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Integrating Homeless Service Providers and Clients in Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

People who are experiencing homelessness are at increased vulnerability to disasters. Factors that increase disaster vulnerability for this population include limited options for shelter, limited access to media, social isolation, lack of income, lack of transportation, poor literacy skills, and disproportionate rates of disability, illness, and addiction. These factors are often co-occurring leading to greater rates of injury and death and for survivors they create barriers to recovery after a disaster.

Academic literature available on the topic suggests that communities are ill-prepared to meet the disaster-related needs of people who are experiencing homelessness. Case studies report poor coordination among homeless service providers, limited to no communication and support coming from emergency management officials, and lack of accountability from all sectors. Recommendations from existing literature include the development of interagency plans, formal communication structures, and improved outreach to communicate emergency information to people who are disconnected from the social service system. However, minimal guidance is available that describes what these structures and outreach plans look like.

To build on the existing knowledge base in this area, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the University of South Florida conducted an assessment of coordination and communication strategies in place in two Florida counties which aim to integrate the needs of people experiencing homelessness into broader emergency preparedness efforts. This issue brief outlines these strategies, examines homeless individuals' and service providers' awareness and perception of targeted preparedness efforts, and offers recommendations for other communities looking to improve disaster assistance for people experiencing homelessness.

Background

Overview of the existing knowledge base

A literature search found few articles related to "pre-disaster" homelessness and emergency management. Most describe the need for targeted disaster assistance for this population but fail to offer specific steps or examples for meeting the need. [1,2,3,4,5, 6]

Fullerton et al. (2009) interviewed 151 homeless individuals living in Washington, D.C. one-year after a sniper killed 10 and wounded 4 individuals, all of whom were targeted by the sniper because they lacked housing. The study focused on individuals using the shelter system, thus excluding more isolated and disconnected individuals. Not surprisingly, the individuals participating in the study were found to be well-connected to system supports subsequent to the terrorist attack; the extent of the support is not described but is implied to be in the form of therapeutic support rather than tangible support such as transportation or housing. Fullerton, et al found that after the attack, 65% of the subjects restricted their activities in order to protect themselves. This is important to note given the implications for outreach services. Recommendations focused on the need for more research documenting effective outreach strategies, communications from trusted and familiar sources which are shown to modify behavioral responses, and planning among service providers for increased substance use and resulting withdrawal and for medical care needs.[7]

Leung, Ho, Kiss, Gundlapalli, and Hwang (2008) interviewed 19 key informants to identify issues related to homelessness that emerged during a 2003 SARS outbreak in Toronto. Nearly all homeless service providers identified communication as a major challenge. Service providers claimed to have received inadequate information and few formal directives from public health officials. In addition, service providers were unaware that one shelter had been designated as a quarantine facility for people who were without housing. Though health officials reported knowledge of SARS occurring within the homeless population, they described the need to address more pressing concerns for infection control in hospitals and international travel. Recommendations included a line of communication between public health and homeless service providers using a single point of contact in the homeless community, an email system to disseminate urgent health advisories to homeless service providers, a formal process for making decisions around consolidating services at fewer sites, designated quarantine facilities for people who lack housing, and resource allocation for homeless individuals and for homeless service providers.[8]

Another study (Washington, 1998) analyzed strategic efforts to meet the primary health care needs of homeless and migrant individuals living in Iowa after unprecedented flooding. During the flood, social service agencies acted individually, duplicated resources, and were unaware of other agency roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, agencies were distributing information independently with no consistency in instructions. As such, individuals who were experiencing homelessness were receiving inaccurate information through word of mouth. Strategic efforts taken by the county to address lessons learned included inclusion of homeless and migrant populations in county health department emergency plans, organized roles and responsibilities for agencies, an interagency disaster plan, and a process for coordinating information.[9]

An article based out of Tokyo (Wisner, 1998) makes the case for utilizing social data in order to integrate marginalized citizens, particularly people who are experiencing homelessness, into emergency management plans. Like the previous studies mentioned, the author describes the unique circumstances of people who are experiencing homelessness that make them more vulnerable to disasters. These vulnerabilities include lack of access to information, financial credit or services, and lack of resources

such as income assets and social support. The author notes the progress that developing nations have made in incorporating socially differentiated approaches to risk and vulnerability into public policy and urges developed countries to do the same.[10]

Disaster risk and homelessness in Hillsborough and Pinellas County

The Tampa Bay Area is prone to severe storms, hurricanes, flooding, extreme heat and extreme cold. Evacuation from the area may be a necessary response to storm surges, hurricanes and flooding. There are evacuation concerns related to population density in costal and low lying areas and limited access to roads and bridges. Pinellas County forms a peninsula with only three bridges connecting lower Pinellas County to the mainland. With limited evacuation routes, careful planning and community preparedness will be key to preventing harm and potential loss of life in this area. Indeed, based on 2010 modeling of various evacuation levels, it could take between 13 and 41 hours to evacuate Pinellas County. Many residents of Pinellas County will travel through Hillsborough County during evacuation and some may stay in Hillsborough County depending on how far inland the event is expected to reach. As such, resources for sheltering and other assistance in Hillsborough could be overwhelmed.

Florida has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the United States. According to the 2013 Annual Homeless Report to Congress, 50% of individuals experiencing homelessness who were identified during a Point-in-Time Count resided in 5 states: New York, California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Texas. More than half of the nation's chronically homeless individuals lived in 3 states: California, Florida, and New York. Additionally, while the nation experienced a decline in family homelessness overall, Florida was among the list of states to experience an increase among this population.

Figure 1: Highest rates of unsheltered homeless people by State, 2013

State	# of Homeless People	# of Unsheltered Homeless People	% of Homeless People who were Unsheltered
Highest Rates			
California	136,826	91,272	66.7
Florida	47,862	28,192	58.9
Arkansas	3,812	2,148	56.3
Nevada	8,443	4,745	56.2
Mississippi	2,403	1,320	54.9

Source: U.S Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

Figure 2: Highest rates of unsheltered people in families by State, 2013

State	# of Homeless People in Families	# of Unsheltered People in Families	% of Homeless People in Families who were Unsheltered
Highest Rates			
Florida	16,503	9,163	55.5
Oregon	4,828	1,998	41.4
South Carolina	1,808	736	40.7
Tennessee	2,619	930	35.5
Mississippi	650	215	33.1

Source: U.S Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

Figure 3: Highest rates of unsheltered chronically homeless people by State, 2013

State	# of Chronically Homeless People	# of Unsheltered Chronically Homeless People	% of Chronically Homeless who were Unsheltered
Highest Rates			
California	39,250	33,999	86.6
Mississippi	475	407	85.7
Florida	9,647	7,774	80.6
Louisiana	1,115	870	78.0
Hawaii	1,180	907	76.9

