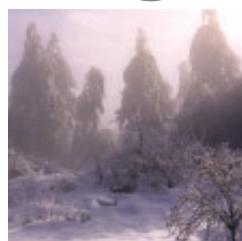


# Coping with Disasters and Strengthening Systems



## A Framework for Child Welfare Agencies



**National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement**

Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine

**A service of the Children's Bureau, US Department of Health and Human Services**

# **Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems: A Framework for Child Welfare Agencies**

*Mary O'Brien  
Sarah Webster  
Angela Herrick*

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Developed by the National Child Welfare Resource Center  
for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI)

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*Peter Watson, Project Director*

*Mary O'Brien, Author*

*Sarah Webster, Author*

*Angela Herrick, Author*

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# Contents

Introduction	1
<b>Before a Disaster</b>	<b>3</b>
Create a Plan	3
Assess Potential Disasters	
Develop a Child Welfare Disaster Plan	
Conduct or Participate in Drills at All Levels	
Update the Plan Regularly	
Prepare to Manage	9
Designate Managers	
Assign Other Critical Roles	
Stress Leadership	
Workload Planning	
Locations for Operations	
Disaster Supply Kits	
Flow of Funds	
Enhance Critical Infrastructure	15
Coordinate with Key Partners	
Develop Communication Systems	
Strengthen Information Systems	
Prepare Staff and Contractors	
Prepare Families, Providers and Youth	
Before a Disaster: At a Glance	28
<b>During a Disaster</b>	<b>30</b>
Manage	30
Workload Management	
Assess and Respond to Client Needs	
Support Staff	
Manage Volunteers	
Coordinate	34
Communicate	34
Assess Information Systems	35
During a Disaster: At a Glance	36
<b>After a Disaster</b>	<b>38</b>
Manage	38
Capture Lessons Learned	40
Rebuild Better Systems	40
After a Disaster: At a Glance	42
Appendix A: Annotated Resource List and Bibliography	44
Appendix B: Contact Information for National Resource Centers	52
Appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan – Basic Template	53
Appendix D: Tips For Managing Volunteers	54

# Introduction

Across the country, natural disasters, man-made crises, or medical events can affect the routine ways child welfare agencies operate and serve children, youth and families. It is especially important for agencies caring for vulnerable populations—such as abused and neglected children—to do what they can to prepare for these disasters. Federal statute, under the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006, now requires States and Tribes to develop plans in preparation for a disaster.

At the same time, child welfare agencies are striving to build stronger systems to improve outcomes for children and families. Many are engaged in systemic reforms, working to strengthen critical structures and systems to improve their performance. Program Improvement Plans and Child and Family Service IV-B plans identify steps to improving safety, permanency and well being outcomes for children and families.

Fortunately, many of the steps agencies might take to prepare for disasters can also strengthen systems critical to ongoing agency management. For example, an agency may need to enhance automated information systems to enable staff to access case information from any location during a disaster—but more accessible automated systems could also improve the agency's success in managing cases on a day-to-day basis.

This publication has a dual purpose—to help managers think through what they might put in place to cope with disasters, and to highlight how taking these steps can improve systems for serving children and families.

This publication, developed to update a 1995 Children's Bureau publication, *Coping with Disasters: A Guide for Child Welfare Agencies*, draws on an extensive literature review and recent presentations by and consultations with State staff members who have experienced disasters. Additionally, members of the Children's Bureau's Training and Technical Assistance Network shared insights from their experiences with relief efforts following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Gulf Coast States, and central office and regional office Administration on Children and Families (ACF) staff provided input.

The three sections in this framework cover steps agencies should take before, during, and after a disaster. The first section—Before a Disaster—has three parts:

- **Create a plan** – recognize what could happen, develop a disaster plan, practice it, and keep it updated.
- **Prepare to manage** – specifies the key elements of disaster plans.
- **Enhance critical infrastructure** – coordinate with key partners; establish communication systems; strengthen information systems; and prepare staff, families, youth, and providers. Work in these areas will both help during a disaster and contribute to improved outcomes for children and families.

The second section provides an overview of how to implement disaster plans when disaster occurs. The third section focuses on the period after the disaster. While agencies continue to manage a response, they also have an opportunity to assess their experiences, revise their plans and rebuild stronger and more effective systems.

To help make this a useful tool, each section concludes with a checklist giving a quick overview of the key points discussed in the text.

# Before a Disaster

Disaster planning is not easy for anyone, but it is doubly hard to devote the time and personnel to planning for future events while dealing with the problems children and families face every day. While planning ahead adds another dimension—and extra work—to an already difficult job, the time and effort are never wasted, especially when the effort can also bring about changes that strengthen the agency and improve outcomes. Planning can also save work after the crisis has passed, making recovery faster and smoother. While planning cannot avoid disaster, it can help mitigate the hardship it brings to agencies and to the children and families they serve.

## Create a Plan

### **Assess Potential Disasters**

To recognize what could happen and take steps to be prepared, conduct an assessment of the types of disasters an agency might face. Brainstorm with staff and/or providers, drawing on their experience to identify potential disasters or crises in your area, and gathering ideas for handling these events. Request information or a briefing on potential disasters from State or local emergency management agencies, police and fire departments or State and local homeland security agencies. Consider anything that could happen, no matter how remote:

#### *Natural Disasters:*

- Hurricanes
- Tornados
- Floods
- Droughts
- Tsunamis
- Landslides
- Earthquakes
- Winter/ice storms
- Extreme temperatures
- Fires
- Volcanic eruptions

### *Man-made Events:*

- Terrorist attacks
- War, armed conflict, civil strife
- Technological (e.g., electrical power blackouts/brownouts, computer system and network disruptions, widespread electronic equipment breakdowns)
- Hazardous materials incidents (e.g., chemical, biological, radiological)
- Economic collapse

### *Medical Events:*

- Outbreaks of infectious diseases/epidemic and pandemic outbreaks (e.g., flu)

Consider both small scale events—such as illness in one unit or a flood that destroys one office, and larger disasters—such as a heat wave affecting the whole population or a hurricane destroying hundreds of homes. Provide for a flexible response based on the scope of the disaster:

- minor disasters can be handled locally,
- major disasters will require State and federal assistance, and
- catastrophic disasters will require massive State and federal aid.

Also consider the impact from disasters in other States, particularly nearby States, after which children and families might move into your State and need services.

## **Prowers County, CO: Preparing for Fire**

In 2004 the Prowers County, CO offices were destroyed by a fire. Reflecting on the experience, Linda Fairbairn, the county administrator said: “The critical message I want to convey is child welfare administrators need to think about the disasters that could happen in advance—and talk about it, plan and practice. I realized afterwards I had overestimated the safety of our building. I never thought there might be a fire. When the fire happened we had never had a fire drill or any kind of evacuation drill for the building. Our workers tried to put the fire out and then opened doors and windows which made the fire spread faster, when they should have closed doors. So make sure you do fire drills, and learn basic fire safety rules.”

Also, when fire broke out in the building, managers realized they had no way to do a building wide alert—each department within the building had its own phone system. They have since developed phone trees so there is an established procedure for notifying each department of a crisis.



## Develop a Child Welfare Disaster Plan

Because disasters do happen and have an impact on children, families and services, child welfare agencies need to make preparing for disasters a priority, consulting with key stakeholders to develop and implement a child welfare disaster plan. In addition to using this framework, agencies can review information on websites about disaster preparedness and recovery (see Appendix A). Federal statute now

requires States and Tribes to develop plans in preparation for a disaster. (See the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006, and Title IV-B, Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act at Section 422(b)(16). Also refer to the annual program instructions for the APSR for current information at the Children’s Bureau website, [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/.](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/))

### COOP Plans in Florida

In Florida, legislation requires that all government agencies have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to provide for continuance of services and control in the event of a major disruption of normal operations. The Department of Children and Families (DCF), which oversees most public assistance and social services programs, including adult and child protective services, economic assistance, mental health and domestic violence, has developed a COOP plan to ensure the continuation of essential functions and the orderly transfer of power to lower echelons when operations are disrupted. The plan identifies an emergency command team and its responsibilities, and details mission essential functions. It includes alert and notification procedures for managers and staff, and guidance on operations in alternate locations.

DCF has held “tabletop exercises” in which teams test the COOP plan by responding to emergency scenarios to evaluate what works and doesn’t work in the plan. The COOP plan is valuable, but DCF is also working on developing disaster plans specific to child welfare to address issues such as services for children with special medical needs during a disaster.

First, look at any existing department-wide disaster recovery or business continuity plans, and at statewide emergency management plans. Most States developed business continuity plans when there were concerns about the year 2000 (Y2K), and they may cover child welfare operations. Other States developed broad Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans at a department or State level, and they could be an excellent starting place for developing a plan specific to child welfare. Further, if disaster plans exist on a department or statewide level, any child welfare disaster plan should flow into and be consistent with these larger plans. Coordinating with State emergency management agencies allows child welfare agencies to coordinate more easily with other key human service agencies, such as Medicaid and economic assistance, and with the broad range of emergency responders, including police, fire and the Red Cross (see “work with emergency management agencies,” page 15).

Assign a person to oversee the child welfare disaster plan. Identify disaster planning as a part of their work performance responsibilities, and ensure they have time to carry out these tasks. Responsibilities would include:

- ensuring the plan gets developed through a collaborative process;
- communicating the plan within the agency and in the community;
- coordinating with statewide emergency management processes;
- ensuring child welfare agency involvement in practices or drills; and
- periodically reviewing and updating the plan based on new requirements, findings from tests and drills, and contributions from stakeholders.

As appropriate, the person responsible for the plan can delegate some of these tasks to specific people, and/or convene workgroups to assist with these tasks and to provide a forum for stakeholder participation.

In developing a disaster plan specific to child welfare, it helps to get input from key stakeholders, including caseworkers, supervisors, regional managers, information technology management staff, federal partners, foster and adoptive families, service providers and the courts. Consult with other public agencies, such as mental health, and other community members, such as the faith community; and coordinate with disaster plans developed by other systems serving similar populations.

For example, find out what the court's disaster plan is and discuss how the plans could support each other. Communicate with Tribes as appropriate to coordinate disaster planning and response.

In agencies where child welfare services, and particularly case management services, have been privatized, contracts should specify that contractors develop, implement and update disaster plans and provide these plans to the child welfare agency. The agency then knows the procedures to be followed during a disaster and can coordinate response across contractors and with the public child welfare disaster plan.

