenge: Employment and Economic Opportunity

“Before Katrina I was a billing manager. Now I am unemployed, living on food stamps. I can’t provide for my family like I did before: clothes, shoes, toys, all the things we had before Katrina. I’m not used to this. I always worked.” – KCLC member living in Atlanta

“I have a better job after Hurricane Katrina, but the cost of living in New Orleans is now so high I can’t keep up. Clothing, food, rent – it’s all so much more expensive after the storm. Because the (New Orleans) schools are so messed up now, I have to pay for private school, and so that’s where all my money goes.” – KCLC member who has returned to New Orleans



Based on the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, the U.S. Government’s foreign aid policy for ending displacement includes a commitment to providing displaced residents with access to vocational training, assistance to improve self-reliance, and assistance to secure employment.

In Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath, several hundred thousand former residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast lost their jobs. Many of these residents have already or will soon find new jobs on their own, either in New Orleans or elsewhere. But others need help returning to the workforce.

The right to work, free choice of employment, just and favorable working conditions, protection against unemployment, as well as the right to just and favorable compensation for work that ensures an existence worthy of human dignity for the worker and his/her family are fundamental human rights.

However, long before Hurricane Katrina, many New Orleanians had trouble getting jobs and remaining employed. In 2004, the unemployment rate in New Orleans was nearly 12 percent, twice the national average. During that same year, the poverty rate of individuals in the city (at 23 percent) was 10 percentage points higher than the national average, and the median family income was only two-thirds of the national average.

For many, the employment problems facing displaced residents are a result of both the concentration of jobs in the low-wage service industry and limited education attainment. Prior to Katrina, over 12 percent of workers in the city of New Orleans were employed in the relatively low-wage food service and hotel industry (compared to 9 percent of all workers nationally).

As explained by Darius, a displaced New Orleanian now living in Houston, the labor challenges faced in New Orleans are exacerbated as displaced residents with very limited marketable skills were forced to move away. “I was a cook for 20 years. I wasn’t rich but I could pay my bills,” he said. In Houston, without a high-school diploma, Darius was unemployable as a cook, notwithstanding his work experience. Darius was told to go back to school, get a GED, and then apply for a “food prep” certificate. “All I want to do is cook and take care of my family, but I can’t do that,” he said. “So I’ll keep hustling some work until I can get home. I can’t stop working to go to school for all that.”



---

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

Even though there is a relatively high level of unemployment among displaced residents, the New Orleans Data Center, which tracks demographic conditions including employment, indicates that there are a fair number of employment opportunities in the city. But there is a skill mismatch. Many former and returning residents fall short of qualifying for the high-paying jobs currently available in sectors and in industries that require higher levels of education, experience, and training.

Many of the low-wage jobs that existed prior to Katrina are now held by immigrant laborers who moved into town soon after the storm and now dominate the construction field. The failure to meet the standard of care established by the *UN Guiding Principles* and the USAID policy has only exacerbated this employment quagmire for displaced residents.

*Green collar jobs are jobs involving environmentally friendly products and/or services. From an employer's perspective, green collar workers can be instrumental in the booming "eco-friendly" field. More and more requirements are being placed on new buildings; many of the new schools being built in New Orleans must be "green buildings." This change in attitude toward eco-friendly design is happening all over the country and New Orleans has the opportunity as it rebuilds to be one of the cities on the frontier.*

—Tracie L. Washington



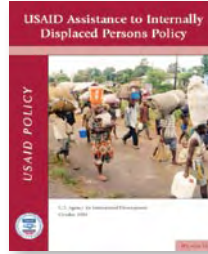
*The twin problems facing the labor market, disadvantage and displacement pose serious challenges for New Orleanians regardless of their current and future locations. However, sensible and thoughtful labor market policies might alleviate some of the losses workers have suffered and perhaps improve their pre-Katrina job status. The opportunities and necessity in reconstruction should be especially valuable in upgrading many workers' skills.*

—Dorothy Newell, MSW



## Challenge: Affordable Housing and Homelessness

“Before Katrina, my rent was \$375. The lowest rent I could find when I returned was \$1,295,” said Shirley who returned to New Orleans but continues to have needs associated with her displacement. The house that Shirley rented was in poor repair, and a gas leak in the building forced her and her family to move to another apartment, which rented for \$1,000 a month. Although Shirley receives food stamps and Medicaid for her children, she was turned down for Section 8 housing assistance. To pay utility bills that cost as much as \$300 a month, she was forced to take out loans that she later could not repay. The good credit rating that she was able to maintain prior to the storm is now ruined. At one point, her family was nearly homeless and she still often feels on the verge of becoming homeless. “People are going in debt to keep a roof over their heads. You’re either in debt or about to be homeless. Even living paycheck to paycheck is not working anymore,” she explained. This is a serious setback from her life before Katrina when she planned to buy a house. “It wasn’t just a dream,” she said. “I was saving up, and I had good credit. It’s never going to happen at this rate.”



Based on the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, the U.S. Government’s foreign aid policy for ending displacement includes a commitment to providing temporary housing for the duration of one’s displacement, transportation to return home, help to rebuild homes and reclaim land, and safeguards that protect female-headed households.

Before Hurricane Katrina, finding affordable and adequate housing was a daunting challenge. In New Orleans, for example, two-thirds of extremely low-income households bore housing costs that exceeded 30 percent of their income. More than half of very low-income households used more than half their income to pay for housing.

After Katrina, displaced residents moved repeatedly from one temporary housing setting to another.



## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION



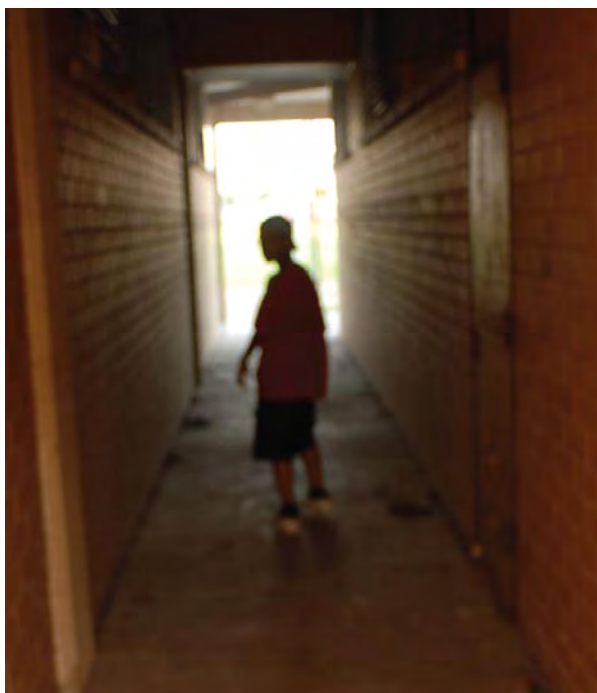
Desperate to return to stable living conditions, they had to settle for what was available. So they incurred staggering debt to afford the skyrocketing cost of buying, renting, or rebuilding their homes, boarded with one or more other families in cramped homes, or lived in hotel rooms and toxic FEMA trailers. The lack of affordable and adequate housing and low rates of homeownership, combined with a slow and uneven reconstruction effort, pose steep barriers to displaced residents.