Source: U.S Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

Figure 4: Highest rates of unsheltered veterans by State, 2013

State	# of Homeless Veterans	# of Unsheltered Homeless Veterans	% of Veterans who were Unsheltered
Highest Rates			
California	15,179	10,293	67.8
Montana	309	191	61.8
Hawaii	558	324	58.1
Florida	5,505	3,177	57.7
Oregon	1,494	785	52.5

Source: U.S Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

Coordination and Communication Strategies in Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties

To better understand the structures in place to assist people experiencing homelessness before, during, and after a natural disaster, interviews were conducted with 18 individuals in Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties. The individuals were identified by their local homeless coalitions and through snowball

sampling and were described as being a major stakeholder or having significant knowledge or expertise in emergency planning activities related to homeless populations in their jurisdiction. Based on the interviews, we identified the primary strategies put in place in both counties to coordinate human service agencies and integrate the disaster needs of vulnerable populations, including people experiencing homelessness. These strategies are described below.

Pinellas County

Pinellas County uses a combination of strategies to help improve coordination and communication across sectors to better assist vulnerable populations during disaster. These include a planning committee (Recover Pinellas) made up of human service agencies, a database (SAMS Ready System) aimed to improve surveillance and movement of available resources, and sheltering/evacuation operating procedures for the homeless service community.

Recover Pinellas

Pinellas County has an emergency management agency that oversees and maintains a county-wide disaster preparedness and recovery plan. The agency is a member of Recover Pinellas, a stand-alone network of agencies that facilitates coordination and communication among public and private human service agencies during all phases of a disaster. Recover Pinellas was established in February 2014 when the Disaster Recovery Leadership Network (DRLN) and Pinellas County Organizations United in Disaster (PROUD) merged. Recover Pinellas is not integrated into the county's emergency plan but is considered a major partner and holds a seat at the emergency operations center.

As of June 2014, Recover Pinellas is in the process of drafting its by-laws. However, it will continue to maintain the objectives of the former Disaster Recovery Leadership Network which is to help ensure that health and human service organizations in Pinellas County are optimally prepared for any major disaster, work with community partners to develop and implement plans that will ensure that Pinellas County residents have access to health and human services during long-term recovery from a major disaster, and facilitate coordination and communication among Network stakeholders during all phases of a disaster.

Recover Pinellas will use a communication plan that is likely to remain similar to the one laid out by the Disaster Recovery Leadership Network. The Communications Plan is designed to provide a framework and Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) to guide health and human services response efforts in

Pinellas County, FL, after natural disasters and emergencies including, but not limited to, hurricanes, tornadoes, high winds, and flooding. The Communications Plan is intended to provide notification to those responsible for executing the Plan when a disaster looms or has occurred, provide guidance for restoring services, facilitate communication between participating agencies to manage service delivery, and provide needed short term assistance. The Communications Plan is organized in a structural format, starting with a brief background, a diagram showing the flow of communications, a review of the concept of operations, and specific pre- and post-disaster operational activities. Where possible, the Standard Operating Guidelines augment operational guidelines to help add specificity to the many processes, tasks and activities that must be completed prior to and after a disaster. The Communications Plan is intended to complement the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP). See Appendix A for the Communication Flow Diagram.

SAMS Ready System

Currently, the primary mechanism for human service agencies to report the status of their organization, including whether or not they are operational, have resources to share, or are in need of resources is through 211. However, Pinellas County is currently developing the SAMS Ready System which aims to streamline status reports from human service agencies. The purpose of the SAMS Ready System is to serve as a community data base of human service organizations status following a disaster. The data base will be a warehouse of the agencies that will be accessed to move necessary resources throughout Pinellas County post disaster. The system can serve as a notification system through text or email to update users of status of the disaster and other pertinent information.

Homeless Evacuation/Sheltering Plan

Pinellas County has a separate operating procedure for homeless evacuation and sheltering. The operating procedure describes the process and entities responsible for training and awareness, communication and notification, transportation, homeless support personnel for shelters and evacuation buses, and data collection. The operating procedure provides the homeless service community with specific and concrete list of deliverables, when they will be delivered, and how they will be delivered. Additionally, the Pinellas County Homeless Evacuation/Sheltering Plan includes a special needs shelter designated for people experiencing homelessness. The shelter is an optional resource for people experiencing homelessness and is staffed with homeless support services. See Appendix B.

Hillsborough County

Hillsborough County's primary strategy for improving disaster preparedness, response, and recovery for vulnerable populations is the Vulnerable Populations Task Force which guides emergency management activities for a number of high risk populations including people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, HELP, Inc. provides resources and support for individuals and families who are ineligible for mainstream recovery assistance or who may need additional support if other assistance programs are

insufficient for meeting needs. Because people experiencing homelessness often do not qualify for FEMA housing assistance, HELP, Inc. is included as core strategy to assist this population.

Vulnerable Populations Task Force

Hillsborough County's emergency management strategy is outlined in the Hillsborough County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. The Emergency Support Function leads for ESF-6, 8, 11 and 15 play key roles in coordinating health and human services before, during, and after a disaster. To better meet the needs of high risk populations, such as people experiencing homelessness, the Hillsborough County Office of Emergency Management holds regular meetings of a Vulnerable Populations Task Force.

The Vulnerable Population Task Force identifies stakeholders (or critical players) that will help the Task Force meet goals related to communication and resource coordination to meet the needs of targeted populations including people experiencing homelessness. Their goals include identifying vulnerable populations, developing plans for reaching these populations, defining regional and local resources to extend their reach to these populations, and defining tasks for timely and appropriate communication and coordination. The Task Force also developed a Continuity of Operations training program for critical agencies serving these populations to enable them to resume their operations as quickly as possible in order to continue providing regular services to their existing clients as well as others.

The Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative (THI) is a member of the Vulnerable Population Task Force. THI is the lead agency for HUD Continuum of Care funding as well as the Tampa/Hillsborough 10-year plan to end homelessness. They take a lead role in bringing together organizations to discuss strategies to prevent and end homelessness in Hillsborough County. In this role, they are often seen as a point of contact into the homeless community by other public and private sectors. Emergency management activities are regularly discussed in group meetings and THI facilitates community trainings and awareness of homeless evacuation and sheltering plans. See Appendix C.

HELP, Inc.

