

## United Way's Role in Disaster Preparedness and Response

Day in and day out, communities depend on United Way to coordinate, network and marshal resources to improve lives. In times of disaster, those United Way skills become even more critical.

Disaster may take the form of an act of nature such as a hurricane, tornado, blizzard, fire, flood, earthquake or pandemic. Crises may also result from unfortunate incidents including tragic accidents, workplace violence, civil disorder, corporate mismanagement and terrorism. During times of crisis, United Way of America provides experience, expertise, and resources to local United Ways facing local, regional, state or national emergencies.

### **Preparedness**

United Way helps communities become better prepared to face crises that may come their way. To that end, United Way of America provides preparedness tools, resources and training for local United Ways to put to use in their communities.

### **Response**

Our experience – most recently because of September 11, 2001 and the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005 – has taught us that there are three phases of disaster response. Our communities look to United Way for leadership in each phase.

### ***Relief***

During the relief stage, United Way goes to work immediately, joining our community partners to identify short-term needs and address any gaps in urgent services. We team with corporate supporters to provide for such critical services as shelter, transportation, food, water, clothing and medications.

Our most important resource during this stage is 2-1-1. 2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember three-digit dialing system (similar to 9-1-1 and 4-1-1) that makes a simple but critical connection between individuals and families seeking services or volunteer opportunities and the appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. 2-1-1 is backed by trained staff and volunteers and a comprehensive database of health and human services. Currently, 54 percent of the U.S. population has 2-1-1 access, with more centers coming online every month.

### ***An example of relief - United Way of Northeast Louisiana***

*Supported by their telecommunications corporate partner, United Way 2-1-1 in Monroe, Louisiana fielded more than 111,000 phone calls over two months following Hurricane Katrina. They helped rescue stranded people, find missing loved ones and locate such critical needs as mental health assistance and temporary housing. Above all, they were the compassionate voices at the other end of the telephone.*

### ***Recovery***

The recovery stage begins when communities start developing a common direction. Our main roles are: leading Long-Term Recovery Committees to produce and implement community restoration plans, using 2-1-1 to mobilize volunteer and financial resources, and connecting social services to needs.

### ***An example of recovery - United Way of South Mississippi***

*United Way of South Mississippi (Gulfport/Biloxi) is leading a Long-Term Recovery Committee that is pitching in to bring a storm-shattered fishing village back to life. By helping Katrina victims get back on their feet, United Way also is engendering the comeback of the Gulf Coast fishing industry.*

### ***Rebuilding***

When first responders leave, the enduring work to put communities back together begins. When community needs shift from immediate response to long-term recovery, leadership and resources are even more critical. During this third phase, you'll find United Way still in the forefront, investing in long-term strategies to better rebuild social infrastructures.

United Way works closely with the government, business, and charitable sectors to coordinate and re-establish the social services network. Using 2-1-1 or other data to document ongoing needs, United Way directs resources to critical services – like housing, mental health counseling and quality child care – that create long-lasting changes in the community.

#### ***An example of rebuilding - United Way of Escambia County, Florida***

*United Way of Escambia County brought together workforce programs, budget counselors, faith groups and other organizations to help hurricane victims rebuild their lives. Individuals or families received financial assistance by participating in a life skills workshop, teaming with a mentor to develop a personal action plan, attending a recovery support group regularly, working on a GED, or completing at least seven hours of career center classes.*

### **Operation Caring Communities**

More than 1,300 local United Ways in communities across America form a strong system for improving people's lives. In the wake of the 2005 hurricanes, United Way created Operation Caring Communities, a system-wide mutual assistance network that will mobilize whenever a disaster of a certain magnitude occurs. Through this coordinated network, United Ways across the country will reach out to their assigned partner United Ways in communities affected by disaster, helping them provide services to people in need and strengthening them for the hard work of long-term recovery.

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