Although housing is a human right, governmental responses to Hurricane Katrina have driven the increased rate of homelessness. In post-Katrina New Orleans, for example, the number of homeless people is well above the national average and is approximately four times higher than major cities that have high homeless populations. The failure to ensure affordable housing blocks the return of displaced residents, in particular, those who are African American, regardless of income. In the wake of the storm, HUD entered into contracts with private developers that involved the demolition of public housing developments and other subsidized housing in New Orleans and the Gulf Region, whose pre-storm residents were predominantly African American. In addition, HUD has approved funds for poorly managed home repair and rebuilding programs in Louisiana and Mississippi that provide woefully inadequate grants to homeowners and no direct benefits to renters, who are unable to afford rental rates that have skyrocketed since the storm. Reports by nongovernmental organizations document that the programs create racial inequities, causing additional hardships for African Americans. Federal disaster recovery dollars have flowed to development projects in the Gulf Region that require the displacement of neighborhoods and/or increase the potential for flooding and toxic pollution in neighborhoods, where predominantly African American residents have managed to return and rebuild their homes.

## Communities in Action

Throughout the Gulf Region, residents are establishing land trusts to protect their neighborhoods, raising funds to rebuild or construct homes – some of which employ green building standards that promote environmental sustainability, supporting job training and recruitment programs, and advocating for flood protection, reduction of pollution that triggers climate change, just employment conditions and affordable housing programs in local, state, and federal policies and budgets. The tremendous activism led by Gulf Region residents is unparalleled in recent history and includes the support of people and organizations from across the United States and abroad, all of whom have stepped into the void created by the governmental failure to abide by a standard of care that ensures recovery.

Notwithstanding these inspiring efforts, there are other effective tools and strategies that can be instituted immediately to combat these challenges and reverse the poverty trend, through expanded employment and economic opportunities and improved affordable housing and homeownership prospects. In particular, reinvesting in effective government systems, many of which are already available, is essential to creating and maintaining affordable housing and stable living environments for the people of the region.

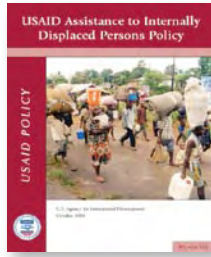


---

### WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

## Yearning to Learn



Based on the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, the U.S. Government's foreign aid policy for ending displacement includes a commitment to providing access to education and the rebuilding of schools.

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, approximately 118,000 school-age children in Louisiana and 20,000 school-age children in Mississippi were displaced. Missed school days as a result of displacement continues to take a toll as more than 50,000 children did not attend school for the entire year of 2005-06, and approximately 15,000 children missed all or most days of school in the following year of 2006-07. Although the consequences of missed school days and other setbacks in education and child development services in the lives of displaced children have yet to be assessed, it is clear that post-Katrina governmental responses have not adequately ensured access to

*For the foreseeable future, both New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast will need to function amid uncertainty about the size of future student enrollment and the distribution patterns of students throughout the various school districts. Nevertheless, numerous improvements can be made to the current systems to help students receive an excellent public education while the surrounding communities rebuild.*

—Eden B. Heilman, J.D., M.S.W.  
*The Recovery of Public Education in New Orleans And the Mississippi Gulf Coast*

schools and child care centers, which can contribute to severe limitations in a child's ability to reach his or her fullest potential.

Public education is a basic human right. But, for children of color and poor children who continue to have needs associated with their displacement, this right is undermined by the inability of our government to build a comprehensive education infrastructure. As a result, damaged child care centers in Mississippi are provided no governmental assistance for rebuilding and the increased need for child care centers by working parents is unmet. In Louisiana, several public schools located in predominantly African American neighborhoods are slated for permanent closing and the majority of open schools are charters that can employ selective admission policies. [Heilman, 12] Notwithstanding the best efforts by parents and advocacy groups to ensure quality education, federal and state laws and policies stand in the way of securing the human right to education.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is authorized to implement the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, a federal law that places the burden of recovery from natural disasters on state governments. The Stafford Act is blind to the challenges faced by impoverished states like Louisiana and Mississippi, which are not capable of financing their own recovery and had established inadequate educational resources for poor children and children of color prior to the storm. The law does not require federal assistance to ensure the basic human right to education. As a consequence, FEMA did not consider child care an essential public service, and denied governmental applications for assistance to rebuild damaged child care centers. The rationale for FEMA's denial defies logic given that the agency identified zoos and museums as examples of essential public service eligible for rebuilding assistance.

For the 2007-08 school year, post-Katrina federal spending on public education infrastructure comprised only two percent of the overall federal recovery assistance provided to the hurricane-ravaged region. The federal government spent \$1 on Katrina-

*FEMA did not consider child care an essential public service, therefore, many applications for assistance from child care centers were denied. FEMA did not list child care as an example of essential public service; however, zoos and museums made the list.*

— Carol Burnett, PhD.

*Post-Katrina Child Care Needs of the Mississippi Gulf Coast*

related education relief for every \$2.5 billion spent for other purposes in response to the storm, which is woefully insufficient to bring about comprehensive educational recovery in Louisiana and Mississippi.

However, the federal government is not alone in denying resources for the education of children in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour refused to implement the recommendations for providing resources to establish and improve early childhood education and child care services that were presented by the Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal, which Governor Barbour instituted. Action taken by the Louisiana legislature following Hurricane Katrina has established a tangle of governmental entities that have authorized and operate a majority of charter schools that can apply selective admissions criteria.

Significant research has shown that often the largest gains in academic achievement from pre kindergarten programs are among poor children and children of color. Mississippi is the only southern state and one of the few states in the nation that does not have a publicly funded early childhood education program.

Mississippi state government relies on federal programs, such as the Child Care and Development Fund and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, to provide low-income working families with child care assistance through a voucher program. Like all other states, Mississippi has enormous discretion in establishing eligibility requirements,

application procedures, and a system of payment for services rendered. The Mississippi child care voucher program has been repeatedly criticized for being overly burdensome on parent applicants who must provide more documentation in their applications than required by federal regulation, and wait long periods that can last for months to receive decisions either approving or denying their applications. For child care service providers, the Mississippi program either creates delays in payment or does not pay for services rendered by a child care facility. As a consequence, services for young children are either terminated or routinely disrupted. However, the biggest problem with the state program is that it is significantly under funded as only 30 percent of eligible children are served by the program.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Mississippi Department of Human Services waived application and eligibility requirements for parents returning after the storm in need of subsidized child care services. While the waivers helped many families to obtain child care assistance, the expiration of these waivers was devastating to parents of children not of school age.

Similar to that of Mississippi's hurricane affected cities, preschool child care centers in New Orleans have been greatly reduced. Child care centers in New Orleans comprise one-fifth of the pre-Katrina number, a decrease from 271 centers to 58.

In New Orleans, prior to Hurricane Katrina, the administration of public education was woefully inadequate, and academic achievement among students was declining. The storm damaged approximately 100 public school buildings. These conditions facilitated the drive to make New Orleans the first majority charter school district in the nation, which began in the weeks following the storm and has since been accomplished. Since Hurricane Katrina, 52 percent of K-12 public schools in New Orleans are now charter schools. However, the introduction of charter schools has not remedied educational inadequacies nor have they uniformly addressed increased needs among displaced children regarding gaps in their education, unstable living conditions, and counseling services. The Louisiana Recovery School District, instituted by

state legislation in the weeks after Hurricane Katrina, has authorized 27 charter schools and operates 33 traditional public schools in New Orleans. The initial operation by RSD created significant problems due in part to the firing of all 4,000 school system employees and requiring teachers to seek new certification as a condition of re-hiring. In January 2007, the RSD faced a civil rights lawsuit brought on behalf of 300 children who were denied school enrollment because there was no room for them in the city's schools.