### **Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Provider Contract Language**

Texas has stated in contracts with their providers a requirement to maintain a written disaster and emergency response plan. The contractor's plan must address mandatory and emergency evacuations, disaster planning training for facility staff, location and tracking of children, protection or recovery of records, provision of regular and crisis-response services to children during and after a disaster, communication with DFPS, and post-disaster activities. The contracts state that all staff and subcontractors of the primary contractor must be aware of the disaster plan and its requirements and be prepared to fulfill their role in executing the plan. In an emergency, the agency website provides a key communication link for agency staff, providers, foster families, stakeholders, and the general public for sharing the status of disaster recovery efforts.

The plan needs to contain, at a minimum, details about who has the authority to activate the plan, essential functions to be performed, who makes up the emergency management team, and communication processes. These minimum elements are laid out in the next section, “Prepare to Manage.” It will need to be updated regularly as staff names and positions change due to staff turnover and agency reorganization. The plan can also specify other steps the agency will take prior to disasters, particularly around building infrastructure.

These other steps could be drawn from plans for each of the specific infrastructure areas, and these smaller plans could feed into and support the broader agency disaster plan. For example, the agency might have a foster and adoptive program plan, an information systems development plan, a human resources plan and/or a media communications plan. If disaster recovery or business continuity plans have been developed for these areas, they can be incorporated into and support the overall child welfare agency disaster plan.

Many of the areas addressed in the disaster plan are also important to ongoing program improvements. Key areas include:

- coordinating with key partners—an orientation towards looking outward and working closely with others is critical in all of the agency’s work. Particular partnerships important to both disaster preparedness and ongoing performance are those with other public agencies, service providers, and with courts.
- strengthening internal and external communication systems;
- building or maintaining statewide, automated information systems;
- establishing ongoing support services to help staff deal with the day-to-day trauma of child welfare work; and
- providing critical information to staff, families and providers and staying in touch with these partners.

Developing a child welfare disaster plan and strengthening infrastructure to support the plan can be a daunting task taking a number of years. To help identify priorities for the plan, managers should consider the needs and strategies identified as priorities in any child welfare agency plan, such as the Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan (PIP) or the IV-B Child and Family Services Plan. For example, if the agency’s PIP identifies strengthening information systems as a priority area for improving outcomes for children and families, then it might make sense to focus on improvements in that area under the disaster plan as well.

## Conduct or Participate in Drills at All Levels

Conduct or participate in drills at the office, county / regional and statewide level. It is important to practice response to emergency situations on all levels, including:

- regular fire drills;
- regular emergency evacuation drills;
- specific drills of the child welfare disaster plan; and
- participation in statewide, regional or local drills organized by State or county emergency management agencies.

Specific drills of the child welfare disaster plan allow the agency to test all components of the plan.

It is particularly valuable to coordinate with emergency management agencies so child welfare can join with community organizations such as the Red Cross, local health departments, faith based organizations, police and fire to simulate and test disaster recovery plans.

### Update the Plan Regularly

During drills and tests of the plan, and during actual emergencies, many valuable lessons are learned about processes that work and those that do not work. Update and modify the plan based on these lessons and on realistic re-assessment of potential disasters or threats. Review the plan regularly to ensure that information is current, including contacts, addresses and locations, organizational structure and communication processes.

### Practicing Response in New York

New York's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has conducted building evacuation exercises every year for the past four years at their headquarters in New York City. Staff follow procedures specified in the evacuation plan to leave the building and gather at staging areas. ACS also participates in response drills for specific threats conducted by the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). For example, ACS recently participated in a coastal flooding drill organized by the OEM.

## **Prepare to Manage**

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Key elements of disaster planning that agencies need to consider are listed below.

### **Designate Managers**

Disaster plans should designate who is in charge during disasters and include two or three alternate staff members who can take charge if the designee is not able to assume the role. The plan should also identify essential functions requiring continuous performance during a disaster, and designate managers and alternate staff to oversee those functions. Those in charge during a disaster and those managing essential functions compose an emergency management team. To identify essential functions, consider what the agency absolutely must do (e.g., mission critical activities), and what can be suspended during a disaster. Also consider provisions for temporary delegation of authority to another agency if the senior leadership team is not available.

The plan should define the roles and responsibilities of managers who have been given authority to make certain decisions for the agency. Managers designated to oversee essential functions should receive notification of their assigned roles, a copy of the plan giving them authority, and some basic training on how to carry out their assignments during a disaster. These staff may not be top agency leadership, but other managers who have been given the authority by agency leadership to oversee continuing operations of a specific program, such as foster care. All agency staff members should be notified who the managers will be during a crisis as part of basic training on the plan (see page 23).

Disaster plans need to specify how to put the plan in place and notify managers or alternates during disasters. These steps are sometimes called activation procedures. The plan needs to include how communication will happen among and between managers and staff. It is useful to include phone trees, and to update them regularly (see page 19).

In addition, managers need to make decisions, specific to each circumstance, about which staff members are needed to carry out essential functions, taking into account the safety of staff reporting to work, workload demands and resources (see page 12). To support continuing operation, the plan can also define the roles and responsibilities of frontline staff in each essential function area.

### **Assign Other Critical Roles**

The person responsible for developing and updating the plan should communicate disaster response expectations to agency and contracted staff regularly. Assign responsibility to specific staff or positions for additional key roles during a disaster such as:

- handling the press/communicating a consistent message to media;
- communicating with and screening volunteers; assigning them to tasks and providing basic training;
- acting as liaisons with other jurisdictions (e.g., States, counties, or parishes);
- communicating with federal partners; and
- serving as a liaison to courts (see Enhance Critical Infrastructure, page 15).

### **Stress Leadership**

Child welfare disaster plans provide guidance on preparing for and coping with disasters, and describe general emergency procedures, but they are not substitutes for sound judgment and capable leadership. Plans can state that if local administrators and supervisors determine that an emergency situation far exceeds what was anticipated in a plan, or if they are temporarily out of touch with State level administrators, they have the authority to use their best judgment, and they may need to improvise. Agencies can provide guidance on what actions can and cannot be taken independently by local leaders during a disaster.

## New Hampshire's DCYF Disaster Response Plan

In New Hampshire, the Division of Children, Youth and Families oversees child welfare services, and has developed a Disaster Response Plan that focuses on DCYF's unique responsibilities for foster children. It stresses leadership and local decision making, and the fact that supervisors and administrators will need to improvise to meet the specific conditions of an actual disaster. The plan is activated when ordered by the DCYF Director or designee, who then provides direction and information to district supervisors and State office personnel, informing them to activate continuity plans. For each unit (intake, assessment, family services, special investigations, and eligibility determination), the plan specifies:

- the role of the supervisor—usually charged with determining whether it is safe to for the unit to do its work and with activating phone trees to contact staff; and
- the role of staff.

The plan provides guidance for foster families, calls for residential providers to implement their emergency plans, and includes sections on the ICPC, staff support, backing up information systems, and making emergency payments. Appendices include State and district office phone trees and information on district office disaster response kits. The plan clearly states that DCYF is dependent upon the work of other Department units, so the DCYF plan needs to be coordinated with the broader Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

The Division has begun to implement the plan by visiting all of the local office administrators to brief them on the plan and their responsibilities. When a damaged high pressure gas pipe created an emergency, local managers used the plan successfully to handle the situation and to contact all of the staff.

## Workload Planning

Consider how staff will be deployed during a disaster, especially given the extra demands that may fall on workers:

- Workers may be victims of the disaster themselves, with damaged or destroyed homes or missing or affected family members. This will limit their emotional and physical availability for child welfare tasks.
- The State emergency management plan may call for child welfare staff to help with immediate response efforts, such as overseeing evacuations, and/or taking on tasks in the response and recovery process, such as operating or working at shelters or providing child care at assistance centers.
- Additional or expanded services will be needed during a disaster for existing child welfare families and new families in need. Child welfare workers might need to take on roles outside their programs to provide a broad range of social services, such as food stamps or housing.
- If families are evacuating, having trained staff present could help families stay together, reducing the number of unaccompanied children to care for after the disaster.
- The agency may need to train personnel to answer toll-free phone numbers used for communication during disasters.
- After major or catastrophic disasters, as court processes are re-established, workers and attorneys should be available for court cases so that legal requirements (e.g., permanency timeframes) can be met. This will minimize the impact on children in care and the potential loss of IV-E funding, which would have a further negative impact on services.

### **Limon, CO: Extra Demands on Staff**

After a tornado hit Limon, CO, social services staff members were surprised to find that the local disaster plan that had been written ten years prior assigned Social Services the role of providing clothing, shelter, food and registration of victims. The entire staff worked 14- to 16-hour days to set up and operate a food and clothing warehouse in the gymnasium of an elementary school. The agency had to continue to function—courts went on, child welfare issues went on, and people still needed benefits. This was a very difficult challenge for the staff. They were also surprised by how long the warehouse remained open for services. They operated the warehouse for approximately a year after the tornado so people could get clothing and household supplies as they moved back into new homes.



Consider available resources:

- Identify child welfare staff members with multiple skills who could assist with different jobs within child welfare and other social service agencies as necessary.
- Determine roles that units within the child welfare agency, contractors and staff from other agencies, could undertake.
- Explore existing or potential processes for temporarily employing retired State employees. Some agencies have found this to be an excellent source of willing, skilled labor.
- Develop mutual aid agreements between counties and across State lines and specify how each agency will assist the other in times of crisis as appropriate—including sharing staff, facilities and other resources. These agreements could be included in any existing border agreements.
- Consider using experienced resource parents to help with disaster recovery work.
- Develop a pool of trained volunteers who can help with multiple tasks during a disaster and participate periodically in practice drills.
- Local Court Apointed Special Advocates (CASAs) may be willing to play additional roles during a disaster.

To help staff prepare to take on different roles in a disaster, have a process in place for transferring a case temporarily to another staff member in the case of minor incidents like staff illness or displacement. Include procedures for access to case records and contact lists.

## **Locations for Operation**

Prepare offices and service delivery sites for possible disasters by holding regular drills, coordinating with emergency management and key providers, establishing communication systems and strengthening information systems. Some agencies have found it useful to evaluate their power supply and install generators to provide backup power at key locations.

Determine possible alternative service delivery and staff location sites during a disaster. Consider sites designated for statewide emergency management efforts. Alternative locations for services should have computer servers and access to the agency computer programs if possible.

## Disaster Supply Kits

Consider storing a “kit” of essential items in offices that managers can take if they are forced to leave the building during a disaster. These disaster supply kits could include employee lists, phone numbers, cell or satellite phones, a wireless portable computer, maps, and a list of media outlets. If regular and secure alternate locations are available for services during major disasters, store similar supply kits there, in case agency offices are not accessible or managers arrive at the alternative location directly from home. Update the kits regularly to ensure that contact information is accurate.