HELP, Inc. is a Long Term Recovery Organization and an independent 501(c)(3) coalition that coordinates need-based recovery initiatives for residents of Hillsborough County. HELP, Inc. has been written into the County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan as the entity responsible for restoring impacted lives primarily, but not exclusively, by rebuilding and fortifying homes. HELP works to identify all interested organizations whose participation will enhance long-term recovery. The long-term

recovery process includes identifying respective unmet needs of individuals and families within the impacted area and assigning a case manager to facilitate the recovery process for them. Financing that process is the responsibility of HELP, Inc. HELP, Inc. applies for grants through multiple resources and utilizes those funds as well as donations to fund recovery needs. Case managers are charged with understanding the sequence of delivery of private and federal disaster resources and maximum awards available as well as where additional resources can be accessed through existing programs for which clients may qualify. Case managers access up to date information about local programs providing disaster assistance through HELP, Inc. which uses an information sharing database developed by the Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN).

HELP funds are used as a source of last resort to meet any remaining unmet needs after all other potential resources have been exhausted. Because people experiencing homelessness often do not qualify for other public disaster assistance, HELP funds may be one of the few recovery resources available to meet the needs of this group, including residential needs.

2-1-1 (Crisis Center of Tampa Bay)

The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is in the process of developing a database of that will offer a streamlined approach to identifying agencies that are providing services during and after an event, including homeless service agencies. The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay serves as the lead agency for ESF-15 (Volunteers and Donations) and is charged with coordinating information for the database. The ESF-15 lead and supporting agencies also ensure that human services agencies, including those involved in Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) and HELP, Inc., are aware of donated goods available at the county-operated donations warehouse.

Homeless Individual and Service Provider Knowledge and Perceptions of Coordination and Communication Strategies

Methodology

Faculty of the University of South Florida conducted a total of seven focus groups in order to assess the knowledge base and perceptions of emergency management efforts. Four focus groups consisted of people experiencing homelessness; three focus groups were conducted with service providers. The study was approved by the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board and followed established ethical guidelines. Semi-structured questions were used to guide conversation in the focus groups. Audio-tapes from all focus groups were transcribed for content analysis. In addition, the tapes were compared to transcribed notes taken during the focus group by two members of the research team. While many interesting topics were covered, extraneous stories were not included in the analysis.

The homeless focus groups consisted of persons who had been or were currently homeless and had the experience of living through a natural disaster. To recruit homeless persons in the two counties, the Tampa Hillsboro Homeless Initiative (THI) and the Pinellas County Homeless Leadership Board (HLB) helped to disseminate information regarding this study, which enhanced local support. For the purpose

of this study, homeless individuals were defined as those who live on the street as well as those who were staying in a shelter. All participants were over the age of 18 and English speaking. Small dollar gift cards to a major family chain store or eating establishment were provided to participants. Focus group questions centered on their disaster experiences. A total of 31 participants from four distinct focus groups participated in this study.

The service provider focus groups consisted of key government agency personnel, social service providers for homeless individuals, and representatives of first responder organizations. To recruit persons who are involved in the emergency response to natural disasters in the communities, individuals were identified by the position that they held in the county emergency management agency, position as a first responder, or by the position they hold in a social service organization which serves homeless individuals or those at risk of homelessness; this included shelter settings. THI and HLB helped to identify these organizations and personnel. Participants had to be English speaking and over 18 years of age. No compensation for their participation was offered to this group. Focus group questions for this group centered on the processes and policies used to help those who are homeless during a natural disaster. A total of 15 service personnel participated in two distinct Pinellas County focus groups. A total of 7 service personnel participated in one Hillsborough County focus group.

Findings

Homeless focus groups

- **Information travels through word of mouth.** Respondents indicated that information is spread by word of mouth through informal street networks and tends to reach individuals living in isolated wooded areas. Information often originates from individuals who own radios, have access to television, or by a trusted community homeless advocate. One participant said “we take care of our own” implying proactive efforts to communicate information to others in the homeless community. However, respondents noted that information is generally limited to notification of an ensuing weather event; information about resources and assistance does not tend to travel through informal communication sharing.

- **Information communicated by police officers may not be well received.** Respondents were aware of efforts by the service community to get the news out to them, often by sending police officers out to known homeless encampments. However, this caused great concern among respondents. In the first group, the phrase “Send Red, not Blue” emerged. What this meant was that firefighters (those who wear red), were trusted much more than police officers (those who wear blue.). Other groups shared this same sentiment. Participants noted previous encounters with police as the reason why they “turn the other way” when they see police approaching. Police were described as “unhelpful,” “not caring,” and “not informed” about their needs during pre-disaster periods.

- **Respondents generally knew how to protect themselves from harm.** As respondents shared their stories, common survival tactics began to emerge. Responses included: “Get to higher ground”, “find a parking garage” (a strong foundation to withstand the winds and rain), “find an abandoned

house or bridge", "seek shelter", "hook up with people who are housed", or "leave." For those who decided to wait out the storm, efforts were made to acquire additional supplies for protecting their sleeping area and belongings, including trying to keep important documents as dry as possible.

- **Timing of notifications is important and warrants special consideration.** One respondent said, "What you consider to be a natural disaster while living in a house is completely different than what we consider to be a disaster while living in the woods." What he meant by this, which was agreed upon by others, was that by the time local officials declared an emergency or started evacuation procedures, those on the street were already experiencing the impact of the tropical storm.

- **The decision to use shelter facilities is based on past experience.** Past experiences with shelter services influence the decision to use this option during the time of a natural disaster. Rules or "prison mentality," stares from other occupants in the shelter, the feeling of being "looked down upon," insensitive staff, and the stories from the Hurricane Katrina and the Superdome were just some of the reasons given for not wanting to use shelter services during a natural disaster. Alternatively, homeless respondents preferred to seek refuge with a friend or stranger, at a motel, or leave the area typically before a full evacuation order. Some individuals said that they preferred a homeless specific emergency shelter in order to avoid the stigma from their housed counterparts. Shelter services, however, were seen as a viable option for women, children, and those who needed special assistance.

- **Some anticipated neglect as the needs of people with housing are prioritized.** As one individual indicated, "the government (meaning first responders) will hold back getting regular people—why would they come out for me?" Another stated "The homeless would be last to be helped. We would be at the end of the list." This sentiment may be a response to feelings of stigma or perceptions of disaster response after the experiences of individuals who were impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

- **People on the street help one another but need additional information on how to help those who need special assistance.** Respondents expressed concern for those on the street who were more challenged. Respondents indicated that many in the homeless community knew who would need additional help. It was suggested that those who need special assistance can be helped by others on the street to get safely to first responders or shelters. Again, this reflects the sentiment, "we take care of our own," and the feeling that shelters are a viable option for people who have higher needs.