*Most assuredly and painfully, children and youth continue to experience PTSD because of their involvement in Katrina and Rita ... UNICEF and Save the Children concurred in their recent reports on the Gulf Coast crisis that while it is essential to ensure that adequate food, water, medicine, sanitation and shelter are available for everyone affected by the hurricane, it is also imperative to mitigate the impact of the disaster on children and youth through recreational activities and enrollment in school, whether a temporary or a permanent one. These international relief agencies assert, evidence shows in times of disaster, getting children back to a learning environment is one of the most effective ways of helping them feel safe, cope with trauma and begin their emotional healing.*

—Kyshun Webster, Ph.D.

*Impacts of Hurricane Katrina on Youth Development*

The Orleans Parish School Board, which prior to the storm managed all public schools in New Orleans, has now authorized 12 charter schools and operates seven traditional public schools. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has authorized and operates two charter schools. Unlike traditional public schools, a number of charter schools require selective admission policies, which vary among schools but typically involve a process for testing and interviews. Such policies worsen educational inequities by excluding educational opportunities for children of color and poor children, who are disproportionately relegated to the worst performing schools, reinforcing racial and socio-economic divisions that exacerbate entrenched poverty.

Furthermore, charter schools, on average, have enrolled fewer special education students than traditional public schools whose needs range from speech and hearing impediments to severe and profound autism. However, the mere enrollment of special education students in traditional public schools does not guarantee that students will be provided essential support services due to the dearth of specialized staff. The dual system of authority between traditional public schools and charter schools, which are both managed by three distinct school systems, has not alleviated the inequalities characteristic of the pre-Katrina public school system. They still exist and have become more pronounced since the storm.

Governmental responses to the educational needs of displaced children contravene *The UN Guiding Principles* provision that governments should provide “free and compulsory” primary education to displaced children, which has created a significant barrier to the right of displaced residents to voluntarily return to the city. The psychological, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive well-being of many children and their families continue to be challenged as they struggle to cope with a multitude of circumstances. After disasters, schools must be safe places where students can regain a sense of routine and normalcy, and a place where they can find a full range of supports to address the trauma they continue to experience as a result of a disaster.



Public school systems could play a primary role in identifying and assisting not only students, but also their families. Schools are logically positioned to be major crisis and ongoing counseling intervention sites, in connection with health and mental health professionals. To achieve these objectives requires a strategic, long-term commitment from educational leaders, increased resources, and focused policy.

### Communities in Action

Parents, students, and community leaders have formed networks and coalitions to hold school administrators accountable for providing a quality education. Their efforts include establishing and expanding independent learning institutions, such as the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School programs, opening child care centers, raising funds for books and school supplies, and parent engagement. Additionally, their efforts have helped to improve recreational parks and facilities.

*The consequences of the overlap of poverty and race were clearly seen in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Minorities, as the poorest segments of the population, lived in more vulnerable neighbourhoods and were more exposed to the effects of the storm. It is thus not unexpected that these groups suffered from disproportional displacement or loss of their homes. Katrina therefore illustrates the pernicious effects of socio-economic marginalization and shows the need for a robust and targeted governmental response to ensure that racial disparities are addressed.*

—April 28, 2009

Report of Doudou Diène, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism and related intolerance

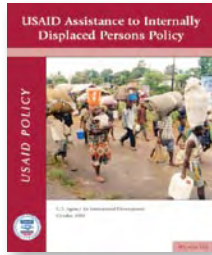


### WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION



## Healthy Mind & Body



Based on the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, the U.S. Government's foreign aid policy for ending displacement includes a commitment to providing health care and trauma counseling, as well as the rebuilding of health care systems.

An adequate standard of living for the health and well-being of an individual and his/her family that includes medical care, and a social safety net that includes medical care are basic human rights. Yet, there is a great need for holistic health care in hurricane-damaged areas where hospitals and clinics remain closed and health providers have also suffered losses, displacement, and other traumas. The dismal situation has gone from bad to worse in New Orleans, which had the highest rates of uninsured in the nation prior to Hurricane Katrina and, since the

*For decades it has been known that poverty and poor environments critically affect an individual's wellness or "well being." These situations have an even stronger impact on children in the areas of physical wellness and emotional stability. Therefore, the struggles of dealing with some of the poorest health statistics in the nation before Katrina mirrored the inadequacies of the conditions in communities.*

—Sandra L Robinson, M.D., M.P.H.  
*Impacts of Hurricane Katrina on Youth Development Health Care for Children of New Orleans*

*"We know that our children will heal. It's how they heal and what scarring remains that will determine their ability to achieve their potential."*

*—Personal communication from school superintendent in a hurricane-damaged parish in Louisiana.*

storm, has suffered the ongoing closure of its only public hospital. Of the seven general hospitals that operated in New Orleans before the disaster, only one was operating at pre-storm levels two years later. This has created a significant barrier to returning home for displaced residents in need of medical care.

The health status of displaced persons has worsened under these conditions. The death rate in New Orleans has risen 47 percent in the two years following Hurricane Katrina. In a recent survey, 36 percent of residents of the New Orleans metropolitan area reported reduced access to health care. The problem is especially severe for the city's African American residents, 72 percent of whom reported reduced health care access - evidence of underlying discrimination. This is a dire situation and fails to meet the basic provision of *The UN Guiding Principles* that authorities are to ensure that people return home in safety.

Children and families traumatized by displacement after Hurricane Katrina are experiencing secondary adversities including ongoing stress and demoralization, economic losses, unstable living arrangements, separation from family members and friends, and uncertainty about the future. The population requiring mental health services is significant, as an estimated 25-30 percent of individuals in the affected areas are in need of such services. Yet mental health services remain limited for trauma-exposed children and families. The Louisiana Department of Education acknowledges that school systems in hurricane-damaged areas need support and training relevant for social workers, psychologists, counselors, nurses, teachers and other staff. Two years

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

after Katrina, the largest provider of psychiatric care in New Orleans was the Orleans Parish Prison, with 60 acute care beds.

Children and youth, in particular, are in need of counseling services that can help them to cope with the stress of displacement. Such services should be culturally relevant and age appropriate. Counseling services should strive to support young people to envision and actively engage in charting the rebuilding of their schools, libraries, recreational places, and communities.



