**Background Paper**

**on**

**FEMA Pilot Functional and Unmet Needs Project**

**Joplin, MO DR 1980**

**Debra Hill & Julie Morrell**

**Background:**

Approximately two weeks into the FEMA Response Phase in Joplin Missouri, Community Relations Specialists were designated to assist in developing a pilot program for Functional and Unmet Needs. The ultimate goals were;

* seek out and locate individuals not yet registered for assistance with FEMA
* determine and provide resources for people with functional and unmet needs
* team members were chosen based upon prior experience as former case workers, emergency medical technicians and/or caretakers. Three teams of two, sought out and connected with local agencies providing services to people with disabilities, as well as people with functional needs

People from the aging population were the most encountered – probably because their functional needs were exacerbated by the May 22nd tornado.

CR Specialists sought opportunities to interface with public and private agencies and local government entity directors to create value-added working relationships.

FEMA outreach efforts through CR Specialists led a proactive and positive effort within tornado impacted areas taking a proactive stance in a reactive situation.

Our focus was a proactive approach with 36 individuals and 60 agencies to identify needs of populations of people with:

* Communication barriers
* Transportation barriers
* Functional needs
* Access needs

Mission target was tornado survivors comprised of populations of people with the following access and/or functional needs:

* + - Aging
    - Families and children
    - Developmental/intellectual / cognitive disabilities
    - Physical disabilities
    - Autism
    - Cerebral Palsy
    - Deaf or Hard of Hearing
    - Non-verbal
    - Blind or visually impaired
    - Mobility impaired
    - Injured
    - In need of medical care

In addition to contact with survivors, many local public and private service providers were contacted and thereby included in our FEMA support network.

**Why This Approach:**

* Reach individuals not registered for assistance due to physical disability, injury, mental health disability, fear of being institutionalized, or developmental disability
* Provide more resources for unmet needs; i.e. removal of debris, cooling and heating issues, child care, employment resources, assisting with understanding of FEMA and other related correspondence, etc.
* Provide information on various FEMA programs
* Facilitate connection to the local Independent Living Center (or, nationally, they are know as Center for Independent Living)

**DISCUSSION:**

What We Did:

* Develop relationship with Independent Living Center (ILC) administrators and staff
* Provide link with ILC
* Refer survivors to additional agencies: State, Local, Private
* Provide additional information to survivors
* Confirm registration with FEMA / determine status of claim
* Compile, maintain and edit comprehensive list of resources via Internet, telephone directories, local Chambers of Commerce, and referrals
* Immediately connected survivors to FEMA Individual Assistance

CR Staff participated in events sponsored by the Association for the Blind; playing ‘Beeper Ball’ and attending ‘Blind Blues and BBQ’. They also attended a July 4th celebration at the preschool operated by the Cerebral Palsy of Tri-County Missouri. (See attached photos) This type of participation served as further exposure for FEMA. (They also attended the TILC Annual Consumer Picnic in June)

**CHALLENGES:**

* Release of Information forms/confidentiality. A variety of forms were utilized during the mission, none of which ever really stuck. Legal counsel and program leads should consider a simple form or Letter of Authorization.
* Community Relations staff must be trained to recognize characteristics of people with access and functional needs to increase their awareness of tools used to enhance quality of life i.e,:
* Service animals
* Oxygen users
* Cane / walker / wheelchair
* In-home caregiver
* TTY phone
* Other assistive devices
* Begin early in the response phase of disaster
* Recommend printed business cards for use with organizations
* Recommend inclusion of all Independent Learning Centers in immediate surrounding disaster area

**The Legacy:**

* Valuable relationships established and/or enhanced between FEMA and individuals, local businesses, State, County and Local human and social service / community support agencies
* Increased registration by locating those who had not yet registered, using force multipliers
* Ability to drill down to those hard to reach individuals with the fewest resources and the greatest needs
* Enhanced the face of FEMA by aggressive and proactive approach to connecting survivors with critical resources
* Established means to provide long-term, ongoing services to individuals after FEMA leaves the community
* Created cohesiveness between providers of resources
* Discovered and enhanced awareness within the FEMA structure, about hidden populations

**OUTCOMES:**

* Lives saved
* Elderly remained in home, preserving independence and dignity
* Mobility (van and lift)
* Volunteer services utilized to assist with debris removal and cleanup
* Contractor home inspection verified absence of mold
* Air conditioning installation
* Free diabetic supplies
* Connected with trauma counseling services
* Provided *immediate* disaster related information
* Excellent PR for FEMA
* Linked individuals with long term assistance through ILC
* Connected ILC with Salvation Army; facilitating transfer of donated wheelchairs, walkers and syringes
* Follow-up ensured completion of tasks and feedback from individuals and agencies served

**EXAMPLES:**

* Mr. R was an 80+year old gentleman with onset of dementia.Home previously flooded. Living alone. Reached the end of FEMA financial assistance. Needed additional help.
* Results
  + Volunteers removed debris, cleaned mud from inside home
  + Installed air conditioning unit
  + Volunteer contractor tested for mold
  + Case worker assigned to monitor and assist with bank account activity
  + Mr. R remained in his home and maintained independence
  + Restored and maintained dignity
  + Created healthier living environment
* Mr. & Mrs. L was an elderly couple, whose home destroyed by the tornado. She, in comatose state. He, sole care-giver and blind. Unable to transport her to doctor’s appointments, unable to easily obtain resources such as food or access to post office.
  + Results
* UFAS FEMA manufactured home
* Connection with ILC provided medical supplies for care of Mrs. L., arranged for van (purchased by Mr. L) and wheelchair lift
* Additional care, as needed
* Cane for Mr. L
* Allowed Mr. and Mrs. L to remain together
* Reduced difficulty of care and transportation
* Peace of mind
* FEMA CR, ILC, and Americorps volunteers moved couple to FEMA home
* Two young mothers living in a shelter were forced to leave the shelter during hottest hours of the day. They walked and pushed their babies’ strollers in 100+ degree heat. Babies were at risk of heat-related complications.
  + Results
* Provided immediate relief from heat in alternate shelter
* Connected mothers with free daycare service to allow job-seeking
* Other service organizations provided food, clothing to families
* Babies potential health risks averted
* Safe, reliable child care options provided
* Encouraged mothers to learn skills, earn money and take control of their own lives
* An elderly couple was found lying in a semi-comatose state in home with no air conditioning.
  + Results
* Team members called 911
* Ambulance transfer to health care facility prevented possible death
* Couple in care of ILC and home health care