



**MEDIA ADVISORY**  
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## **Major Non-Profit Organizations Release Findings of Listening Tour Designed to Assess the Human Needs of Gulf Coast Recovery**

**New Orleans, LA** -- To follow up a commitment announced in January 2006 in New Orleans, *Leadership 18* today released the findings of a listening tour conducted throughout the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of the 2005 hurricane season. The listening tour was designed to hear the needs and priorities of those who were most impacted by the storms.

The 2006 Gulf Coast Listening Initiative, conducted by Kelton Research, was commissioned by *Leadership 18* for the purpose of directly engaging citizens living in the Gulf who have been impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The survey research was done to help determine what their most pressing needs are, how they have tried to rebuild their lives and what their short and long term challenges are in trying to do so.

"Much has been said about rebuilding buildings, structures, homes and businesses after the devastating hurricanes of 2005," stated John R. Seffrin, PhD, Convening Chair, *Leadership 18* and Chief Executive Officer, American Cancer Society. "As we stated in January here in New Orleans, the human service organizations that make up the *Leadership 18* want to use their collective influence to put people first and build a better state of human existence by listening to the needs of the people. And now we want to share our findings and formulate solutions to those key issues," he continued.

The first phase of the 2006 Gulf Coast Listening Initiative was conducted in June 2006 in the communities of Montgomery, Mobile, Gulfport and Jackson, MS the communities of Houston, TX Alexandria, Baton Rouge and New Orleans, LA. Kelton Research conducted Town Hall-style group discussions, followed by both individual and small group interviews. Participants in each session were recruited through a variety of means and asked to complete a short survey outlining their current needs and efforts in obtaining hurricane recovery related assistance.

The findings of the research include the following key areas:

- **Information** -- Communication systems between service providers and evacuees in need are unavailable or underutilized. There is a significant lack of knowledge in affected communities regarding available programs and assistance.
- **Housing** -- Housing is unavailable or extraordinarily expensive. The majority of displaced residents are still living in temporary housing with no foreseeable future for permanent, low-income housing.
- **Employment** -- A majority of evacuees report working outside of their trained profession earning significantly lower salaries. Many who accept these lower paying jobs still aren't able to make ends meet, but no longer qualify for the aid they need to get back on their feet.
- **Childcare** -- Without the foundation of previously established communities, many are without the network on which they once relied for childcare. They are unable to leave children behind to look for work, or are unable to afford childcare once they find work.
- **Transportation** -- Evacuees cannot afford to replace lost cars or gas to operate those that weren't lost. Public transportation often doesn't operate in the areas where FEMA trailers are located.
- **Clothing and Household Items** -- After leaving with little more than the clothes on their backs, evacuees still have not been able to replace their wardrobes and household goods. They struggle to find jobs without being able to look presentable in interviews.
- **Health Care** -- Both physical and mental health issues remain significant problems for evacuees. The lack of insurance, health care facilities and patient records make it difficult to seek and receive appropriate medical care. There is a tremendous need for counseling, particularly for children, because of the uncertainty and monumental loss many evacuees and survivors are facing.
- **Specialized Needs** -- Case workers are overwhelmed and need support; senior citizens have special circumstances that require specialized physical and mental care; parents of children with special needs find it even more difficult than before to find the services they need; and families with missing family members struggle with their inability to find loved ones.

The organizations of Leadership 18 remain committed to ensuring the viability of neighborhoods, providing for the development and education of children, encouraging the self-sufficiency of the citizens of the area and empowering local leadership and involving the community and will use the finding of the listening tour to move ahead in these key areas.

#### **Leadership 18 Member Organizations Participating in the Gulf Coast Initiative:**

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| 1. Alliance for Children and Families      | 9. Lutheran Services in America              |
| 2. American Cancer Society                 | 10. National Mental Health Association, Inc. |
| 3. Boy Scouts of America                   | 11. National Urban League, Inc.              |
| 4. Camp Fire USA                           | 12. The Salvation Army                       |
| 5. Catholic Charities USA                  | 13. United Way of America                    |
| 6. Girl Scouts of America                  | 14. Volunteers of America                    |
| 7. Girls Incorporated                      | 15. YMCA of the USA                          |
| 8. Goodwill Industries International, Inc. | 16. YWCA of the USA                          |

The complete report "Voices from the Gulf" can be downloaded at [www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org), direct link is: <http://national.unitedway.org/files/pdf/VoicesfromtheGulfCoastReport.pdf>