*Louisiana ranks 49th in the nation in a recent state-by-state study on the well-being of America's children and 50th in percentage of population lacking access to quality health and mental health care. New Orleans, the hub of the region, has a tradition of being a community with much history and character, but also a legacy of racism and continuing poverty... Unfortunately, children who live in poor families often experience increased levels of trauma compared to children whose families are more advantaged, placing them at risk for mental health problems. Not only are these children at greater risk of mental health problems, they also are less likely to receive mental health services that can prevent more serious problems over time.*

—Joy D. Osofsky, Ph.D.  
*The Real Crisis Resulting from Hurricane Katrina: Children's Mental Health Needs*

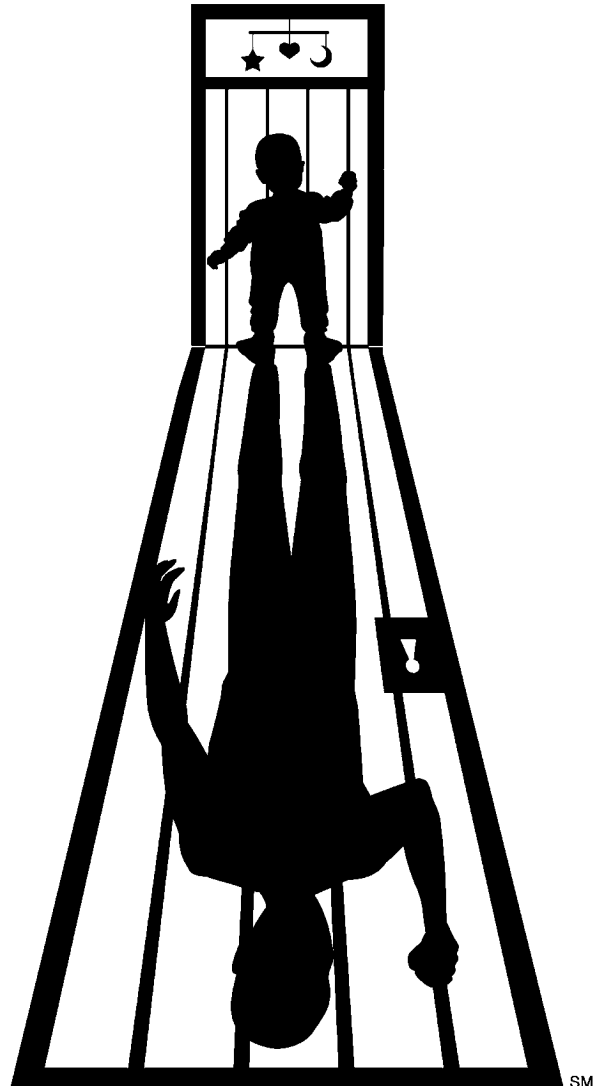
## Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline®

Florida is very worried about the dropout rate. She sees a lot of children out of school during the day. When she asks them why, their responses ask the question, “What’s the purpose?” They see their parents, who received a high school education, still have to struggle daily with 3 to 4 jobs to barely make ends meet. So, what’s the point? “They don’t want to go to jail, but that’s where they’re going to end up,” said Florida.

“It’s not like these kids are trying to get in trouble in school, but they’re dealing with so much at home and all the distractions on the street,” said Darryl “Sess 4-5” Warren. “They don’t have choices. Instead of talking to these kids, they just send them to juvenile court. You get sent to juvenile court just for truancy. But if they’re not doing anything for you at school, what’s the point of going?” he asked.

Unfortunately, in the aftermath of Katrina, many of the newly configured schools in New Orleans functioned more like security check points than learning centers. The complaints from students were constant and deafening. Sheila, a student, says she is “sick and tired of being required to remove shoes and underwear.” She doesn’t understand why it should take 20 minutes just to get into school. “Even my baby brother’s school has metal detectors. How stupid is that? He’s 8 years old and they’re already treating him like he’s on his way to prison.”

When students returned to New Orleans, the newly formed Louisiana Recovery School District governed most of the Orleans Parish public schools. Schools had one security guard to every 37 children as



compared to a pre-storm ratio of one security guard to every 333 children. “We never had to face so many guns, even when the military came in after Katrina.”

But these conditions weren’t evident at all New Orleans public schools. “It must be nice to go to the smart white-people school,” said Angela. “Those children at Lusher and Audubon and Ben Franklin never see security officers and guns.” Angela’s observations are based on fact. The oppressive security practices were used disproportionately in Orleans Parish’s lowest performing schools, whose students are African American. “We have created a system where our students with special needs and our struggling students are being pushed into schools

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

where they are far more likely to have continual contact with police,” according to Ellen Tuzzolo.

Even more disturbing is the fact that many of these same “low performing” schools criminalize and inflict draconian punishment for petty offenses, without alternatives to removal. The Juvenile Justice Project along with student advocacy groups led by the Fyre Youth Squad reported that students as young as 9 years old are being handcuffed to tables and chairs in their schools, brutalized by police and security personnel on school grounds, and arrested or hauled off to the juvenile division for petty incidents. “The police in the schools and these rent-a-cops don’t know how to deal with students. Since when did walking in the halls between classes get you handcuffed for a whole period?” reported Kwame in response to a KCLC survey.

This problem is exacerbated by the lack of cohesion and adequate expulsion procedures. As recently as December 2008, Orleans Parish public schools students and their parents had waited months for a hearing regarding the decision by administrators to remove students from schools. Some of the offenses are serious, but more often than not, expulsions have become a method of selective admissions for schools, particularly the chartered schools. Wanda Phillips reported that her son was recommended

for expulsion after four incidents of cutting class in the school building. “It’s not like he was vandalizing anything or beating up on anybody. He just wasn’t going into his classes and wandering in the halls when he was supposed to be in class. It’s not good, but I don’t see why you throw my child away. He’s sitting at home for two months waiting on a hearing,” said Ms. Phillips.

### Communities in Action

Parents, students, and community leaders in New Orleans are working to dismantle the pipeline to prison that has been part of the post-Katrina education infrastructure. The best example of this proactive advocacy has been found in the partnership of the Fyre Youth Squad and the Downtown Neighborhood Improvement Association Education Committee (“DNIA-EC”). John McDonogh High School was ground-zero for the oppressive security activities documented by scores of local and national news reports. But DNIA-EC stepped up and demanded that the schools in its community reduce security guards and replace them with additional social workers, interventionists, and counselors. Further, DNIA-EC publicized their vision of “schools as community centers” as a way to transform the struggling schools in their neighborhood.



### WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION



# Dear President Obama...

## Displaced Children's Letters to President Obama

Apr. 123, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

I am a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at McDonogh #42 in New Orleans, Louisiana. My name is Kyle Marcelin. I'm writing this letter because I don't want to be left behind. I want to ask you, what are you going to do to help our community? Our schools should have more activities and programs to extend our learning. I also want to ask you to please help our engineers to make stronger levees. The next thing I want to ask you to do is to provide enough money to help our community. We need more important safety and security, between all of the crimes. It is also important that our schools are rebuilt and stronger than ever. Help our struggling families to restore housing so that everybody will have a house to live in.

Sincerely,  
Kyle Marcelin

Dear President Obama,

I am a 7th Grader at McDonogh #42 in New Orleans, Louisiana. My name is Kyle Marcelin. I'm writing this letter because I don't want to be left behind. I want to ask you, what are you going to do to help our community? Our schools should have more activities and programs to extend our learning. I also want to ask you to please help our engineers to make stronger levees. The next thing I want to ask you to do is to provide enough money to help our community. We need more important safety and security, between all of the crimes. It is also important that our schools are rebuilt and stronger than ever. Help our struggling families to restore housing so that everybody will have a house to live in.