### **Operational Disaster Kits for Managers could include:**

- Laptop computer with extra batteries
- 1 gigabit USB thumb drive (with important documents loaded before a disaster)
- Phone lists, address book, with employee and management contact information
- Employee lists
- Cell phones, satellite phones, radios/walkie-talkies, wireless handheld devices
- Radios and extra batteries
- Disaster plans
- Maps, driving directions to alternate facilities
- Portable GPS devices (if available)
- Flashlight, lanterns, with extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Pocket knife or multi-tool
- Car chargers for laptop and cell phone
- Personal hygiene items

### **In addition, the agency might want to arrange for:**

- Agency vehicles with full gas tanks

## Flow of Funds

Using direct deposit to pay workers and those who receive checks directly from the child welfare agency (e.g., foster parents, adoptive parents with subsidies, independent living clients, youth with Education and Training Vouchers, residential facilities, etc.) allows continued payments and electronic access to funds even if mail systems are down, local bank offices are closed, or recipients have relocated. However, be aware that in catastrophic disasters, bank systems may be down, so agencies should maintain the capability to revert to paper checks.

Child welfare agencies may receive voluntary cash donations to assist children and families. These funds must be kept in a secure place, and the agency will need convenient accounting procedures to assure their correct use, generate receipts and report on expenditures.

Agencies may want to document the work they do at the State and local level related to the disaster (i.e., efforts to locate children) that may be eligible for federal reimbursement. During major and catastrophic disasters, all payroll and timekeeping records should be saved as a portion of overtime pay may be eligible for reimbursement.

## Enhance Critical Infrastructure

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To support the key elements of the agency disaster plan discussed above, and to make ongoing program improvements, it is important to strengthen critical infrastructure areas. When prioritizing areas to address, consider the goals and strategies contained in existing child welfare plans, such as the PIP or the IV-B plan, and think about the critical infrastructure areas listed below.

### Coordinate with Key Partners

*Work with emergency management agencies.* State emergency management officials have overall responsibility for managing major and catastrophic disasters. Contacting and maintaining links with these officials will give child welfare managers the knowledge they need during disasters and help them advocate for including the needs of child welfare clients and staff in statewide plans. Many jurisdictions link to the emergency management team by having an agency leader serve on the team or by sending staff members to monitor meetings.

Child welfare disaster plans developed at the county or local level also need to be coordinated with local emergency management plans and first responders such as police and fire departments. Coordinating with emergency management on both levels allows the agency to:

- Keep updated on current emergency response plans. Who should be the child welfare agency's contact during a disaster to coordinate services? How can they be reached? Who should be contacted on specific issues (e.g., phone communication, reuniting families and children separated by the disaster, locating children at shelters)?
- Keep updated on the roles assigned to child welfare staff responding to disasters (i.e., running shelters, processing food stamp applications, etc.).
- Provide information on the child welfare disaster plan so it can be coordinated with or incorporated into the State and/or local emergency management plan.
- Provide State emergency management or other agencies with agency contact information during a disaster.
- Determine where emergency services are located during a disaster and whether child welfare can provide services in these locations.
- Advocate for the needs of child welfare clients, staff and volunteers in the disaster response plan (e.g., medically fragile children who need equipment or evacuation).
- Advocate for child welfare participation in emergency response drills.
- Work with emergency response agencies to establish data sharing agreements with agencies likely to be involved in running emergency shelters to help locate displaced children after a disaster.

## **Coordinating with Emergency Management in New Hampshire**

New Hampshire's child welfare agency has taken the critical step of reaching out to work with broader emergency response planning efforts in their State, making links that have helped them manage their agency well during disasters. The Director of the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) within the Department of Health and Human Services, is a member of the State's disaster planning team. DCYF has found it valuable to participate in staged drills of responses to emergencies, and then debrief and act on lessons learned. These drills help child welfare agencies clarify their roles and those of others. New Hampshire has staged drills of ice storms, flu pandemics, nuclear reactor meltdowns, and the impact of disasters in urban areas of nearby States. Recently, floods hit one corner of the State, and both DCYF offices and foster families were flooded out. Systems worked well in response: staff from other counties filled in, a phone system was used to locate missing children, and communication systems were maintained.

*Establish liaisons with other jurisdictions to coordinate services and share information.*

During disasters children and families often move across State or county lines. Identify liaisons in neighboring States and counties, if there are autonomous child welfare agencies at the county /local level. The liaisons can share information from State or county automated databases and records, and coordinate services for children and families who cross State or county lines.

Plans can identify liaisons by name or by a specific position. Agencies might consider identifying two or three contacts—for example, one for general information, one for foster care and adoption, and one for residential services. To identify liaisons, consider existing relationships from cross-state organizations such as the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Placement of Children (ICPC) or the Foster Care or Adoption Managers Associations. Provide complete contact information (e.g., phone numbers, alternate phone numbers, fax, email, addresses) for those liaisons and their alternates in the plan. This information can also be incorporated into existing border agreements.

### **ICPC Liaisons in Florida**

Florida has developed an ICPC Disaster Preparation and Response Plan. It states that:

- the ICPC Office is responsible for serving as the communications liaison between Florida and other States as either Florida's dependent children relocate to another State or other State's dependent children relocate to Florida, and that
- the primary point of contact in the ICPC Office will be the ICPC Administrator.

*Build collaborations with other relevant State agencies and programs.* Building on relationships with other State agencies or programs can identify agency-specific roles to support families and children in times of a disaster. For example, the health department may already have plans for distribution of medication which the child welfare agency should connect with in their planning. Child support enforcement can access recent employment data to help locate missing parents after a disaster. Other agencies oversee services such as Medicaid, food stamps, and mental health that are critical to disaster recovery.

*Collaborate with service providers.* Providers of ongoing services for children and families are critical partners, and should be involved in developing and updating the child welfare disaster plan. They should also help plan the delivery of essential services during and after disasters (e.g., expanding counseling and family support services after a flood destroys homes or setting up new programs for large populations affected by a tornado). Child welfare agencies should assess any special medical needs of children in out-of-home care and communicate with hospitals and other medical providers to help meet these needs, if necessary. Including service providers in practice drills is beneficial and may prevent later role confusion.

Ensure that contract providers have effective and updated disaster plans in place (see page 6 and 24). In addition, if case management services have been outsourced, review and coordinate providers' disaster plans.

*Coordinate with courts.* Work collaboratively with courts to achieve outcomes for children and coordinate disaster response efforts. Share information on each system's disaster plans and on the status of court processes during a disaster. Work towards integrated information systems, so the agency and courts share appropriate case level information. This benefits both ongoing agency management and efforts to manage services to families in the wake of a disaster. Assign a person or position to act as a liaison with courts during and after a disaster to facilitate communication.

*Establish liaisons with federal partners.* Designate staff to initiate contact during disasters with federal agencies that oversee your agency, and maintain contact during the recovery process. This will allow communication about federal requirements and possible waivers, and information sharing on what is happening on the State and federal level related to the disaster.

*Identify potential volunteers and their tasks.* Identify people and organizations that might assist as volunteers during a disaster, such as the faith community, civic groups, local or national volunteer organizations, or nonprofit agencies. Consider the types of tasks they might do and any training they would need to understand the agency and carry out those jobs.

## Develop Communication Systems

*Toll-free numbers.* It is critical for the agency to have toll free numbers, or reserve numbers that can be activated when necessary for staff, families, youth, and providers to contact the agency during and after a disaster. These lines should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and accessible to people with disabilities (TTY). These lines can provide recorded messages with information for people calling in, or be used to make outgoing calls.

### **Toll Free Numbers and Call Center Services: Louisiana**

Louisiana's child welfare agency, the Office of Community Services (OCS) recognized the need for a toll free number to be used during emergencies, and they realized that another State agency had an existing contract with a call center vendor which could provide these numbers. OCS was able to arrange to add onto this existing contract, saving significant time and effort it would have taken to set up a new contract. In the event of a disaster, the OCS provides a single toll free telephone number for staff, foster parents, providers and clients to use to contact the agency. The call center can handle a large volume of calls and is located outside Louisiana. The call center fields the calls and rolls them over to central office and to district offices as they open, and also prepares a report of those who have called in. The call center also sends a prerecorded message to foster parents at the beginning of the hurricane season, reminding them of the plan and giving them the toll free number to call. A second phone call goes out if there is a mandatory evacuation or hurricane watch.

It is helpful to draft scripts specifying what information you want from families, providers and youth who call in (e.g., Are you safe? Where are you? How long do you plan to stay? Any problems we can help with?). Also consider what information you want to provide (e.g. how to access services, information on the status of siblings, parents or children).

*Internal communication.* Examine buildings where staff members work to see if managers can quickly communicate to all staff in an emergency. Is there a system (such as phone trees, intercoms, email) to communicate to all programs or units in a building and to all agency buildings throughout the county or State? Use these communication methods regularly so staff are used to being contacted and receiving important information this way.

*Websites.* Post information for staff, families, providers, and youth on a designated website, and update it regularly. Websites can include current status of services and how to access them, disaster updates, alternate transportation routes / maps, information for staff, toll free numbers and other contact information. Some agencies use intranet sites to provide this detailed information. (For examples of State websites, see Appendix A.)

*Prepare for media communication.* A staff person should be designated to work with the press and communicate a consistent message. To prepare, agencies can draft news releases that include:

- toll free phone numbers for clients and for staff;
- websites; and
- alternative locations for service delivery and staff.

The disaster tool kit should include a list of media outlets where releases will be sent, including print newspapers, TV, cable TV, radio and key websites. Also consider how to reach families or youth with limited access to public media or low literacy skills. Ask local media for input on developing an effective public communication plan. The media may be the only avenue of communicating with staff if internal communications systems are impacted. The media plan should include providing critical information for families, providers, youth and staff.

*Communication technology.* Arrange for critical managers, staff and providers to have alternatives to land line phones such as cell phones, or, optimally, satellite phones. In major disasters, cell phones may not work if cell phone towers are down or if electricity is out and the cell phone batteries run down. Satellite phones have proven to be more reliable for communication during recent major disasters. Other approaches to communication include:

- text messaging using wireless hand held devices (e.g., BlackBerries); and
- radios and/or walkie talkies with powerful ranges for communication within buildings or shelters or between locations.

Computers are powerful tools for communication and should be accessible to managers and staff during a disaster. Mobile computing capability and wireless remote access allow computers to be used off site or in the field during disasters. Explore getting computers or mobile computing technology into the hands of as many staff and managers as possible.