- **Assistance from organizations that was passed up prior to an event may be welcomed during reconstruction.** Immediate actions for those without shelter include an assessment of lost belongings including identification papers, medications, clothes, sleeping supplies, and general living items. Attention to bodily harm and health tends to be secondary. At this time, assistance from organizations like the Salvation Army and the Red Cross to meet immediate needs are welcomed.

- **Reconstruction can be an opportunity to connect people to work.** Many of the homeless respondents saw the post-disaster environment as an opportunity to find work. Hauling branches, helping local homeowners and businesses clear and clean up properties was identified by this group

as an opportunity to earn income to help replenish needed supplies. However, they noted that they are typically not connected to work opportunities after an emergency and questioned the logic for this.

Service Provider Focus Groups

- **Service providers offered a different perspective on their attention to the homeless population than the homeless focus groups.** In areas where there was a known high concentration of street and wooded homeless, coordinated efforts to inform homeless individuals about approaching storms began early; up-to three weeks prior to an event in one county. Information is distributed to homeless service providers and in areas with high concentrations of homelessness and searches of abandoned buildings and shelters begins. In addition, police are dispatched, as are other community volunteers depending on the area in either county, to notify those without shelter.

- **Linkages to the local emergency management agency impacts service provider understanding and participation in disaster efforts.** Professionals who worked for agencies associated with disaster services, not surprisingly, had detailed information about the chain of command in the service network and within their organization and what to do should a disaster strike. Other agencies that were peripheral to disaster services were less informed about county emergency plans and their agency role.

- **Providers receive information and instructions via email, often through a listserv.** Respondents in both counties reported that as a disaster is approaching, information is received via email to assist them in making operational decisions including actions steps to help keep their service populations safe.

Discussion

The different perspectives of the service provider focus groups compared to the homeless focus groups may be due to the absence of any major disasters in the area since Hurricane Jeanne in 2004. Regular trainings for service providers contribute to general understanding of local strategies by members of the service provider focus groups. Whereas, homeless individuals tend to reflect on experiences that occurred prior to the development of any homeless specific plans. Additionally, despite the best service intentions, people experiencing homelessness may continue to face challenges during disaster including survival during pre-disaster weather when sheltering plans are not yet activated, competition for services, the changing roles of service providers and law enforcement into first responders as the event unfolds, the mental and physical impact of the event, and re-establishment of place and property.

The perspectives from the homeless focus groups offer some insight into opportunities to improve communication so that information is delivered efficiently and meaningfully. For example, using trusted outreach workers to communicate information that describes actions to take and opportunities to help others who need assistance getting to safety. Also, understanding the context for accepting and

declining assistance may be an opportunity to proactively address factors that may influence decisions to receive help at a later time.

Agencies that have fewer linkages to local emergency management agencies may need more attention from homeless service leaders who are working with the emergency management agency. While these agencies may be smaller nonprofit or faith-based organizations, they may have strong relationships with people experiencing homelessness and may be a resource for assistance during all phases of a disaster. At minimum these peripheral agencies are likely to receive email notification through listservs that will help inform their own continuity of operation plans.

Recommendations for Other Communities

The following recommendations are based on strategies employed in both counties and takes into consideration the feedback received in the focus groups:

- **Emergency management can extend its reach to homeless populations by partnering with homeless service agencies.** The high demand placed on first responders and disaster workers limits their ability to engage with people who may need more targeted assistance. As one provider noted, the homeless population "falls through the cracks" as assistance is prioritized to address the highest demands as efficiently as possible. By engaging the homeless service community in preparedness efforts, emergency management extends their reach to people experiencing homelessness. Homeless service providers can communicate meaningful information and instructions to their clients prior to an event and direct them to appropriate disaster assistance in the aftermath.

- **Homeless specific emergency plans are helpful but need to be tested annually.** Having a separate homeless evacuation and sheltering plan provides service providers with a standard operating procedure that is easily understood and offers concrete information that can be easily communicated to the people they serve. Service providers participating in focus groups had some knowledge about the evacuation and sheltering plan for their clients or knew where to get that information. Some stakeholders suggested that the homeless plan be tested annually along with agency Continuity of Operation Plans in order to increase coordination and efficiency during an actual event.

- **Leaders from the homeless service community should participate regularly in emergency management planning meetings/committees.** Representation at emergency management meetings is essential to ensuring the disaster needs of people experiencing homelessness are integrated into community wide emergency management efforts. In addition to providing a voice for this population, the homeless service leaders engaged in emergency management serve as a liaison to other service providers in the community who have less contact with the emergency management agency. Interviews with key stakeholders and service providers found that many in the emergency management sector as well as the homeless service community looked to their homeless coalitions to serve in this role.

- **Communication chains should extend to more homeless service agencies, not just those that work closely with emergency management agencies.** Information regarding impending severe weather is often received by service providers via email from listservs. Having a listserv that is inclusive of all homeless service providers would be beneficial. Email communications should include the homeless evacuation and sheltering plan, details about its activation, and a description of other forms of communication should email communications be disrupted.

- **User friendly technology can streamline connections to resources.** In the aftermath of an event, a number of agencies may need to shut down operations or open at limited capacity. Consequently, other agencies may become overwhelmed by an increase in demand from new clients. Having a central place for agencies to communicate the availability of resources (or lack of) is an efficient way to connect individuals to services that have the capacity to serve them. After conducting an initial pilot of the SAMS Ready System, JWB Children's Services Council of Pinellas County, the administering agency for the database, found that service providers were less likely to use the database if it was difficult to access. As such, they warn that any database used for this purpose should be easy to navigate and should require very few steps to enter and access information.

- **Regular trainings and preparedness campaigns targeting homeless service providers are helpful.** The Pinellas County Homeless Evacuation and Sheltering Plan describes the entities responsible for coordinating trainings, when they should occur, and how informational materials will be distributed. In Hillsboro County, the Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative has taken a lead role in increasing awareness among service providers about emergency assistance for people experiencing Homelessness. See Appendix C. Having regularly scheduled trainings ensures that new providers are aware of emergency plans in place to assist their clients and serves as a reminder for others. These trainings can be strengthened by clarifying formal roles and responsibilities related to communication and the provision of services to people experiencing homelessness and by providing concrete guidance to a broader range of homeless service providers.

- **Separate trainings and preparedness campaigns for people experiencing homelessness are also beneficial.** In addition to describing the elements of the homeless evacuation/sheltering plan, trainings for people experiencing homelessness might clarify the roles of various agencies (e.g., police, Red Cross), allay fears about having to show identification to access shelters, and provide information about how to help (or get help) when a peer is having challenges getting to safety.