Sincerely,

Kyle Marcelin

Dear President Obama,

This is Donkayl Nolan, I'm a 7th grader from McDonogh 42 Charter School. I'm writing to inform you that lots of houses isn't rebuild. Our security is bad. They have lots of people killing and raping children our age. Our schools doesn't have enough money for the books and computers.

They have lots of houses not rebuild since Katrina. People are living on the street and on porches. They have house with dogs and cats living in. The dogs and cats catching stuff from some houses. Can you rebuild and put people that don't have houses in them houses.

They have lots of people killing and raping children our and people killing each other. So can you get some more security in this city.

The schools doesn't have enough money for books and computers for everybody. The school is falling apart the walls are pilling and the floors is cracking. So can they get new money and so can you give them the schools some more money for books, computer and the repairing

Sincerely,

Donkayl

April 23, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

This is Donkayl Nolan, I'm a 7<sup>th</sup> grader from McDonogh 42 Charter School. I'm writing to inform you that lots of houses isn't rebuild. Our security is bad. They have lots of people killing and raping children our age. Our schools doesn't have enough money for the books and computers.

They have lots of houses not rebuild since Katrina. People are living on the street and on porches. They have house with dogs and cats living in. The dogs and cats catching stuff from some houses. Can you rebuild and put people that don't have houses in them houses. They have lots of people killing and raping children our and people killing each other. So can you get some more security in this city.

The schools doesn't have enough money for books and computers for everybody. The school is falling apart the walls are pilling and the floors is cracking. So can they get new money and so can you give them the schools some more money for books, computer and the repairing

Sincerely,  
Donkayl

### WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

# Dear President Obama...

April 23, 2004

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
400 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

My name is DeVonté Cheneau. I am an 8th grader from McDonogh #42 Charter School. I would like to inform you about the tragedy Hurricane Katrina brought on my city and I. Hurricane Katrina has hurt the heart of New Orleans (our citizens) in so many different ways. Hurricane Katrina forced many schools to close down. It also killed New Orleans citizens, separated families, and destroyed people's homes forcing them to live on the streets. So President Obama, I'm asking you to please do what you can to help out my city.

PS: you met with my Aunt Deborah Bridges sister of my grandpa Houston Bridges

Sincerely, DeVonté Cheneau

Dear President Obama,

My name is DeVonté Cheneau. I am an 8th grader from McDonogh #42 Charter School. I would like to inform you about the tragedy Hurricane Katrina brought on my city and I. Hurricane Katrina has hurt the heart of New Orleans (our citizens) in so many different ways. Hurricane Katrina forced many schools to close down. It also killed New Orleans citizens, separated families, and destroyed people's homes forcing them to live on the streets. So President Obama, I'm asking you to please do what you can to help out my city.

PS: you met with my Aunt Deborah Bridges sister of my grandpa Houston Bridges

Sincerely, DeVonté Cheneau

My current story

I have been having a lot of difficulties ever since I evacuated from New Orleans. I miss my home and my friends and family. I have had a hard time adjusting in school and with my school work. We have had to move many times and as a result I have gone to many different schools. When I got used to a school, the teachers and friends we had to move to another house. Some of the things I want to do as far as recreational things and certain things I want to have. It has been very hard for me living in Atlanta. I am not used to a lot of the things about this city. It is a nice place but it's not New Orleans. I think things would be better for me if I was back home and I hope I can go back home at some point. Hopefully very soon.

Terrian C. Jones

Dear President Obama,

I have been having a lot of difficulties ever since I evacuated from New Orleans. I miss my home and my friends and family. I have had a hard time adjusting in school and with my school work. We have had to move many times and as a result I have gone to many different schools. When I got used to a school, the teachers and friends we had to move to another house. Some of the things I want to do as far as recreational things and certain things I want to have. It has been very hard for me living in Atlanta. I am not used to a lot of the things about this city. It is a nice place but it's not New Orleans. I think things would be better for me if I was back home and I hope I can go back home at some point. Hopefully very soon.

Terrian C. Jones

# Dear President Obama...

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

My name is Rufus Moses and I attend McDonogh 42 Elementary Charter School in New Orleans, Louisiana. Do you remember Hurricane Katrina who left our city and a lot of people devastated? It left our homes abandon and they still haven't been rebuild. It also left our schools in a situation that you need to help. In our schools we need more computers that will help us become more technology literate. We also need books for our library because we need to do projects. I am asking you to fix the levees because we do not want to experience any more hurricanes like Katrina.

Next Mr. President, we need to stop crime because the crime is worse than it was before Hurricane Katrina. The last thing I am asking is for you to improve our transportation. Our homes today are nothing like they were before that devastating hurricane. That is what I want you to do for me and I know you would think they are some good decisions.

Sincerely,  
Rufus Moses

Dear President Obama,

Dear President Obama,

My name is Rufus Moses and I attend McDonogh 42 Elementary Charter School in New Orleans, Louisiana. Do you remember Hurricane Katrina who left our city and a lot of people devastated? It left our homes abandon and they still haven't been rebuild. It also left our schools in a situation that you need to help. In our schools, we need more computers that will help us become more technology literate. We also need books for our library because we need to do projects. I am asking you to fix the levees because we do not want to experience any more hurricanes like Katrina.

Next Mr. President, we need to stop crime because the crime is worse than it was before Hurricane Katrina. The last thing I am asking is for you to improve our transportation. Our homes today are nothing like they were before that devastating hurricane.

That is what I want you to do for me and I know you would think they are some good decisions.

Sincerely,

Rufus Moses

Dear President Obama,

Dear President Obama,

My name is Creighton Hollinger. I am from New Orleans Louisiana. I attend McDonogh 42 Charter School. My city is trying to recover from a disaster hurricane which happen almost 4 years ago. Hurricane Katrina put my city through a lot of stuff. Some of the playgrounds messed up, houses still messed up, some stores still closed, and people are still scattered around. Thank you Mr. President.

Sincerely,

Creighton Hollinger

April 23, 2009

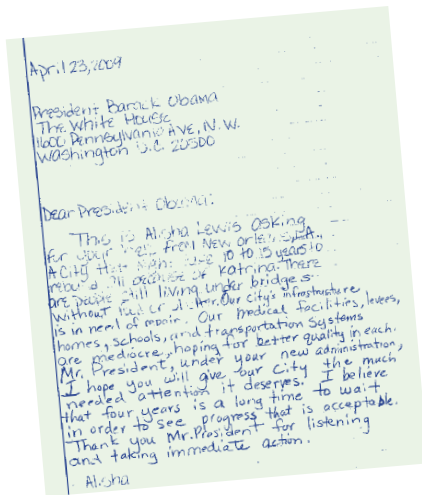
President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Obama:  
My name is Creighton Hollinger. I am from New Orleans Louisiana. I attend McDonogh 42 Charter School. My city is trying to recover from a disaster hurricane which happen almost 4 years ago. Hurricane Katrina put my city through a lot of stuff. Some of the playgrounds messed up, houses still messed up, some stores still closed, and people are still scattered around. Thank you Mr. President.

Sincerely,  
Creighton Hollinger

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

## Dear President Obama...



Dear President Obama,

This is Alisha Lewis asking for your help from New Orleans, LA. A city that might take 10 to 15 years to rebuild. All because of Katrina. There are people still living under bridges without food or shelter. Our city's infrastructure is in need of repair. Our medical facilities, levees, homes, schools and transportation systems are mediocre, hoping for better quality in each.