If street signs have been knocked down or landmarks obliterated during a major disaster, staff may have difficulty locating clients and one another. Experiment with GPS locators for these emergency situations.

Decide on communication technology ahead of time. Practice using it prior to a disaster, so staff will not have to use new technology for the first time under stressful circumstances.



## Strengthen Information Systems\*

*Build on existing plans and requirements:* Consult with the agency information management staff on existing disaster recovery plans (DRP) for the agency's information system. Is the plan tested and updated? Are backups already done? What are the thresholds for having equipment in place, back on line, and connected to a central site after a disaster? Also look at existing business continuity plans. Are there procedures in place for falling back on manual processes (paper forms), and for setting up in alternate locations? Consult with information systems management staff on the current requirements for SACWIS systems or other information systems. What information is stored and updated in the current system on staff, clients, and providers?

*Store critical information.* Store the following information in statewide automated databases:

- disaster plan details including roles and responsibilities;
- case and client records;
- disaster plan contact information for staff, families, providers and youth; and
- human resource data (employee information, payroll systems).

Agencies have found that it is particularly critical to ensure that information on clients is entered into automated systems, and that this information is updated regularly. After a disaster, paper files may not be available, and up-to-date contact information on automated systems greatly expedites efforts to locate children and families.

*Provide access to automated systems.* During disasters, when families, youth and providers disperse, staff across the State and from other States will need information on these clients to make appropriate safety decisions and provide adequate services. Statewide automated systems allow staff in any part of the State access to information, and they allow central office staff to access information about children and families throughout the State.

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\* Federal regulations at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/sacwis/at\\_oism\\_001d.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/sacwis/at_oism_001d.htm) describe the information that is required in SACWIS systems and the requirements for hardware and software security, including disaster recovery plans.

## Protecting Automated Records in Texas

In Texas, State agency records created mainly in the State capital, Austin, are backed up at a secure facility in San Angelo, Texas. San Angelo is over 200 miles away from the capital in an inland location.

*Protect vital records.* Use off-site backup for information systems with case and client records (such as Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems—SACWIS) and human resource data (e.g., employee information and payroll systems). Backing up automated systems in a secure, remote location is a vital step to accessing information if disaster strikes agency buildings or the local area. Coordinate with other key partners, such as courts, on taking steps to backup critical records.

*Protect equipment:* To protect data, equipment and servers from environmental factors, invest in secure server cabinets with the necessary air conditioning and waterproof protection. Take appropriate steps to protect computers during disasters, such as covering/bagging machines and installing surge protectors.

*Assess Paper Records:* In addition, agencies should assess any paper records they maintain:

- How critical are they?
- Can they be converted to electronic records by scanning?
- What steps must be taken to protect them?

Agencies can help protect critical paper files from fire and water by keeping them in fire-safe metal filing cabinets.

## Prepare Staff and Contractors

The safety of workers is a top priority, as they need to be safe themselves to ensure the well-being of children in care. These steps will help ensure that staff are prepared for a disaster, and that agencies will be able to maintain communication with them:

*Personal disaster plan.* Workers should be encouraged to develop simple personal disaster plans, including where they would go in a disaster, and contact information at these locations. This information should be updated as necessary, at least annually, perhaps on the anniversary date of hire or at the time of performance appraisal. Human resources should collect and store the information in a place where it will be accessible during a disaster, preferably in statewide automated databases. This will allow the agency to assess the safety of the workforce and determine their ability to carry out their job assignments after a disaster.

Workers should be required to check in as soon as possible after a disaster. Some agencies specify that staff check in within a designated period of time, such as 24 hours, if this is feasible. Provide workers toll free phone numbers for checking in, information about alternative work locations, and how the agency will communicate with them if internal communication systems are impacted. For example they should know which radio or television stations have agreed to make major announcements for the agency.

*Office Preparedness:* Prepare staff to be safe if a disaster happens while they are at work. Post information on exit routes, conduct drills, and maintain strong communication systems. Some agencies keep emergency supplies (such as flashlights) in multiple locations and urge workers to keep a personal emergency supply kit in their offices. Sneakers are an item most people do not think about adding to their personal disaster kit, but after the attacks of 9/11, workers both in NY and DC found themselves walking miles either home or to safety.

### **Personal Disaster Kits for Staff could include:**

Flashlights, lanterns, glow sticks

Sneakers

Maps, driving and walking direction for evacuation routes

Car keys

In vehicles: water, blankets

*Train all staff on agency disaster plan.* Training on the plan should be included in new worker training, and offered to all staff on a regular basis. The training should focus on how staff members can prepare, how to contact the designated manager and what is expected of them during a disaster. This should include participating in disaster-related drills.

*Establish support services for staff.* Set up programs to address the ongoing needs of staff arising out of the trauma of child welfare work, such as employee assistance and mental health counseling. If these services are regularly available to staff to help them handle the stress of working with abused and neglected children, they will be easier to access during a disaster. Providing these services will also help agencies retain their workforce, contributing to improved services.

## Secondary Trauma Services

In Colorado, David Conrad is under contract with the Department of Human Services to offer county child welfare agencies individual and group stress debriefing sessions after crises and disasters, and ongoing sessions to help workers process the day-to-day trauma of their work. He developed a six-hour Secondary Trauma Training Seminar to educate caseworkers about what secondary trauma is, how it impacts them and what they can do to process secondary trauma. He also conducts Educational Support Groups with Colorado caseworkers. These groups allow him to visit with teams regularly—at least bimonthly—to provide them with an opportunity to debrief and to offer them new insights and tools they can use to protect themselves. He says: “I also hope agencies will realize the value of having support services in place following a natural disaster or other acutely traumatizing event. For example, I traveled to Prowers County, shortly after the fire destroyed their building. Because I had been conducting ongoing support groups with their staff, they were very receptive to my conducting a stress debriefing and to assisting staff with their ongoing trauma (e.g., loss, anger, frustration). The availability of crisis intervention services and ongoing secondary trauma training and support are critical if staff members are to move through and past their own trauma.”

*Expectations and Support for Contracted Staff:* In child welfare agencies that have outsourced or privatized case management or significant service delivery responsibilities, expectations around preparing for and responding to disasters should be included in contracts and passed on to the contractor’s staff. In addition, contracted staff should receive disaster training, and contractors should be encouraged to establish support services for their staff.

## Missouri Alliance for Children and Families

The Missouri Alliance for Children and Families, a provider for the State of Missouri, has developed detailed emergency response procedures to protect their staff and avoid injuries in the event of a disaster or general emergency. They have also developed policy for their foster parents to follow in preparation for a disaster and when responding to emergency situations.

## Prepare Families, Providers and Youth\*

Agencies should prepare families, providers and youth so they will know what to do during a disaster and so that the agency can locate them after a disaster.

*Disaster plan.* To keep children and youth safe, agencies should require families and providers who care for children to develop a disaster plan, and to update it on a regular basis. Youth in independent living and youth receiving Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) should also be encouraged to develop and update personal disaster plans.

Larger facilities are more likely to have disaster plans in place, possibly due to accreditation or licensing requirements. Agencies need to make an extra effort to help individual families and youth, who are less likely to have specific plans in place, to develop them. (See Appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan.)

Families, providers and youth receiving ETVs or in independent living, should be required to check in as soon as possible after a disaster. Just as with staff, some agencies specify a check-in within a designated period of time (e.g., within 24 hours or as soon as feasible).

Disaster plans should include:

- where the family, provider or youth would go in an evacuation (2 locations—one nearby and one out of the area);
- phone numbers and other contact information (e.g. email);
- contact information of someone who will know where they are (e.g., out of area relative, friend);
- what they will take with them, including medication and medical equipment; and
- toll free phone numbers they will call to check in.

In group homes or facilities, disaster plans (with toll free phone numbers to call) should be posted in areas accessible to youth.

Just as for staff, the information in these plans should be stored in an accessible place, preferably in statewide automated databases. Agencies should inform key partners, such as courts, of the information they are collecting and storing to encourage coordination of efforts to locate children after a disaster.

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\* “Families and providers” include: foster families, relative caregivers, adoptive families, emergency shelters, group homes, residential treatment centers, and the facilities serving children in the care of child welfare (psychiatric hospitals).

*Emergency preparedness.* Providing information on requirements for disaster plans should be part of a broader effort to inform families and providers on emergency preparedness. This information should be provided in a culturally competent fashion (e.g., in local languages and through appropriate channels). Consider including this information in preservice training for foster care licensure. Helpful information includes:

- how to prepare and update a disaster plan (e.g., forms—where, how and when to submit);
- the requirement to check in and how to contact the agency (e.g., toll free phone numbers, websites, email addresses);
- a list of critical items to take when evacuating with children, including:
  - identification for the child and any citizenship documentation;
  - the child’s medical information and equipment (e.g., prescriptions, recent medical reports, physician(s) name and contact information, immunization history), educational records, and court orders; and
  - agency contact information.
- recommended content of disaster supply kits, including items for special needs (e.g., medical equipment for medically fragile children);
- tips on what to do if disaster strikes; and
- tips for helping children handle disasters.

To help families, providers and youth keep critical information with them, agencies can distribute wallet-sized laminated cards. If these cards are in wallets they are more likely to be taken if sudden evacuation from homes is called for. Cards can have:

- child-specific information (name, social security number, medical information), and / or
- agency contact information (phone numbers, websites and emails).

Some States have also prepared small notebooks or expandable files where families can keep all the critical items for each child. This is good practice on an ongoing basis and helps ensure families, providers and youth can easily take critical information with them when they evacuate. Training and assistance can help families, facilities and youth compile the items listed above.

In compiling emergency preparedness information, agencies can refer to emergency preparedness checklists and information available on websites (see Appendix A).

## Preparing Families and Providers in Louisiana

In Louisiana, the training section has conducted emergency preparedness training for all the foster homes and residential providers in hurricane prone areas of the State. Foster parents and residential providers were advised of the agency expectation that they will evacuate if ordered and were instructed on making personal evacuation plans. The agency assisted them in making photocopies of medical cards, case plans, placement agreements, court orders and other critical documentation for children in their care. In addition, another unit has contacted all foster families in hurricane prone regions to update home telephone numbers, cell phone numbers and telephone numbers for their Primary and Secondary Evacuation locations. The Residential and Private Foster Care section has notified residential facilities and private foster care providers of the agency's evacuation expectations, the planned use of a call center, and the phone numbers to use to check in after a disaster

*Prepare birth parents and families receiving in-home services.* Agencies need to work first to prepare and ensure communication with children and youth in out-of-home care. However, birth families and families receiving in-home services should also be encouraged to develop and update family disaster plans, and the agency should provide them with emergency preparedness information and a phone number they can call to check on their children after a disaster or evacuation.