- **A community leader or "champion" helps maintain momentum for engaging in community-wide preparedness and response.** Stakeholders in Pinellas County noted the importance of having a leader to help maintain momentum around emergency management. When a previous leader stepped back from this role, engagement by human service agencies in local emergency management efforts declined. Because human service agencies are constantly facing competing priorities, having a champion for emergency management can help maintain interest and keep emergency management in the forefront of mission driven efforts.

- **Emergency shelters should include some additional supports and services for people experiencing homelessness.** Key stakeholders and individuals in focus groups agreed that additional supports for people experiencing homelessness are needed in disaster shelters. Many of the supports needed are the same for the general population (e.g., secured areas for storing belongings, child care, mental health and crisis counseling, addiction services including 12-step groups, identification replacement). However, it was noted that shelter staff may need additional guidance for delivering services to people experiencing homelessness. In the case of Pinellas County, the Department of Health and Human Services takes a lead role in coordinating and delivering disaster services for people experiencing homelessness. Having a designated agency responsible for coordinating and delivering homeless services should help prevent people from "falling through the cracks."

- **Conducting focus groups with people experiencing homeless may help inform more effective strategies for communicating disaster information.** Interviews with people experiencing homelessness identified preferences in outreach and communication strategies. Such information may help develop more effective and efficient strategies to engage and assist people experiencing homelessness. The focus groups revealed that while service providers were distributing information well in advance, many people experiencing homelessness remained unaware of these efforts and received information through word of mouth. Communities may want to consider opportunities to take advantage of word of mouth communication and devise strategies to improve the timelessness and accuracy of such information. One option may be to recruit leaders in the homeless community to distribute information and flyers to others.

Conclusion

Relationships with human service agencies allow emergency management bodies to extend their reach to individuals whose unique disaster related needs might otherwise be neglected in response efforts. Indeed, literature looking at nonprofit organization response and recovery in previous catastrophic events indicates that the individuals who depended on nonprofit services prior to an incident continue to need those services after the event and often have increased needs. [11] As such homeless service providers are a critical resource particularly when emergency management personnel are overwhelmed by the needs of the entire community.

Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties have made great strides in disaster planning for people experiencing homelessness. By engaging homeless service leaders in emergency management meetings and formal communications, these Counties have been able to extend their reach to a targeted population that might otherwise be neglected particularly when a disaster of massive scale is looming. What's more, having homeless specific guidance has improved community wide coordination and communication particularly when the plan is reinforced annually through trainings for the service provider community.

The structures in place in both counties offer a promising framework that can be replicated in other communities. Core structural components include homeless service provider engagement in planning meetings, a homeless specific sheltering and evacuation plan, a communication plan to relay timely and

accurate information to health and human service agencies, and a platform for reporting operational status and needs (such as 211 and SAMS Ready System). Focus group interviews indicate that these structures are most useful when paired with regular trainings, a champion who can maintain momentum in the homeless service community, and strategies to reach homeless service agencies that are less connected to local emergency management efforts.

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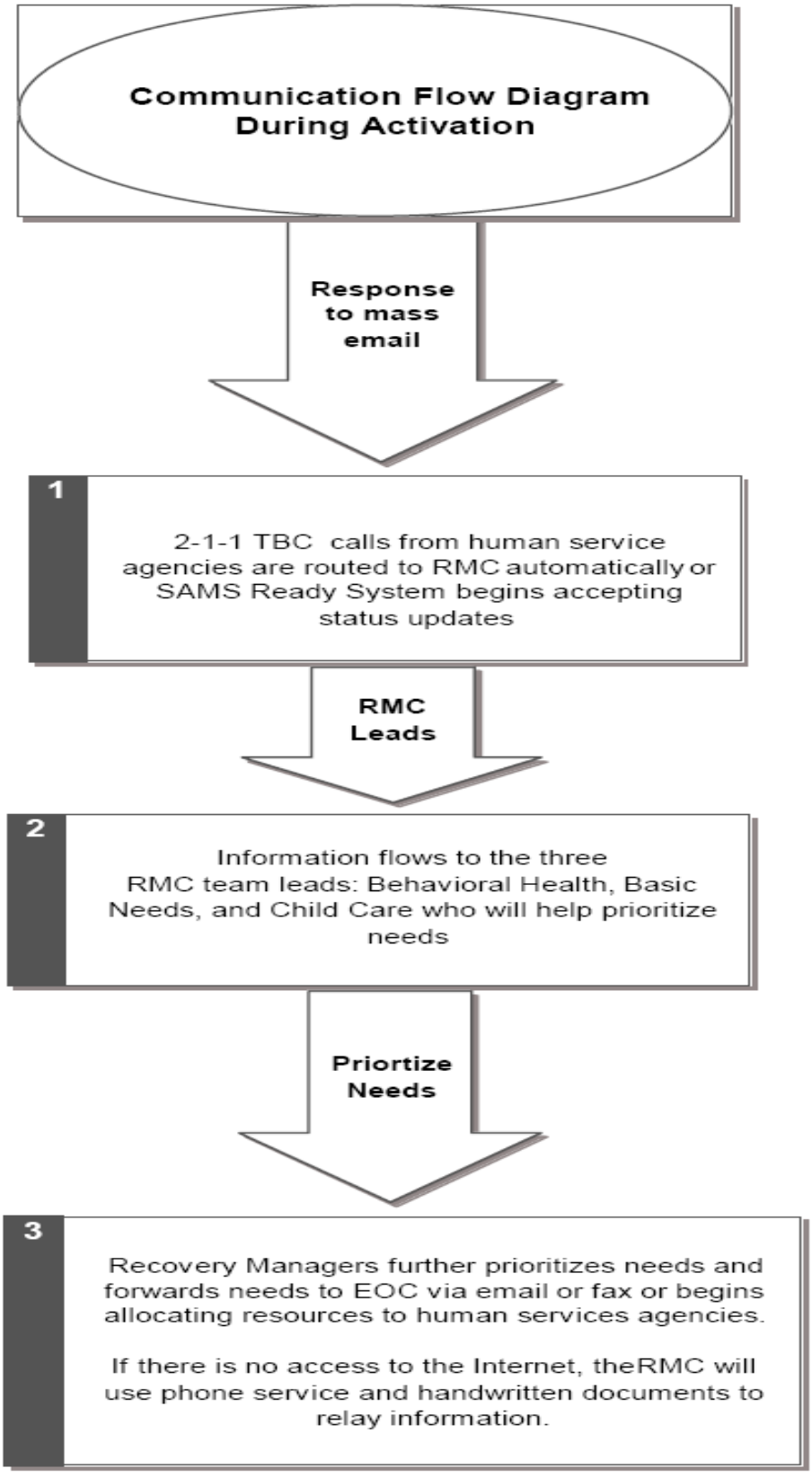
Appendix A

Recover Pinellas Communication Flow Diagram During Activation



Appendix B

Pinellas County Homeless Evacuation/Sheltering Plan

Homeless Evacuation/Sheltering Plan

An operating procedure for Pinellas County

Updated May 2008

Overview

Purpose: This plan sets forth the requirements for implementing, activating and operating the homeless evacuation and shelter assistance plan for Pinellas County.