Mr. President, under your new administration, I hope you will give our city the much needed attention it deserves. I believe that four years is a long time to wait in order to see progress that is acceptable.

Thank you Mr. President for listening and taking immediate action.

Alisha

April 23, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

My name is Jade Windon, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student at McDonogh 42 Charter School in New Orleans, LA. Mr. President, I write to you expressing how many of our lives who continue to be affected today by a storm that happened almost 4 years ago. Hurricane Katrina devastated the lives of everyone here and the Gulf Coast region. Here in New Orleans, we are making very little progress. Our communities are still feeling the effects of Katrina. I ask you Mr. President to please help us to rebuild our lives and city. Our school, infrastructure, jobs, and health are just a few of the things that I would like to see fixed. Thank you Mr. President and may God Bless America, especially New Orleans.

Sincerely,

Jade Windon

Dear President Obama,

My name is Jade Windon, 7th grade student at McDonogh 42 Charter School in New Orleans, LA.

Mr. President, I write to you expressing how many of our lives who continue to be affected today by a storm that happened almost 4 years ago. Hurricane Katrina devastated the lives of everyone here and the Gulf Coast region. Here in New Orleans, we are making very little progress. Our communities are still feeling the effects of Katrina.

I ask you Mr. President to please help us to rebuild our lives and city. Our school, infrastructure, jobs, and health are just a few of the things that I would like to see fixed.

Thank you Mr. President and may God Bless America, especially New Orleans.

Sincerely,

Jade Windon



# Dear President Obama...

April 23, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Hurricane Katrina came to New Orleans three years ago. Our city and the Gulf Coast is still trying to come back to life. My name is Frank Dalcour a seventh grader at McDonogh 42 Charter School. Mr. President, enough is enough. Our city continues to struggle each day we are getting no where. It seems to me that the Black Community is suffering the most. Please help our schools. We need more of everything.

Sincerely,

Frank

Dear President Obama,

Hurricane Katrina came to New Orleans 3 years ago. Our city and the Gulf Coast is still trying to come back to life. My name is Frank Dalcour a seventh grader at McDonogh 42 Charter School. Mr. President, enough is enough. Our city continues to struggle each day. We are getting no where. It seems to me that the Black community is suffering the worst. Please help our schools. We need more of everything.

Sincerely,

Frank

Dear President Obama,

My name is Donyell Haywood, I am an 8th grade student at McDonogh 42 School. The experience I had with Hurricane Katrina was not a good feeling. The impact of the devastation crushed my hopes, dreams and desire to come back home. I, as many other people was not prepared mentally or emotionally for this horrific devastation. Many lives were lost along with homes, schools, businesses and communities.

Mr. President, what I would like to share most with you is my hopes and dreams that our city of New Orleans will gain strength and fame as it once had. Many people have come home but are struggling to survive. The high cost of living, price gouging and unfit streets to travel have become a nuisance for many. Help us to prepare for once was a healthy, reviving and strong city.

Mr. President, there are many more improvements that are needed here in New Orleans. Please come to our city to see what I and many more of my classmates are experiencing. Help us to bring back our devastated communities. Our lives are broken in so many ways.

Thank you for reading my letter and understanding what we are all living through each day.

Sincerely,

Donyell Haywood

April 23, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President Obama:

My name is Donyell Haywood I am an 8th grade student at McDonogh 42 School. The experience I had with Hurricane Katrina was not a good feeling. The impact of the devastation crushed my hopes, dreams, and desire to come back home. I, as many other people was not prepared mentally or emotionally for this horrific devastation. Many lives were lost along with homes, schools, businesses, and communities.

Mr. President, what I would like to share most with you is my hopes and dreams that our city of New Orleans will gain strength and fame as it once had. Many people have come home but are struggling to survive. The high cost of living, price gouging, and unfit streets to travel have become a nuisance for many. Help us to prepare for once was a healthy, reviving and strong city.

Mr. President, there are many more improvements that are needed here in New Orleans. Please come to our city to see what I and many more of my classmates are experiencing. Help us to bring back our devastated communities. Our lives are broken in so many ways. Thank you for reading my letter and understanding what we all are living through each day.

Sincerely,

Donyell Haywood

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

# Dear President Obama...

April 23, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania  
Washington DC

Dear President Obama,

Hi, My Name is Tyron McMaster and I attend McDonogh #42 Charter School in New Orleans, LA. I write to ask for quicker help in rebuilding our community. Mr. President, Our city continues to struggle with infrastructure problems, housing issues, medical, and education. A major concern of mine is to wish for a stronger levee for protection during violent storms.

As a student in Middle School, I would like to see our school support more activities and programs for student involvement, however, there are no funds for that. I believe that more activities for student involvement will decrease discipline problems. We could surely use more technology in our schools. I want to be able to compete with the better schools when I reach High School. Someday, Mr. President, I wish to serve with you as a cabinet member. Your response to our city's issues are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Tyron

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear President Obama:

My name is Clarence, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at McDonogh 42 Charter School. More than 3 years ago, Hurricane Katrina destroyed our city, New Orleans. Our homes, school, and health facilities are not the best. I want the best for me and my family. Mr. President, I ask for your help in restoring our city back to good living conditions. Help our schools by funding more activities and programs. Help our community develop better housing and jobs for every citizen. Help us rebuild our city that will match cities.

Sincerely,  
Clarence

Dear President Obama,

Hi, my name is Tyron McMaster and I attend McDonogh #42 Charter School in New Orleans, LA. I write to ask for quicker help in rebuilding our community. Mr. President, our city continues to struggle with infrastructure problems, housing issues, medical, and education. A major concern of mine is to wish for a stronger levee for protection during violent storms.

As a student in Middle School, I would like to see our school support more activities and programs for student involvement, however, there are no funds for that. I believe that more activities for student involvement will decrease discipline problems. We could surely use more technology in our schools. I want to be able to compete with the better schools when I reach High School. Someday, Mr. President, I wish to serve with you as a cabinet member. Your response to our city's issues are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Tyron

Dear President Obama,

My name is Clarence, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at McDonogh 42 Charter School. More than 3 years ago, Hurricane Katrina destroyed our city, New Orleans. Our homes, school and health facilities are not the best. I want the best for me and my family. Mr. President, I ask for your help in restoring our city back to good living conditions. Help our schools by funding more activities and programs. Help our community develop better housing and jobs for every citizen. Help us rebuild our city that will match cities.

Sincerely,

Clarence

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

# Dear President Obama...

April 23, 2009  
 President Barack Obama  
 The White House  
 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.  
 Washington D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama  
 my name is Jarmal Howell I am  
 an eight grader at McDonogh 42  
 Charter School. Katrina caused  
 devastation not only in my community  
 but the whole New Orleans area. I  
 don't have much to ask but can you  
 help my community and others by  
 rebuilding our town. I also wanted  
 to tell you that you are my role model.  
 Thanks President Barack Obama for  
 helping rebuilding our city.