When possible, agencies should collect identifying information, such as social security numbers or driver's license numbers, from birth parents and from families receiving in-home services to help locate them during and after a disaster. Locating birth parents is particularly important for continued work on the permanency plan and when court processes require their presence. This information, along with other contact information, should be recorded in automated databases so it can be accessed when needed. If agencies do not have contact information for birth parents, they may be able to get phone numbers and other information from the foster families or providers caring for their children.

# Before a Disaster: At a Glance

## Create a Plan

- Assess the types of disasters the agency might face.
- Develop a child welfare disaster plan (coordinate with department-level and statewide disaster plans, assign person responsible, consult with stakeholders, state expectations for providers, write the plan—how to manage, build critical infrastructure, prioritize).
- Conduct or participate in drills on all levels.
- Update the plan regularly.

## Prepare to Manage

- Designate managers in charge and backups.
- Identify essential functions; designate staff and backups to oversee these functions, provide training; plan for communication.
- Assign other critical roles (media, volunteers, liaisons to other States, federal partners, and courts).
- Stress leadership.
- Consider post-disaster workload demands and resources.
- Identify locations for operations (prepare buildings, consider generators, determine possible alternative locations).
- Prepare disaster supply kits.
- Consider flow of funds.

## Enhance Critical Infrastructure

### Coordinate with Key Partners

- Work with emergency management agencies.
- Establish liaisons with other States to coordinate services and share information.
- Build collaborations with other relevant State agencies and programs.
- Collaborate with service providers.
- Coordinate with courts.
- Establish liaisons with federal partners.
- Identify potential volunteers and their tasks.



### Develop Communication Systems

- Establish toll free numbers.
- Establish and use internal communication systems.
- Designate websites for disaster information.
- Prepare for media communication.
- Arrange for and use communication technology (e.g., alternatives to land line telephones; computers and mobile computing; explore GPS locators).

### Strengthen Information Systems

- Build on existing plans.
- Store critical information in statewide automated systems.
- Provide access to automated systems.
- Protect vital records (e.g., off-site backup, protect computers).
- Protect equipment.
- Assess paper records.

### Prepare Staff and Contractors

- Encourage staff to develop personal disaster plans and keep them updated; store information from the plans so they are accessible during a disaster.
- Require staff to check in after disasters and provide information on how to do so.
- Keep emergency supplies in offices.
- Train all agency staff on agency disaster plan; participate in drills.
- Establish support services for staff.
- Develop expectations and support for contracted staff.

### Prepare Families, Providers and Youth\*

- Require foster and adoptive families and providers to develop disaster plans and keep them updated; store information from the plans so they are accessible during a disaster.
- Require families, providers and youth to check in after disasters.
- Provide families, providers and youth with information on emergency preparedness.
- Prepare birth families and families receiving in home services.
- Collect critical identifying information for birth parents when possible; store contact information so it is accessible during a disaster.

\* This includes foster parents, relative caregivers, adoptive families, group homes, residential treatment centers, other facilities serving children in the care of child welfare agencies (psychiatric hospitals).

# During a Disaster

If child welfare agencies develop disaster plans that address key elements and critical infrastructure areas, they will have a framework to guide response during a disaster. If the plan is tested and updated regularly, it will help managers continue essential functions. This section describes the steps agencies need to take to implement disaster plans, and highlights some other considerations during disasters.

## Manage

Under the direction of the managers in charge, staff members take on the roles assigned to them or their positions. This includes those designated to manage essential functions, and those assigned to other critical roles (media, volunteers, liaisons to other States, federal partners, and courts). Key managers meet regularly as an emergency command team, and maintain links to broader emergency management efforts. Managers let staff and providers know who needs to report to work and how to maintain essential functions.

### **Communicating with Managers and Contractors in New York**

New York's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has found that the ability to communicate and coordinate with key players is critical during a disaster. On 9/11, ACS evacuated its headquarters near the World Trade Center, and moved to an ACS building in another part of the city. In the weeks following 9/11, ACS leadership kept in constant contact with the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Deputy Commissioners met daily and also met regularly with the managers of contracted services to answer questions, discuss service delivery, and keep them informed about efforts to bring computer systems back on line.

More recently the Deputy Commissioners all got 800-megahertz radios with a dedicated frequency—with one channel they can use to communicate with one another at headquarters, another that goes to the alternate site for ACS headquarters, and another that goes directly to the Mayor's OEM. The OEM does routine roll calls with these radios to make sure they are working.

## **Workload Management**

Managers contact and deploy staff as needed to meet the demands of the disaster, and draw on extra resources, including mutual aid agreements with other counties or States. Specific steps related to workload management include:

- Assess the availability of child welfare staff, including those affected by the disaster and their locations. Agencies could maintain a database to keep track of who has been located and their status.
- Based on the plan, carry out work functions identified as essential. Some nonessential, routine activities can be discontinued or limited, saving staff time for more critical functions.
- Find out what special waivers might go into effect during a crisis and communicate those to all parties needing the information. It is particularly important that this information gets to frontline staff who are dealing directly with children, youth and families (e.g., ICPC waivers, Medicaid waivers).
- Train staff to answer calls coming in to the toll-free phone number.
- Rotate local and non-local staff members, and volunteers, through the most demanding disaster-related positions.
- Have managers log situations they address so short “how to” guides can be produced and shared. This will help avoid a duplication of effort as other managers face the same situation, and will allow the experience to inform revision of the disaster plan.

## **Assess and Respond to Client Needs**

A primary focus during disasters is to be in contact with clients and begin to respond to their needs. Consider the following steps:

- Establish contact with families, providers and youth in the child welfare system at the time of the disaster when they call in, or use emergency contact information to locate them. Coordinate with other systems that have child and family location information.
- Maintain a database to track clients who have called in and those who are in unknown circumstances.
- Conduct an initial assessment of locations and needs of families, providers and youth.
- Provide information, support, and services for these families, and coordinate services with other agencies.

- Provide additional programs/services to children, youth and families affected by the disaster, such as:
  - immediate trauma services for children, youth and families;
  - assistance for medically fragile children and their caregivers;
  - more time for service visits;
  - new benefit programs to respond to needs (e.g., rebuilding housing);
  - child care for families seeking help; and
  - extra assistance needed by foster families to provide for their own children.
- Identify children separated from their families, and provide services to them.
- Relocate services to alternate locations as required by the scale of the disaster.
- Locate services close to where families and children are—disaster assistance centers along with other service providers, if possible, and/or use mobile units, neighborhood centers, or coordinated outreach to provide access.
- Make services culturally competent by providing services, and information about them, in the language clients use, and in a culturally appropriate way.
- Compile and distribute to staff and clients lists of other disaster-related services and programs available through statewide emergency management efforts and/or other agencies.

## **Support Staff**

Recognize and understand staff stress and needs. Child welfare staff may be victims of the disaster themselves, if their homes or personal goods have been destroyed or damaged, or if their families have been affected. Furthermore, staff may have difficulty handling both their ongoing child welfare work and the additional work of responding to the disaster.

Provide staff support and opportunities to process emotions. Group opportunities to debrief stress and share stories of their experiences can support and validate staff, and help them recover faster. Draw on any existing staff support resources, such as employee assistance programs, to provide counseling and other support. In some cases it is appropriate to use resources from outside the area, as local mental health professionals may be just as affected as staff and not able to offer productive help.

## Louisiana's Approach to Dealing with Secondary Trauma

In the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita the Louisiana Department of Social Services recognized the personal toll on their staff and developed a program to help staff deal with the personal impact of traumatic life events. They developed a training curriculum and workbook to help staff work through their personal losses. Agency trainers encourage staff to share their unique stories and find strength in the support of others, helping them to heal. Expressions of feelings are encouraged as the trainers guide the staff in regaining a sense of empowerment lost by whatever traumatic event they have encountered.

Other specific steps to support staff include:

- Allow staff scheduling flexibility. In alternative locations, staff members often must work in close quarters, and the work is stressful and demanding. Allow staff to stagger their work times so they can address personal needs.
- Advocate for staff to have priority in emergency housing. Articulate the necessity of having some staff on hand at service centers and in affected communities to provide required services to children, youth and families in need. Support staff by working to ensure their basic needs are met, including places to sleep near the work site.
- Establish administrative centers separate from disaster services. These centers allow staff space to take breaks, meet with one another, and store their personal items, and should be located near service centers for easy access. Consider locating counselors in these centers to help staff process their experiences.
- Address immediate staff needs. If services are disrupted in a community, staff may need child care for their own children. If they have been affected directly, the agency might organize collections of needed goods or funds.

## Manage Volunteers

Depending on the scope of the disaster, agencies can have a few to an overwhelmingly large number of volunteers offering assistance. The agency may want to assign a person or position the responsibility of communicating with, screening and assigning volunteers. In major or catastrophic disasters, this person will need assistance, and the agency might benefit from a volunteer coordinator in each region or county. The agency may need to orient/train volunteers, and managers have found it useful to develop brief manuals or one-page "tip sheets" giving instructions for tasks and agency expectations so rotating volunteers will be oriented appropriately and efficiently. (See Tips for Managing Volunteers, Appendix D.)

## **Coordinate**

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During disasters agencies can draw on relationships they have established with key partners to communicate as necessary about the situation. This includes:

- Statewide emergency management staff: Make contact between agencies, discuss location of emergency services, get information on the agency's role in response, and advocate for needs of child welfare clients, staff and volunteers.
- Liaisons in other jurisdictions: Contact liaisons in other counties or States for assistance, or to consult and share information on families leaving or coming into the area.
- Contractors: Make sure roles and responsibilities are functioning as needed between the agency and various contractors.
- Service providers: Consult about status of current services and plans for services to be delivered after the disaster.
- Courts: Coordinate efforts with courts to locate children and workers. Communicate about any necessary delay in court proceedings and on emergency placements of children. Consult on a process to transfer jurisdiction across State lines when the child and foster family have relocated and the family has no plans to return. For others, institute ICPC requests as appropriate.
- Federal partners: Maintain contact with federal partners to share information and communicate about federal requirements and local needs.
- Volunteers: Draw on any trained or available volunteers. Communicate with organizations offering volunteers through designated volunteer coordinators (see page 33).