Scope: This plan will be implemented in Pinellas County to help the homeless population respond to the need for evacuation assistance and shelter during a hurricane. It includes education, notification, transportation assistance, "homeless-support" sheltering and recovery. Parts of this plan will be implemented throughout the year, for education purposes. Other parts will be implemented when there is a hurricane threat in coordination with other county emergency actions.

Background: According to the 2007 Homeless Point-in-Time Survey conducted by the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless on January 29, 2007, there were 5,195 homeless adults and children counted on that date. Although the highest concentration of homeless persons is in St. Petersburg and Clearwater, the population is fairly well distributed across the county.

Table 1

2007 Pinellas County Homeless Population*

Adults	Men	Women	Children	Total
4325	**72%**	**28%**	***870***	**5195**

Main City of Residence	% of Homeless Population
St. Petersburg and south county	47%
Clearwater and surrounding area	17%
Largo, Pinellas Park, Lealman, Tarpon Springs	11%
Other Pinellas County	9%
Other Florida Locations	14%
Outside Florida	2%

Other pertinent data from the 20007 Homeless Survey:

- More than 1,200 are on the street at any given time
- 65-70% report having mental health and/or substance abuse problems
- 41% report being homeless for longer than 1 year and/or being homeless 4+ times in 3 years
- 39 % work full or part-time
- 24% are veterans
- 8% are 60 or older

*Source Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless

Communication: Messages communicated through the mainstream media may not reach those who have no permanent residence. Many of these individuals have no access to television, and some may be illiterate or non-English speaking, so that written communications may also be ineffective with a subset of this population. Some homeless individuals may be able to be reached through radio, but the most common form of communication in this population is word-of-mouth, leading to the spread of inaccurate rumors and misunderstandings that may have serious consequences during an emergency.

Transportation: Although about 3% of homeless individuals live in their cars or vans, most have difficulty with transportation and may not be able to reach a hurricane shelter in a timely manner without transportation assistance.

Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Medical Legal Issues: According to the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless (2007), 65-70% report having mental health and/or substance abuse problems, and 40% report having physical medical problems. Mental illness may make communication with some members of this population more difficult. Other homeless individuals with substance abuse problems or legal issues may make their safe integration into a mainstream risk shelter environment difficult.

Interpersonal Issues: Some homeless individuals may have difficulty interacting with the mainstream shelter population due to the issues already discussed, or related to other lifestyle/cultural issues. In the stressful and (relatively) intimate setting of a disaster shelter, the consequences of such issues may be amplified.

OPERATING PROCEDURE

Training/Awareness

- Prior to the beginning of hurricane season (June 1), training will be provided for homeless support workers staffing the homeless-support shelters. This training will be coordinated by Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless, Pinellas County Health and Human Services and Pinellas County Emergency Management.
- Hurricane information materials will be prepared and distributed to agencies and programs that serve the homeless population and distributed to the homeless through a mass campaign prior to the start of hurricane season, and throughout the hurricane season, as appropriate. (see *Communication/Notification* below)

Communication/Notification

- *A flier containing hurricane season information, including pick-up points, homeless support and general populations shelters will be distributed to homeless persons by the street outreach teams, food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, drop-in centers, and agencies serving the homeless.
- *Posters containing information on the evacuation/sheltering plan for the homeless will be posted at parks, libraries, shelters, food pantries, shelters, drop-in centers, free clinics, etc..
- When countywide evacuation levels are called by County Emergency Management, *bright-colored “emergency notification and response” cards will be distributed, by the street outreach teams and staff of the above locations, to notify homeless citizens that it is time to evacuate. These will list pick-up points where homeless people in need of transportation can be picked up and taken to an evacuation shelter.
- Law enforcement officers and the street outreach teams will provide notification to street homeless, through loudspeaker drive-bys in areas where homeless persons typically congregate. They will also post fliers, including updating of the Public Notification Board in Williams Park; and distribution of “emergency notification and response cards”.
- 211 Tampa Bay Cares will replicate the cold night shelter notification process, calling and e-mailing shelters and service providers throughout the county. They will also use Community Voice Mail and e-pinellas to notify the homeless population and agencies that serve them of evacuation status or other emergency information.
- *Cards and fliers will be printed by Pinellas County Communications prior to the start of hurricane season.

Transportation

- Pinellas County Health and Human Services will coordinate with the Pinellas County School Board to provide up to three buses for transporting individuals needing transportation to the designated homeless-support shelters. Pinellas County Health and Human Services will provide two (2) staff monitors for each bus. At least one (1) bus that is wheelchair accessible will be on stand-by and available, as needed. Additional transportation needs will be coordinated by Pinellas County Health and Human Services from the County Emergency Operation Center, as needed.
- The following sites have been selected to serve as pick-up points, where homeless people may go and be transported to the nearest homeless-support evacuation shelter, and receive supplies. These include:

Solid Rock Church
4224 28th Street N.
St. Petersburg, FL 33714
521-6306; 692-3899
SolidRockCTR@aol.com
Pastor Glen Miller

St. Vincent de Paul
401 15th Street N.
St. Petersburg, FL 33705
823-2516; 463-1638 (cell)
Svdp.south.pinellas@netzero.com
Sophie Sampson

Salvation Army
1400 4th Street South
St. Petersburg, 33701
Major Allen Satterlee
550-8080

St. Vincent de Paul & CHIP
1345 Park Street
Clearwater, FL 33756
Ebrant@clearwater-fl.com
chipbrant@tampabay.rr.com
441-3790 (St. Vincent); Mary Lou Guthart
466-6612 (CHIP)
467-4337, 207-5646 (cell); Ed Brant

St. Timothy Lutheran Church
812 East Tarpon Avenue
Tarpon Springs 34689
Church administrator, Judy Webb -
admin@mylutheran.com
(727) 937-3503

The Shepard Center
101 Court Street
Tarpon Springs, FL

- Pinellas County Human Services will arrange for homeless shelter support staff to accompany each bus and keep in contact with the Emergency Operation Center by 800 MHz radio.
- Under normal shelter closure conditions homeless will be returned to pick-up points, as appropriate, by Emergency Operation Center dispatched buses.
- In the event that the county risk shelters close after 4 p.m. Pinellas County Health and Human Services will coordinate buses to pick up the homeless at the designated shelters and take them to designated homeless shelters (most are the same as the designated pick-up sites). Tarpon Springs homeless sheltered overnight in Clearwater will be given bus passes by the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless to return to Tarpon Springs when the overnight shelter closes.