Sincerely yours  
 Jarmal Howell

Dear President Obama,

My name is Jarmal Howell. I am an eight grader at McDonogh 42 Charter School. Katrina caused devastation not only in my community but the whole New Orleans area. I don't have much to ask but can you help my community and others by rebuilding our town. I also wanted to tell you that you are my role model. Thanks, President Barack Obama for helping rebuilding our city.

Sincerely yours,  
 Jarmal Howell

April 23, 2009  
 President Barack Obama  
 The White House  
 1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
 Washington DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

My name is Aubuane Knox I am 14 yr old and attend McDonogh 42 Charter School. The time of Katrina it felt like my life was over. On August 29 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit the city of New Orleans and caused alot of devastation to our community. It has been 3 yr and and half an the city of New Orleans is still not rebuild.

I am asking you "can you please help the city of New Orleans get back together." I am asking you "can you please improve safety and security, rebuild, strength schools, strength the levees so that we would not have to go through some thing else that would devastate our community, home and schools."

In New Orleans there are home that are still not rebuild. We have family member who are living under bridges and also abandoned homes. Our school are ragged and we need more activities to keep us learning such as art clubs, book clubs, and much more. I am asking "Can you please make New Orleans a better place to live."

Sincerely,  
 Aubuane Knox

Dear President Obama,

My name is Aubuane Knox. I am 14 yr old and attend McDonogh 42 Charter School. The time of Katrina it felt like my life was over. On August 29 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit the city of New Orleans and caused alot of devastation to our community. It has been 3 yr and and half an the city of New Orleans is still not rebuild.

I am asking you "can you please help the city of New Orleans get back together." I am asking you "can you please improve safety and security, rebuild more schools, strength the levees so that we would not have to go through some thing else that would devastate our community, home and schools."

In New Orleans there are home that are still not rebuild. We have family member who are living under bridges and also abandoned homes. Our school are ragged and we need more activities to keep us learning such as art clubs, book clubs, and much more. I am asking "Can you please make New Orleans a better place to live."

Sincerely,  
 Aubuane Knox

# KCLC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REBUILDING THE VILLAGE

The following recommendations are made for the purpose of ending the trauma and hardship of displacement in the lives of people from the Gulf Region and ensuring that federal standards are adopted to protect the right of all people to recover from a natural disaster. These recommendations are necessitated by both the frequency of natural disaster declarations throughout the United States and territories, and the recognition that current disaster law and policies are inadequate to ensure the recovery of people who become displaced by a natural disaster. Many of these recommendations can be accomplished in the short-term by Presidential Executive Order and should also be considered for new legislation that permanently establishes the rights of displaced U.S. residents.

## Adoption of the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*

- The U.S. Government should recognize the survivors of Hurricane Katrina as “internally displaced persons,” who have a right to a level of governmental protection and assistance that ends their displacement in keeping with the *UN Guiding Principles On Internal Displacement*.
- The U.S. Government should adopt and implement the *UN Guiding Principles On Internal Displacement* as the standard federal response to a natural disaster that causes population displacement.
- The U.S. Government should convene a task force of federal departments and agencies to improve policies and practices pertaining to disaster planning and response, housing, public education, health and mental health care, voting rights and public participation, employment standards and programs, and environmental protection for the purpose of ensuring that displaced persons are able to fully enjoy the

protection and assistance afforded by the *UN Guiding Principles On Internal Displacement*. This task force should also ensure that legislation proposed by the administration or Congress does not restrict or otherwise interfere with the provisions of the the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.

## Safeguards Against Displaced People Becoming Homeless or Jobless

- The U.S. Government should develop a comprehensive social service delivery system that is technology-based and interlinked through governments for a natural disaster resulting in population displacement. Such a system would be used prior to a natural disaster to identify and periodically send communications to residents living in vulnerable regions that notifies them of federal disaster plans and preparations. In the





event of a disaster, the system would be employed to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, such as food, housing, health care, education, family reunification, and trauma counseling to displaced residents for the duration of their displacement.

- The U.S. Government should develop disaster recovery programs that prioritize support for both displaced homeowners seeking to rebuild their homes and displaced renters of private and/or subsidized housing to access affordable rental housing and first-time homeowner programs. Temporary housing assistance should be made available to all displaced persons for the duration of their displacement. These programs should prohibit the use of federal disaster funds for projects that arbitrarily displace communities.
- The U.S. Government should develop disaster recovery programs with the participation of displaced persons. Such programs should be designed to prevent or at least mitigate the conditions that caused or contributed to population displacement. The U.S. Government should create affirmative hiring of and job training programs for displaced residents on reconstruction projects and disaster recovery operations. Furthermore, the U.S. Government should aggressively investigate and penalize government contractors for unsafe working conditions and unfair compensation on reconstruction projects.

### **Learning & Growing by Displaced Children**

- The U.S. Government must ensure that education effectively addresses the needs of the whole child by establishing for parents and guardians voluntary social service and educational programs that include access to health care, early childhood education, school and home visits by social workers certified to provide culturally relevant counseling services, and school and home visits by learning tutors to assist displaced children who have a lapse or interruption in their education as a result of missing school days or transferring to one or

more schools during displacement.

- The U.S. Government should prioritize the rebuilding of schools and facilities in a disaster-stricken area and supporting the recovery of teaching staff and school faculty.

### **Health & Wellness of Displaced People**

- The U.S. Government must ensure that displaced children and adults have access to adequate health care programs that are not restricted as a result of lost medical records or legal documents.
- The U.S. Government must ensure that health programs for children and adults include culturally relevant mental health services, crisis counseling, and therapeutic treatment for the duration of displacement.

### **Dismantle the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline***

- The U.S. Government must ensure that education spending is used to implement effective school-based interventions and alternatives to the expulsion or removal of students with challenging behaviors and special learning needs.
- The U.S. Government should develop standards to mandate that every 4th grader, not limited by special learning needs, is prepared to read at grade level or higher.
- The U.S. Government should create financial incentives that steer schools away from the designs, construction, and equipment installation that are found in prisons, and toward designs, construction, and equipment installation that inspire learning, creativity, and self-esteem among children and young people.

# Katrina Citizens Leadership Corps Membership

## Louisiana

Mary Joseph, KCLC  
Louisiana Coordinator  
Alencia Anderson  
Gilda Armstrong -Butler  
Chiquita Blisset  
Ella Bogan  
Lillian Breaux  
Rebecca Burton  
Rhonda Butler  
Antonia Cager  
Florida Cager  
Janee Chamber  
Mille M. Charles  
Duane Cruse  
Betty Davis  
Rev. Lois J. Dejean  
Almarie Ford  
Almarie Gaines  
Emanuel Gaines  
Devin Green  
Glenda Harris  
Thelma Harris-French  
Ciara Hearn  
Jason Hughes  
Christopher Hunte  
Charlotte Hutton  
Annie Jackson  
Emelda Jefferson  
Pamela Jolly  
Ruth Kidd  
Sonjia Kirk  
Lenora Lockett  
Maurice Magee  
Shirley Marrero  
Ron McClain  
Brandon Akil Mitchell  
Margarat Montgomery  
Dorothy Newell  
Joy Osofsky  
Rahsheda Perine  
Marcia Peterson  
Sandra Reed  
Kimberly Richards  
Howard L. Rogers  
Sonya Saizon  
Ruby Sanchez  
Barbara J. Shelby  
Carmen Spooner  
Cheryl Bowers Stephens  
Renee Taylor  
S. Kelly Terry  
Pedronia Turner  
Barbara Waiters  
Pastor Tom Watson