## **Communicate**

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Implement the elements of the communications plan discussed on page 19. This includes:

- Use the internal communication system to broadcast messages about the disaster to staff in all locations.
- Ensure that toll free phone numbers are working or are available as soon as possible.
- Post critical information on websites and keep updated.
- Implement the media plan.
- Review communication technology, including:
  - Are phones, cell phones, satellite phones or other technology working among key managers and partners?

- Are computers available?
- Is there a need for GPS locators?
- Do staff need additional training on this technology?

## **Assess Information Systems**

Review access to computers for staff members who need them to provide client information, process payrolls or perform other essential functions.

Check off-site locations with backups of critical information systems to determine accessibility should it be necessary.

# During a Disaster: At a Glance

## Manage

- Designated disaster managers take charge; those in charge of essential functions take on their roles; communicate with staff and providers.
- Those assigned to “other critical roles” take on their tasks.

### Workload Management

- Assess the availability of child welfare staff.
- Deploy staff to meet the demands of the disaster and draw on extra resources.
- Carry out work functions identified as essential; waive others.
- Find out what special waivers might go into effect during a crisis and communicate those to all parties needing the information.
- Train staff to answer the toll free phone numbers.
- Rotate local and non-local staff.
- Have managers log situations they address.

### Assess and Respond to Client Needs

- Establish contact with/locate families, providers and youth; maintain database to track.
- Conduct an initial assessment of locations and needs of families, providers and youth.
- Provide information, support and services to families, providers and youth; coordinate with other agencies.
- Provide additional programs/services for children, youth and families affected by the disaster.
- Identify and serve children separated from parents.
- Relocate services to alternate locations as required.
- Locate services close to where families and children are.
- Make services culturally competent.
- Inform clients of other available disaster-related services and programs.



### Support Staff

- Offer staff support and opportunities to process emotions.
- Allow staff scheduling flexibility.
- Advocate for staff to have priority in emergency housing.
- Establish a separate administrative center for staff to meet and take breaks.
- Address immediate staff needs (child care, need for goods, funds).

### Manage Volunteers

- Assign a person or position the responsibility of screening, assigning and communicating with volunteers.
- Develop brief manuals or one-page “tip sheets” of instructions for tasks.

### **Coordinate**

- Draw on established relationships with key partners to communicate as necessary about the crisis. Include:
  - statewide emergency management staff,
  - liaisons in other jurisdictions,
  - contractors,
  - service providers,
  - courts,
  - federal partners, and
  - potential volunteers.

### **Communicate**

- Use internal communication system to broadcast messages.
- Ensure that toll free numbers are working.
- Post critical information on websites; keep updated.
- Implement the media plan.
- Review communication technology.

### **Assess Information Systems**

- Review access to computers for staff.
- Check off-site locations with backups of critical information systems.

# After a Disaster

During a disaster agencies focus on responding and meeting immediate needs. After the disaster, agencies continue to respond to an even broader array of needs, and to implement other elements of the plan. Especially after a catastrophic disaster, there will be a long period of recovering and rebuilding. Over months and even years, agencies have to deal with the aftermath that can be bigger and more daunting than dealing with the immediate impact. This section describes some short term and long term considerations for agencies after a disaster.

## Manage

*Continue work begun during the disaster.* Provide additional services and supports to affected families, coordinate with key partners, work on keeping in touch with staff, families and providers, implement the communications plan, and use the automated information system. Specific considerations include:

- Assess the need for new or modified services as a result of the disaster.
- Continue to develop and provide additional programs and services to respond to needs.
- Provide services to children, youth and families arriving from other States. Make placement slots available to children coming from another site affected by a disaster.
- Coordinate services for children served by the agency who are out of the area or out of State.
- Continue to provide services to unaccompanied children and work to reunite them with families.
- Ensure service delivery is culturally sensitive and competent (e.g., audio messages, telephone hotlines and fliers should use local languages; use bilingual staff when necessary; advocate for distributing food that is culturally familiar).
- For staff answering the toll-free numbers, develop a list of frequently asked questions to help them respond to common questions.
- Work with federal partners to explore which federal requirements are still in place and if there are any waivers that might reduce the demands on State staff focused on disaster recovery.

- Have a system for communicating with staff through meetings or emails so that everyone is getting information on the extent and impact of the disaster and the status of agency offices and services. Establishing a consistent source for internal communication will cut down on conflicting messages.
- Continue support services to help staff deal with the trauma and stress of child welfare work and disaster work. Also, allow staff to exercise control by giving them some choices (e.g., flexibility in redesign of offices, scheduling, and office attire).
- Recognize staff efforts through awards, citations, and /or press coverage.

### **Supporting Staff in Prowers County, Colorado**

Following the fire in Prowers County, CO that destroyed the child welfare offices, managers noted that one of the worst things about the disaster was the loss of control. So where they could, they gave staff opportunities to exercise some control. For example, they picked out five desk models and some colors and let people select the ones they wanted for their offices. They also let people flex their work day schedule to avoid overcrowding in limited space.

In the aftermath of a major disaster that destroys buildings and communities, agencies need to invest in rebuilding. This is particularly challenging as available resources must first be used to meet immediate needs. However, agencies must, in the aftermath of disasters, work collaboratively with partners to rebuild the structures needed for effective services in the long term, including physical facilities, equipment and records for service providers.

Agencies that have coordinated disaster planning across all human service departments and across all statewide stakeholders will find this valuable, as many services and responders—such as food stamps, Medicaid, housing and economic development—are critical to child welfare families making a full recovery. In addition, the ability of child welfare staff and providers in other systems to function is dependent on broader emergency response efforts providing for basic needs so they can live and work in the area, including housing, availability of food, transportation and other basic services.

## Capture Lessons Learned

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Hold debriefing sessions with managers, staff, stakeholders, and partnering agencies. Explore what went well and what lessons were learned. For example, a fire will trigger efforts to contact everyone in the building, and if managers could not do that efficiently, the agency might establish new phone lists and phone trees to place in accessible locations.

Based on these debriefing sessions, update the disaster plan. This analysis can also support and help guide rebuilding efforts. Revisions should be communicated within and outside of the agency.

## Rebuild Better Systems

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Assign a person to collect information on rebuilding resources—donations, available grants, and other offers to provide assistance. Charge this person with communicating this information to all staff. This is more efficient than each staff member taking time to search for resources they need, and helps coordinate and make the best use of available resources.

For any disaster—minor, major or catastrophic—the assessment of lessons learned can help agencies identify systems that need to be strengthened. Disasters that destroy agency buildings and damage systems may provide opportunities to build better systems than those that were in place. These stronger systems will enhance the capacity to manage the agency on an ongoing basis and during a disaster.

For example, an assessment of lessons learned could include these critical systems:

- *Collaboration with partners.* How did the agency work with key partners, such as service providers or courts? What could have been done differently or more effectively? Strengthen the agency's commitment to ongoing collaborative work with these partners.
- *Contracted Services.* Did outsourced agency responsibilities such as case management function effectively during the crisis? Reassess contract expectations to improve oversight and address deficiencies.
- *Service Delivery.* Were necessary services provided effectively and efficiently despite the circumstances? Commit to ongoing work with providers to develop responsive services and enhance the service array.

- *Communication with families, providers and youth.* Was the agency able to stay in touch with clients and providers? Institute new procedures for providing emergency preparedness information and having clients develop and update personal disaster plans. Strengthen ongoing communication and collaboration with families, providers and youth.
- *Management of staff.* Was the agency able to communicate with staff to assess their needs and availability during and after the disaster? Did the agency help staff deal with stress? Strengthen the process for gathering and recording contact information for staff and contractors, and build new systems to provide ongoing support. This will help retain a strong workforce, contributing to improved services.
- *Communication systems.* Was the agency able to contact all staff quickly? Did toll free numbers and websites work? Was the media plan effective? Were managers, staff and providers able to communicate with one another through phones or computers? Focus on rebuilding a strong communications infrastructure to improve management.
- *Information Systems.* Does the agency have critical client, human resource and contractor contact information stored in statewide automated databases? Could staff access this information during and after the disaster? Were vital records protected? Rebuild more effective information systems to make information easily accessible on a day-to-day basis.

Agencies that develop and implement disaster plans addressing the key elements and critical infrastructure areas laid out in this framework are more likely to be prepared for disasters, and will have taken steps to strengthen the systems vital to improving day-to-day management. While it is difficult to commit time and resources to future needs, agencies can start with the most critical steps in their particular circumstances, many of which will yield benefits in both the short and the long term. While catastrophic disasters occur infrequently, minor incidents, such as flooding of an office, are more common, and having designated managers, alternates and phone trees in place to notify staff will be invaluable. Keeping better automated records of client information will help during disasters and also in ongoing management of cases. Strengthening internal communication systems with staff (email and phone trees, websites, toll free numbers) can help communications during a disaster and build a more informed and cohesive workforce. These are just a few examples of how disaster planning is a worthwhile investment that can help agencies move towards stronger systems and improved outcomes for children, youth and families.

# After a Disaster: At a Glance

## Manage

- Assess need for new or modified services as a result of the disaster.
- Continue to provide additional services and supports to affected families.
- Provide services to children, youth and families from other States who arrive in your State.
- Coordinate services for children who are out of the area or out of State.
- Continue to provide services to unaccompanied children.
- Ensure service delivery is culturally sensitive and competent.
- For staff answering the toll-free numbers, develop a frequently asked questions document.
- Maintain contact with federal partners.
- Communicate with staff and contractors frequently so they know what is going on.
- Continue support services for staff and contractors to help them deal with the trauma and stress of child welfare work and disaster work.
- Recognize staff efforts.
- Invest in rebuilding; collaborate with partners and with broader emergency response efforts.

## Capture Lessons Learned

- Hold debriefing sessions.
- Update the plan based on these debriefing sessions.
- Communicate revisions to the plan.

## Rebuilding Better Systems

- Assign a person to collect information on rebuilding resources.
- Identify systems that need to be strengthened.
- Build new systems that will improve disaster response and also strengthen critical infrastructure to improve performance and outcomes.