Sheltering Support for Homeless Persons

- Homeless individuals may go to any county risk shelter; however, the County has designated specific shelters that will be staffed by specialists trained to assist homeless persons.
- 2007 Risk shelters that will be staffed with homeless support personnel include:

I. Level A-Recommended Evacuation of Mobile Homes and Low-Lying Areas

Red Cross Shelters
Northside Baptist Church
6000 38th Avenue North
St. Petersburg, FL

Ross Norton Recreation Center
1426 South Greenwood Avenue
Clearwater, FL

II. Levels B and C-Mandatory Evacuations

St. Petersburg High School
2501 5th Avenue N.
St. Petersburg, FL

Kennedy Middle School
1660 Palmetto Street
Clearwater, FL

Largo High School
410 Missouri Avenue
Largo, FL

- A minimum of two (2) homeless shelter support staff will be placed by the Pinellas County Health and Human Services at each homeless support shelter for each shift, to provide problem-solving, mediation, and post-evacuation planning and placement to homeless evacuees. In addition, each homeless support shelter will have an additional police officer, who has received Crisis Intervention Training.
- Basic shelter supplies, such as blankets, towels, and items for personal hygiene (soap, toothpaste, deodorant, etc.) will be coordinated by the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless. Kits will be available at the pick-up points (or delivered to the Homeless Support Shelters).

Recovery

Under normal conditions for closing county risk shelters, homeless citizens will be returned to pick-up points as appropriate by Emergency Operation Center dispatched buses.

If risk shelters close after 4 p.m., homeless persons will be transported by the dispatched buses to an available overnight homeless shelter. Overnight shelters or other appropriate locations will be coordinated by Pinellas County Human Services. Three overnight shelters have been identified:

Solid Rock Church
4224 28th Street N.
St. Petersburg, FL

Homeless Emergency Project
1120 N. Betty Lane
Clearwater, FL

Salvation Army
1400 4th Street South
St. Petersburg, FL

If facilities that normally provide services to the homeless population are damaged in a hurricane, Pinellas County Health and Human Services and Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless will work with the county recovery teams to ensure that alternate facilities are found that can provide basic services until normal services return.

Responsibilities

- Pinellas County Emergency Management (PCEM)
  - Ensure overall program is updated and in place prior to the beginning of hurricane season each year
  - Provide three 800 MHz radios to Human Services for bus monitors
  - Coordinate training for Human Services staff and general risk shelter staff
  - Collect data for tracking and reporting, analysis and evaluation
  - Provide after-action report to all involved parties

- Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (PCBCC)
  - Declare and announce State of Emergency

- Pinellas County Health and Human Services (PCHHS)
  - Provide staff for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
  - Provide trained staff for homeless-support shelters
  - Provide bus monitors
  - Coordinate training for Human Services staff and general risk-shelter staff

- Act as liaison with the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless
- Identify and coordinate overnight shelters for recovery
- Work with Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless and Pinellas County Emergency Management to provide recovery support, as needed
- Assist in training homeless program staff

- Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO)
  - Coordinate training for in-house personnel and provide information to municipal police departments (MPDs) to include information about this procedure and to assign responsibility for law enforcement agencies to provide handouts to street homeless, as appropriate
  - Assist with distribution of hurricane warning cards and make drive-by announcements

- Pinellas County School Board (PCSB)
  - Coordinate training for general risk-shelter staff and staff of homeless-support shelters
  - Provide three (3) school buses and drivers through normal EOC transport coordination procedures for use in transporting homeless citizens to and from designated homeless-support shelters

- Pinellas County Communications Department(PCCD)
  - Assist with publicity for Homeless Sheltering Program
  - Produce bi-lingual fliers and handouts for program

- Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless (PCCH)
  - Coordinate training for homeless program staff, volunteers and homeless citizens
  - Distribute informational fliers and cards to appropriate locations
  - Obtain and distribute, as needed, blankets and personal hygiene items
  - Act as liaison with Pinellas County departments on homeless sheltering issues
  - Publicize this procedure throughout the homeless community and providers
  - Work with Pinellas County Health and Human Services and Emergency Management to provide recovery support, as necessary

- 211 Tampa Bay Cares, Inc.
  - Notify providers of shelter activation

See Table 2 for a table of these activities and responsible parties.

See Table 4 for a timeline depiction of these actions and responsible parties.

Table 2 – Partners and Responsibilities

Phase	Partner	Responsibilities	# Staff*
I	PCCH/PCSO/MPDs	Distribute early warning hurricane cards	All Patrol Officers Street Outreach Teams
	PCCH/PCEM/PCHHS	Training for homeless program staff; general risk shelter staff; homeless persons	2
	PCBCC	Declare state of emergency	1
	PCBCC	Make announcement	1
	PCEM	Activate EOC	10
	PCHHS	Activate homeless program staff	4
	PCHHS	Activate transport sites	1
	ARC	Open Shelters	
III	PCSB	Open shelters according to level	≤78
	EOC	Notify 211	1
	211	Notify providers of shelter activation	5
IV	PCCH/PCSO/MPDs	Distribute emergency notification cards	Members/Patrol Officers Street Outreach Teams
	PCHHS	Coordinate transportation	1
V	PCSB	Activate buses/drivers	≤3
	PCCH	Distribute blankets/personal hygiene items	≤6
VI	PCSB	Close risk shelters	≤52
	PCHS	Activate overnight shelters, if applicable	1
	PCSB	Provide return to point of origin or overnight shelter as appropriate	≤3
VII	PCEM	Data analysis	1
	All Partners	Provide feedback	
	PCEM	Write & distribute evaluation	1
	PCEM/PCHHS	Modify plan	10