Shelia Webb  
Godfrey White  
Shirley Williams  
Sonja Williams  
Adren Wilson  
Luke Winn

## Mississippi

Layla Fitzgerald, KCLC  
Coordinator Jackson,  
Mississippi  
LeKeisha Cotten, KCLC  
Coordinator, Mississippi  
Gulf Coast  
Ukele Anderson  
Roberta Avila  
Cassio Batteast  
Wanda Berry  
Rev. Ken Braxton  
Roberta Burnett  
Carolyn Coleman  
Catherine Coleman  
Tim Collins  
Yashia Cormick  
Curtis Cotten, Jr.  
Curtis Cotten, Sr.  
Lina Cotten  
Vera Cotten  
Darlene Craft  
Joyce Marie Craft  
Eula Crowell  
James Crowell  
Kristal Daniel  
Derbert Dilworth  
Nicole Divinity  
Thea Faulkner  
Gary Fredericks  
Jerry Galloway  
Temiska Gilmore  
Charise Graham  
Sharon Hanshaw  
Alexis Harry  
Latoya F. Harry  
Rev. Kenneth Haynes  
Carolyn Johnson  
Glen Johnson  
John Jopling  
Jaimie Kroot  
Arrnetta Lyles  
Thao McGee  
Henry McNeal  
Maxine McNeal  
Freda Nall  
Jaimie Osborne  
George Parks

Glenda Perryman  
Judith Phillips, PhD.  
Brenda Powell  
Shonta Richardson  
YaSin Shabazz  
Bandaka Soule  
Bill Stallworth  
Jasmine Stiff  
Marva Tanner  
Darrell Taylor  
Geraldine Taylor  
Wilma Taylor  
Tonia Thomas  
Gwen Thompson  
Tremell Tillman  
Lashawn Traylor  
Sharon Turner-Davis  
Thao Jennifer Vu  
Sue Weishar  
Chamon William  
Cardia Williams  
Joe Williams  
Janice P. Wilson  
Zenobia Wright

## Georgia

Yolanda Seals, KCLC  
Coordinator, Atlanta,  
Georgia  
Ayango Brown  
Diana Brown  
Gilbert Cook  
Patricia Coppin  
Sam Coppin  
Shelly Cross  
Bobbie Ruffin Fleming  
Carl Galmon  
Therol Green, Jr.  
Stephanie Hall  
Byron Haynes  
Anethral Hebard  
Danielle Hewson  
Andreyah James  
Robert James  
Zanetta Jones  
Kendric Matthews  
Stacy "Suga" Matthews  
Cheryl Mills  
Tamica Moon  
Janice Moore  
Jennifer Moore  
Cora B. Murray  
Charlotte Pate  
Maude Perrymon  
Stacy Piper

Nicole Ramsey  
Astrid Recasner  
Marilyn S. Riley  
Shirley Scieneaux  
Angela Sims-Winfrey  
Christine Smith  
Lillie Mae Stokes  
Tysheka Taplett  
Elise Thomas  
Evelyn Washington  
Elizabeth Williams  
Zaneta Williams  
Linda Young

## Texas

Brandi Brown KCLC  
Coordinator, Houston,  
Texas  
Eugene Keith Anderson  
LaShonda Anderson  
Ron Angeletti  
Henry Armstrong  
Saliha Bava  
Barbara Best  
Akua Boateng  
Debra Bolten  
Deborah Brown  
Machelle Dixon  
Gilda Ebanks  
Maria Teresa Fletes  
Catherine Flowers  
Cherrel Jackson  
Herbert Jackson  
Linda Jeffers  
Audrey Kaywood  
Marva LeBeau  
Susan B. Levin  
Patricia Legohn  
Trishawn Lewis

Alvin McFadden  
Linda Nellum  
Tina RaboteauWilliam  
Saulberry  
Carolyn Scantlebury  
Jeff Stys  
Lowell Taylor  
Liljose Marie Tompkins  
Laurie Vignaud  
Althea Washington  
Clarence Weaver  
Dianne Weaver  
Rennette Williams

## Consultants

Paulette Bailey-Wilson,  
Legislative Consultant  
Arthemease Bloxson-  
Melancon, L.C.S.W.,  
D.C.S.W.  
Carol Burnett, Ph.D.  
Beverly Favre, Ph.D.  
Monique Harden, Esq.  
Eden Heilman,  
J.D., M.S.W  
Dr. Fleta Mask Jackson  
Margaret Montgomery,  
Ph.D.  
Joy Osofsky, Ph.D.  
Judith Phillips, Ph.D.  
Sandra Robinson,  
M.D., M.P.H.  
Tracie Washington, Esq.  
Kyshun Webster, Ph.D.



All of these reports can be viewed at [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

## WHAT IT TAKES TO REBUILD A VILLAGE AFTER A DISASTER

STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND THEIR LESSONS FOR OUR NATION

## PROJECT CONSULTANTS AND RESEARCHERS

A Call to Action to Address Gaps in Services for Seniors Post-Katrina

Arthemese Bloxson-Melancon, L.C.S.W., D.C.S.W.

Post-Katrina Child Care Needs of the Mississippi Gulf Coast

Carol Burnett, Ph.D.

Homelessness and the Gulf Region.

Beverly C. Favre, Ph.D.

The Need for the U.S. to Adopt the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* as the Standard for Federal Response to a National Disaster that Results in Population Displacement

Monique Harden, Esq.

The Recovery of Public Education in New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast

Eden B. Heilman, J.D., M.S.W.

An Executive Summary: What It Takes to Rebuild a Village After a Disaster: Stories from Internally Displaced Children and Families of Hurricane Katrina and Their Lessons for Our Nation

Dr. Fleta Mask Jackson

Supplemental Report on Employment

Dorothy Newell, M.S.W.

The Real Crisis Resulting from Hurricane Katrina: Children's Mental Health Needs

Joy D. Osofsky, Ph.D.

Housing After Katrina

Judith Phillips, Ph.D.

Health Care for Children of New Orleans

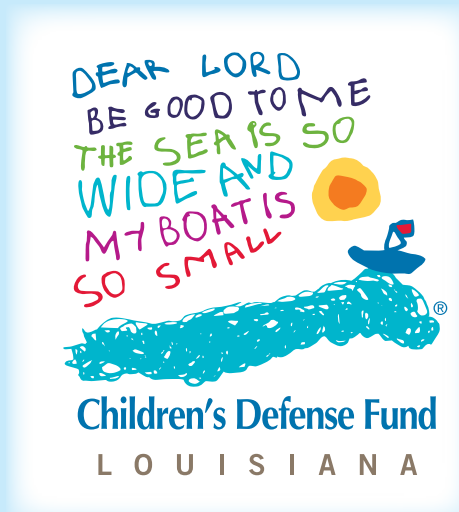
Sandra L. Robinson, M.D., M.P.H.

Rebuilding New Orleans

Tracie L. Washington, Esq.

Impacts of Hurricane Katrina on Youth Development

Kyshun Webster, Ph.D.



The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

**Children's Defense Fund**  
1452 N. Broad Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70119  
p (504) 309-2376 f (504) 342-2566  
[www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