# Appendices

Appendix A: Annotated Resource List and Bibliography

Appendix B: Contact Information for National Resource Centers

Appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan – Basic Template

Appendix D: Tips for Managing Volunteers

## Appendix A: Annotated Resource List and Bibliography

### Websites with Disaster Preparedness Information

#### Federal:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights. (2006). *HIPAA Privacy Rule: Disclosures for Emergency Preparedness - A Decision Tool*. [Web Page] URL <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/decisiontool/>

This tool presents avenues of information flow that could apply to emergency preparedness activities.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. [Web Page]. Preparedness and Response. URL <http://www.dhs.gov/xprepresp/>

Abstract: The Department of Homeland Security “assumes primary responsibility for ensuring that emergency response professionals are prepared for any situation”. This website contains national disaster-related information, documents, and regulations. Additionally, the site contains links to other disaster-related websites such as Ready.gov.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2006, May). *National Response Plan*. Washington, D.C.: [http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial\\_0566.xml](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0566.xml)

Abstract: The National Response Plan, last updated May 25, 2006, establishes a comprehensive all-hazards approach to enhance the ability of the United States to manage domestic incidents. The plan incorporates best practices and procedures from incident management disciplines—homeland security, emergency management, law enforcement, firefighting, public works, public health, responder and recovery worker health and safety, emergency medical services, and the private sector—and integrates them into a unified structure. It forms the basis of how the federal government coordinates with State, local, and tribal governments and the private sector during incidents.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). [Web Page]. URL <http://www.fema.gov>

Abstract: This website includes information for businesses, government, emergency personnel individuals, kids and the media. The government section has resources on mitigation, preparedness/training, response and recovery, and includes guidance on continuity of operations plans (COOP) and the national incident management system.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (2005, December). *Long-Term Community Recovery Planning Process: A Self-Help Guide*. Washington, DC: FEMA.

<http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/ltrc/selfhelp.pdf>

Abstract from the author: The purpose of this guide is to provide communities with a framework for long-term community recovery that has been used by FEMA and its technical advisors over the past several years.



## Child Welfare Specific:

Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Hurricane Relief Resources* [Web Page]. URL [http://childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service\\_array/mental/katrina\\_resource.cfm](http://childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service_array/mental/katrina_resource.cfm)

Abstract from the author: In response to the recent hurricanes, Child Welfare Information Gateway has compiled a list of resources to assist families and States affected by these natural disasters.

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. (2002). *Children, Families, and Workers: Facing Trauma in Child Welfare. Best Practice/Next Practice: Family-Centered Child Welfare.*

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPWinter02.pdf>

Abstract: Based on the events of September 11, 2001, this entire publication focuses on meeting the needs of children and adults involved with the child welfare system as they face a trauma.

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. *Disaster Preparedness and Relief Resources* [Web Page]. URL [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/disaster\\_relief.html](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/disaster_relief.html)

Abstract: This website contains a list of resources related to disaster preparedness and relief.

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. (February 2006). *Helping Children, Youth, Families, and Professionals Deal with Post Traumatic Stress from Natural Disasters.* [Webcasts and Presentation Materials]. <http://event.netbriefings.com/event/nrcfcpp/Archives/hunternrcfcppp8/>

Abstract: NRCFCPPP provides us with webcasts of presenters discussing issues of stress and coping with natural disasters. NRCFCPPP Executive Director, Gerald Mallon, provides an overview and introductions to the session; Victoria Kelly, Clinical Director of Upper Bay Counseling and Support Services, Inc., presents on "Helping Children and Families Cope with PTSD Following Natural Disasters"; April Naturale, Director of Network Development at National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, presents on "Secondary Traumatic Stress in Social Work Practice"; and Liz Hughes Kromrei, Director of Staff Services for Child Protective Services at the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, presents on "Texas Child Welfare Responses to the 2005 Hurricane Season".

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. (2005-2006). *Hurricanes and child welfare. Permanency Planning Today.* <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/ppt-winter-2005.pdf>

Abstract: This article discusses the role national child welfare agencies have played in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau (1995, January). *Coping with disasters: A guide for child welfare agencies*. Washington, DC: Westover Consultants, Inc.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/copingdisasters.pdf>

Abstract: Developed by a group of nationally recognized experts in disaster preparedness and recovery to help child welfare agencies prepare for and cope with disasters.

## Other:

Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center. *Natural Hazards Center* [Web Page]. URL <http://www.colorado.edu/hazards>

Abstract from the author: The mission of the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder is to advance and communicate knowledge on hazards mitigation and disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Using an all-hazards and interdisciplinary framework, the Center fosters information sharing and integration of activities among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers from around the world; supports and conducts research; and provides educational opportunities for the next generation of hazards scholars and professionals.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). *Disaster Technical Assistance Center (DTAC)* [Web Page]. URL <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/dtac/>

Abstract from the author: Established by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Disaster Technical Assistance Center (DTAC) supports SAMHSA's efforts to prepare States, territories, and local entities to deliver an effective behavioral health response during disasters.

## Emergency Preparedness Information and Checklists

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (2004, August). *Are You Ready? An In-Depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness*.

Abstract from author: *Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness* (IS-22) is FEMA's most comprehensive source on individual, family, and community preparedness. The guide has been revised, updated, and enhanced in August 2004 to provide the public with the most current and up-to-date disaster preparedness information available. *Are You Ready?* provides a step-by-step approach to disaster preparedness by walking the reader through how to get informed about local emergency plans, how to identify hazards that affect their local area, and how to develop and maintain an emergency communications plan and disaster supplies kit. Other topics covered include evacuation, emergency public shelters, animals in disaster, and information specific to people with disabilities.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (1997). *Emergency Preparedness Checklist* [Web Page]. URL <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/epc.pdf>

Abstract: This document consists of a checklist, blank floor plans, and forms to help families create an emergency disaster plan.

Florida Institute for Family Involvement. *Disaster Preparedness for Families of Children with Special Needs*. Crawfordville, FL: Florida Institute for Family Involvement.

<http://www.fifionline.org/images/PDF%20Files/PDF%2010-13-05/Ready%20Final.pdf>

Abstract: This article provides tips and checklists to help parents and those with children with special needs prepare and plan for disasters.

Nola.com: Hurricane Center Readers' Hurricane Survival Tips. [Web Page].

URL: <http://www.nola.com/hurricane/>

Abstract: Gathered from the Times Picayune newspaper, readers affected by Hurricane Katrina submitted their advice and wisdom regarding preparation for and evacuation during weather-related disasters.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. *Ready America*. [Web Page].

URL <http://www.ready.gov/america/index.html>

Abstract: The Department of Homeland Security has organized checklists, brochures, and other resources for citizens to prepare themselves for disasters. The website also contains links to State and community information.

## **Selected State Disaster Preparedness Websites**

Florida Division of Emergency Management. *State Emergency Response Team* [Web Page].

URL <http://www.floridadisaster.org/index.asp>

Abstract: This comprehensive website allows Florida residents to create their own family or business disaster plan. Resources and tools are displayed on the site, in addition to up-to-date disaster-related headlines and information.

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. *State Child Welfare Websites Providing Information* [Web Page]. URL [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcppp/disaster\\_relief.html#states](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcppp/disaster_relief.html#states)

Abstract: NRCFCPPP has compiled a list of links to websites of some State child welfare agency websites containing information about local disaster-related resources.

New Hampshire Department of Safety. *New Hampshire Bureau of Emergency Management* [Web Page]. URL <http://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/emergservices/bem/>

Abstract: New Hampshire's Bureau of Emergency Management has developed a State Emergency Operations Plan which clearly assigns roles for each emergency support function. The Bureau also provides a forum for those with identified responsibilities to participate in emergency drills to enhance the State response capacity.

New York State Emergency Management Office. [Web Page].

URL <http://www.semo.state.ny.us/>

Abstract from the author: The New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) is responsible for coordinating all activities necessary to protect New York's communities from natural, technological and man-made disasters and other emergencies that threaten the State. NYSEMO coordinates Emergency Management services for the State by providing leadership, planning, education and resources to protect lives, property and the environment.

## **Annotated Bibliography and Additional Resources**

Bell, J. (1999). Contingency planning beyond Y2K: Merging emergency response and business continuity. *Disaster Resource Guide*.

[http://www.disaster-resource.com/articles/contingency\\_beyond\\_y2k\\_bell.shtml](http://www.disaster-resource.com/articles/contingency_beyond_y2k_bell.shtml)

Abstract: The author discusses technological disaster planning and what organizations should include in their plans to prepare.

Bell, J. (n.d.). Protecting communications before disaster strikes. *Disaster Resource Guide*.

[http://www.disaster-resource.com/articles/protecting\\_comm\\_b4\\_bell.shtml](http://www.disaster-resource.com/articles/protecting_comm_b4_bell.shtml)

Abstract from the author: In today's business environment, communications and information technology equipment transcend all organizational boundaries. Plans to restore both needs to be an integral part of every organization's business recovery plans. Some businesses believe they cannot afford the time to create recovery plans, then find out later that they cannot continue to operate when disaster does strike. Take the time now to build an effective communications plan.

Disaster Resource Guide. *Disaster-Resource.com* [Web Page]. URL <http://www.disaster-resource.com/>

Abstract from the author: [This website is a] source for crisis/emergency management and business continuity information. The online *Disaster Resource Guide* is set up to help you find information, vendors, organizations and many resources to help you prepare for (mitigate) or recover from any type of natural or other type of disaster. *The Guide* is to help you keep your business running, your government agency operational, no matter what.

Emerson, C. (2000). Building on the success of Y2K. *Disaster Resource Guide*.

[http://www.disaster-resource.com/articles/building\\_y2k\\_emerson.shtml](http://www.disaster-resource.com/articles/building_y2k_emerson.shtml)

Abstract from the author: This article assesses the residual value of the Y2K effort for business continuity planners. The tremendous effort was needed to correct the problems caused by the so-called "Y2K bug". Without the successful remediation effort, planners would have had their hands full handling both the external and internal failures that undoubtedly would have occurred. Since there were no major failures, few companies had to actually use the developed contingency plans. Detractors immediately questioned the value of the effort when no major crisis actually happened. It is similar to the plight of the information security professionals who, if they do a great job preventing the hackers from attacking their companies, have nothing tangible to show management. The thousands of staff responsible for fixing the problems did excellent work; major problems were prevented and contingency plans not needed! The author offers the following insights as some of the benefits from the Y2K efforts.

Faupel, C. E., & Kartez, J. (1996). Inter-agency collaboration and hazards education in American communities. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 22(1-2), 131-149.

PsychoInfo abstract: Examined the impact of exchange of information and resources between emergency management and city planning agencies in the US on 3 outcome

measures—mitigate, recovery planning, and hazards education. Survey questionnaires were completed by emergency managers and city planners in 328 cities. Findings indicate: 1) the frequency of engaging in oral and written hazards education activities is significantly affected only by the level of preparedness activities on the part of emergency managers that involve some sort of exchange with other city agencies; 2) the frequency of conducting hazards education workshops is affected by the level of interagency preparedness efforts, the breadth of hazards risks confronted by a community, and by the frequency of interaction between emergency managers and city planners. Policy implications, particularly as they relate to social service delivery organizations, are also discussed.