* Suggestions for minimum staff recommended to implement tasks

Table 3 – Data Collection Table

Data Item	Collection Method	Responsible Agency	Location
# of hurricane info cards distributed X # of agencies	N to each agency –N returns	Coalition for the Homeless	Distribution Point for Cards
# posters/fliers posted	N printed – N remaining	PCEM/PCHHS	PCEM/PCHHS
% of people with emergency notification cards boarding bus at pick-up points	Hash-mark list of passengers w/ cards kept by PCHS staff	PCHHS	On bus
% of people with emergency notification cards sheltering at homeless-support shelters	Hash-mark list kept by PCHS staff	PCHHS	Shelter registration
# of supplies distributed to homeless at pick-up points	Inventory-returns	PCCH	Warehousing point for supplies
# of homeless persons transported to overnight homeless shelter or to point of origin following risk shelter closing	Hash-mark list kept by PCHHS staff	PCHHS	On bus
# of homeless people receiving services from PCHHS staff	Contact record	PCHHS	At shelter
% of sheltered homeless in homeless-support shelters	# of homeless people sheltered in homeless-support shelters / total homeless sheltered in all risk-shelters (based on address information on registration forms	PCSB	At shelter
# of homeless program staff attending homeless-support trainings	Sign-in sheet	PCCH	At training
# of general risk-shelter workers receiving PCCH training on guidelines for homeless	Sign-in sheet	PCSB	At training
# homeless people attending evacuation trainings	Sign-in sheet	PCCH	At training
# homeless people sheltered in overnight homeless shelters following closing of risk-shelters	Sign-in	Overnight homeless shelter providers	Overnight homeless shelters

Table 4 – Homeless Hurricane Evacuation Timeline

Partner	Responsibilities	T-3	T-2	T-1	T	T+1	T+2	T+3	T+4	T+5	T+6	T+7	T+8	T+9	T+10	T+11	T+12
PCCH/PCSO/MPDs	Distribute Early Warning Hurricane Cards																
PCCH/PCEM/PCHHS	Training for homeless program staff/shelter staff/homeless population																
PCBCC	Declare state of emergency																
PCBCC	Make announcement																
PCEM	Activate EOC																
PCHHS	Activate homeless shelter staff																
PCSB/ARC	Open shelters according to level																
EOC	Notify 211																
211	Notify providers of shelter activation																
PCCH/PCSO/MPDs	Distribute emergency notification cards																
PCHHS	Coordinate transportation																
PCSB	Activate buses/drivers																
PCCH	Distribute blankets/personal hygiene items																
PCSB	Close shelters																
PCSB	Transport homeless clients to overnight shelter or alternative location																
PCEM	Data analysis																
All Partners	Provide Feedback	PC Sheriff/Municipal Police PC Emergency Management PC Health and Human Services PC School Board PC Board of County Commissioners 211 Tampa Bay Cares PCCH															
PCEM	Write & Distribute Evaluation																
PCEM	Modify Plan																

2014 Guide for Homeless Providers & Outreach Groups

Shelter Providers

- Have a plan
- Know your evacuation Zone
- Know the disaster shelter location nearest you
- Know how will you get to the shelter

Have A Plan

- If you must evacuate, plan now where you are going to go.
- Public hurricane shelters should be a last resort.
- The public hurricane shelter will provide you with meals and a safe place during the storm but you will need to bring certain items with you.

Planning Guide

http://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/index.aspx?nid=661

- Printed guides also are available at post offices, fire stations, public libraries, and the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center.

(if going to a shelter) Recommended Items to Bring

•Medications
•Baby supplies or other special care items (formula, bottles, food, diapers)
• Water (1 gallon per person for 3 days)
•Non-perishable food
•First aid kit
•Family & emergency contact information
•Copies of keys and personal documents
•Cell phone with charger
•Extra cash
•Insect repellent and sunscreen
•Personal hygiene items: soap, feminine hygiene products, toothbrush and toothpaste, etc.

Types of Shelters

Hillsborough County has two types of hurricane shelters.

- general population shelters (see guide)
- special needs shelters

Types of Shelters

For those with any special needs

The Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center manages transportation to special needs shelters. Residents who have a medical condition requiring special assistance should call Hillsborough County at 813-272-6900.

Explain your needs to the EOC; at that time transportation will be provided through the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center. In addition, HART will have a representative available at the EOC for assistance.

Shelter Availability

- The decision to open shelters will depend on the severity of the storm as well as local needs.
- Even if a shelter is on the official list it may not be opened or may change status during the approach of a storm.

Shelter Availability

Specific shelter locations to be opened will be announced through:

- local television and radio stations
- Hillsborough County Emergency Management website
- Or by calling 813-272-6900

Please do not call 9-1-1 for shelter or storm information.

Should We Evacuate?

The Hurricane Evacuation Assessment Tool (HEAT) is an interactive program designed to assist Hillsborough County residents in determining if they are in one of the five evacuation zones. It also provides information on shelters, hospitals, fire stations, and sandbag locations.

http://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/index.aspx?NID=662

Street Outreach

The most effective method of communication on the street is word of mouth

- Service Providers and Outreach staff will need to inform the street population of shelter options
- Provide evacuation zone maps
- Assist with calls for special needs

Street Outreach

- Will notify homeless encampments of shelter locations including those that accept pets
- Provide guidance for sex offenders (help contact FDLE)
- Provide location of nearest transportation options
  - TPD Vans (in city limits) from shelters
  - Bus Routes county wide

City of Tampa (TPD)

- Passenger Vans will transport Homeless to shelter locations
- TPD broadcasts need to seek shelter from roving teams throughout the city limits
- Works with Red Cross Shelter system to ensure homeless population and pets arrive at appropriate locations

County (HCSO)

- Provides Evacuation Zone Maps
- List of shelter locations (including pet friendly locations)
- Transportation via bus routes to shelter locations
- Sex Offender shelter (TBD) cannot be housed at school sites

HART Line

When evacuation services will start

In the event of a storm, evacuation bus route services will begin after the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center instructs HART to do so and public shelters have been opened. For the safety of our bus operators, evacuation buses will operate during daylight hours only and service will be suspended when the Emergency Operations Center advises HART to remove vehicles off the road.

HART Line

How & where to board

Specific stops along each route are marked with blue and white “Emergency Shelter Bus Stop” signs. Any resident may board at one of these stops. Or, residents may stand at a corner anywhere along the route and as the bus approaches, wave it down. In addition, residents may ask the driver to stop at any time along the fixed route to evacuate to another destination than the designated Red Cross shelter. All HART buses are ADA accessible and can accommodate a maximum of two wheelchairs at any time. This emergency evacuation bus service is free.

HART Line

Areas not part of regular routes

The Hillsborough County School District will operate school buses to evacuate people in areas not covered by the 10 HART evacuation routes. For more information, residents should call the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center at 813-272-6900.

HART Line

What to carry on board

- One suitcase per person
- Clothing for three days per person
- Medications and toiletries
- Pillows and blankets
- Flashlight and batteries
- Identification
- Cash
- Valuable papers
- Drinking water and some non-perishable foods
- Books, games