Friedman, P., & Relave, N. (2005, December). *Managing in emergencies: Making us of new funds and funding flexibility for human services*. Washington, DC: The Finance Project.

<http://www.financeproject.org/publications/feskatrina2.pdf>

Abstract from the author: This brief, drawing on responses to Katrina and other disasters such as 9/11, explores strategies that policymakers and program leaders can use to increase the availability of funds and provide greater flexibility in the use of funds to meet human service-related needs in emergency situations. Some of these strategies have already been implemented, while others reflect proposals. The brief also identifies important strategy-related issues for policymakers and program leaders to consider.

Government Accountability Office. (2006, May). *Briefing for Congressional Staff: Gulf Coast Hurricanes: Lessons Learned for Protecting and Educating Children*. (GAO-06-680R).

Washington, DC: GAO. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06680r.pdf>

Abstract: Based on the information gathered in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, this brief cites examples and ways in which child welfare agencies, educators, and other government agencies can improve their responses in protecting children during disasters.

Government Accountability Office. (2006, July). *Federal Action Needed to Ensure States Have Plans to Safeguard Children in the Child Welfare System Displaced by Disasters*. (GAO-06-944).

Washington, DC: GAO. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06944.pdf>

Abstract: This report contains the results of a study examining “the challenges facing state child welfare systems, including the development of plans for dealing with the dispersion of children in the child welfare system due to disasters. This report addresses state child welfare disaster planning”. The report specifies “information on (1) the number of states that have statewide child welfare disaster plans and the primary components of those plans, (2) the extent to which states that experienced federally declared disasters in 2005 also had child welfare disaster plans, and (3) how the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) supports states’ efforts to develop child welfare disaster plans”.

Lind, C. (2005, December). *Managing in emergencies: Enhancing collaboration for human services*. Washington, DC: The Finance Project.

<http://www.financeproject.org/publications/feskatrina1.pdf>

Abstract: This brief highlights how collaboration is imperative in emergency situations and discusses six strategies agencies can use to enhance collaboration, including engaging in collaborative disaster planning and preparation. The strategies are illustrated with examples.

National Governor's Association, Center for Best Practices. (2006, July). *Preparing for A Pandemic Influenza: A Primer for Governors and Senior State Officials*. Washington, D.C.

Available at <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0607PANDEMICPRIMER.PDF>

This primer discusses steps states can take to prepare for influenzas, including lines of command and communication strategies.

O'Brien, M., & Webster, S. (2006, Spring). Coping with Disasters: Tips for Child Welfare Agencies. *Child Welfare Matters*. Portland, ME: National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.

Abstract: Citing specific examples and lessons learned from the field, this entire newsletter focuses on tips child welfare agencies can use to plan for disasters.

Steuerle, C. E. (2003, September). *Preparing for the Next Emergency: Some Lessons for Charities from September 11*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

[http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310852\\_preparing\\_for\\_next\\_emergency.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310852_preparing_for_next_emergency.pdf)

Abstract from the author: The Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy and Harvard University's Hauser Center decided to bring together active participants in September 11 relief, representatives of the charitable sector, and researchers to exchange information on what they had learned. The goal of the session was not to praise or criticize the September 11 effort, but rather to ascertain future directions. Most participants felt that important lessons were learned on how to raise, manage, and disburse funds; coordinate functions; and work with the public and the press in the case of future disasters.

Sundet, P., & Mermelstein, J. (1996). Predictors of rural community survival after natural disaster: Implications for social work practice. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 22(1-2), 57-70.

PsychINFO abstract: Examined why some survived the Great Flood of 1993 in the Midwest and others did not and the relationship of those outcomes to classic crisis intervention theory. Qualitative case investigations were conducted from 8 severely impacted river towns in Missouri. Graduate social work students began on-site data gathering approximately 7 weeks after the flood's initial strike in the state. Outcomes for each community were classified as danger or opportunity crisis resolutions. Results indicate specific, pre-disaster community characteristics were associated with post-disaster survival or failure. Among demographic variables, only the poverty rate appeared to have a strong association with outcome. Contrary to expectations, a vibrant economy was not a predictor of community survival. Communication skills were invaluable aids in survival. Implications for rural social work practice in terms of application to crisis intervention are presented.

Swope, C., & Patton, Z. (2005). Disaster's Wake. *Governing*.

<http://66.23.131.98/archive/2005/nov/disaster.txt>

Abstract: This article presents nine questions that government leaders should be asking based on interviews with experts and on the experience of places that have seen life-threatening crises.

The Urban Institute. (2004). *Issues and Insights after Hurricane Katrina*. Washington, DC:

The Urban Institute.

Abstract: In this transcript, national experts discuss the responses to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in terms of what was done and what could have been done differently.

Walters, J., & Kettl, D. (2005). The Katrina breakdown. *Governing*.

<http://66.23.131.98/archive/2005/dec/disaster.txt>

Abstract: Using examples from Hurricane Katrina and past disasters, the authors discuss the need for coordination, communication, and planning in preparing and responding to disasters.

Weisner, C. D. (2005) COA luncheon address: Will your agency be prepared for a disaster?

Little Rock, Arkansas. <http://www.coanet.org/Files/RoundtableLuncheon.pdf>

Abstract: Based on the experiences faced by human services agencies affected by Hurricane Katrina, Carmen Weisner poses questions about preparedness for agency staff to consider when creating strategic plans around disaster plans.

Winston, P., Golden, O., Finegold, K., Rueben, K., Turner, M. A., & Zuckerman, S. (2006, June). *Federalism After Hurricane Katrina: How Can Social Programs Respond to a Major Disaster?* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

[http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311344\\_after\\_katrina.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311344_after_katrina.pdf)

Abstract from the author: This paper first summarizes key findings from the programs' responses to Hurricane Katrina. It then describes the central features of "normal" program structures prior to the disaster, identifies particular challenges Katrina posed to these programs, explores the key policy responses to the crisis within each program, and finally offers a recommendation to enable more effective disaster responses in the future.

Zakour, M. J. (1996). Geographic and social distance during emergencies: A path model of interorganizational links. *Social Work Research*, 20(1), 19-30.

Abstract from the author: This study combines several quantitative approaches to construct a path model of cooperation among organizations during a disaster. Variables at different levels of analysis, including organizational and network levels, are examined to statistically elaborate relationships among variables. Organizational variables, which are attributional, and a network variable, which is relational, are combined to construct a path model. The explanation of variables at one level using variables at another level is an important means of understanding behavior in a crisis, but this strategy is seldom used in either disaster or volunteerism research (Gillespie, 1991). The results of this study are used to offer suggestions for improving the delivery of social work services during disasters.

## **Appendix B: Contact Information for National Resource Centers**

The National Resource Centers (NRCs) are funded by the Children's Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Each NRC focuses in a different area to help build the capacity of State, local, Tribal and other publicly administered or supported child welfare agencies to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families.

### **National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement**

www.nrcoi.org • 1-800-HELIKID (435-7543) • helpkids@usm.maine.edu

### **National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues**

www.abanet.org/child/rclji • 1-877-222-1800 x1746 • Bullocks@stanabanet.org

### **National Resource Center for Child Protective Services**

www.nrccps.org • 505-345-2444 • thesa.costello@actionchildprotection.org

### **National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**

www.nrcfcppp.org • 212-452-7043 • gmallon@hunterny.edu

### **National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology**

www.nrccwdt.org • 877-672-4829 • nrccwdt@cwla.org

### **National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption**

www.nrcadoption.org • 248-443-7080 • NLyons@spaulding.org

### **National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development**

www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd • 918-660-3700 • ksutter@ou.edu

### **The Collaboration to AdoptUsKids**

www.adoptuskids.org • 888-200-4005 • melody@adoptex.org

### **Child Welfare Information Gateway**

www.childwelfare.gov/ • 800-394-3366 • info@childwelfare.gov

### **National Abandoned Infants Assistance Resource Center**

aia.berkeley.edu • 510-643-8390 • aia@berkeley.edu

### **FRIENDS: National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention**

www.friendsnrc.org • 919-490-5577 • ylayden@chtop.org

### **National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare**

www.ncsacw.samhsa.gov • 714-505-3525 • ncsacw@cffutures.org



## Appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan – Basic Template

*This document is offered as a basic starting point for agencies considering developing a form for resource families to use as part of an overall strategy to improve emergency preparedness. It should be modified to meet the needs of individual agencies.*

### RESOURCE FAMILY DISASTER PLAN

Resource Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_

This document contains my plans if I am required to leave my home address due to a natural disaster or catastrophic event.

#### If I need to evacuate my home, I would relocate to:

FIRST CHOICE: (name of friend or family if relocating to a residence, address, phone number, alternate phone number, other contact information – email, other)

\_\_\_\_\_  
If I am not able to go there, my SECOND CHOICE would be: (address, phone number, alternate phone number, other contact information – email, etc.)

Other means of contacting me:

Cell phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information for person with whom I would be in touch in case of an emergency and who the agency could contact if necessary: (e.g., family member or friend, living outside of the immediate area)

\_\_\_\_\_  
I understand that there are critical items I am urged to take with me when we evacuate. These include:

- agency contact information (e.g. agency emergency contact number)
- my children’s medical information (e.g. prescriptions, recent medical reports, physician/s name and contact information, immunization history)
- educational records
- identifying information for the child including citizenship information
- court order giving the agency custody of any children in my home at the time of the event

I understand that I am required to check in with the (Agency Name). I can use these toll free numbers: (Add phone numbers).

I understand that should any of the information included in this plan change that I am to update the form within 14 days of the change and provide the agency with the update.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: Tips for Managing Volunteers

*This list was compiled by Sarah Webster, who worked on managing an emergency shelter in Texas in the aftermath of the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and it is drawn from the shelter's written manuals and policies, and from her own experience:*

Ensure you have policy in place as to how you will handle volunteers in general and include such things as:

- an application so that you have basic information.
- a criminal background check and internal abuse/neglect check.

Ensure you have a volunteer coordinator to which volunteers are accountable to during a disaster.

Make sure you have a job to assign a volunteer.

During a disaster volunteers should:

- Have an official agency badge with a picture that verifies them as a volunteer
- Receive mini orientation as to the job they will be doing
  - basic medical procedures e.g. hand washing
  - hours they will work (suggest 4 hour shifts)
  - who they will go to if they have a question
  - what to do if they suspect abuse/neglect
  - sign a confidentiality statement

Always ensure volunteers are thanked for volunteering their time and if possible do some type of recognition for volunteers once the disaster has passed.