Evacuees and Local Action

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Moderator: Betty Medina Lichtenstein, Executive Director, Enlace de Familias Inc., (Holyoke, MA)

Peter B. Gudaitis--NYDIS

* Faith-based service organization
* Support service centers established by the city (NYC)
* At Julia de Burgos Center – 5000 families
	+ 2000 evacuee families assisted
	+ 1000 didn’t use service center
	+ 2000 families arrived and didn’t need Help
	+ 5000 TOTAL
* 17,000 arrived to NYC in 1st 3 months, 21,000 by February 2018
* 91% of the 2000 evacuees wanted disaster case management
	+ 300 families applied for disaster case management
	+ Took 1 year to release funds/begin case management
	+ 250 families in case management, but many more who need assistance didn’t get it (for a variety of reasons, including not trusting the system)
		- Problem with trust in evacuee population
* Average family needs $6000-8000 to resettle
	+ Takes about a year to get federal HUD voucher
	+ Challenge to get families into apartments – landlords don’t want to take them (they’re required to) or they up the rent amount to make it difficult for a family to accept apartment
	+ Everyone who received a voucher needed to recertify it at least once before finding apartment
	+ Need furniture—afraid they will get their children taken from them if they don’t have furniture (children MUST have a bed off the ground)
* 18% closure rate over 1 year (254 families left)
	+ Funding runs out in February 2020
	+ 25% who came to NYC returned to PR—many then try to return to NYC because they can’t rebuild homes
	+ 183 in temporary housing
		- 61 in NYC shelters
		- 94 doubled up with family
	+ Most in shelters have jobs, but underemployed—can’t get out of shelter without help
	+ Trying to pressure Cuomo admin to extend funding
	+ 96% who came want to permanently stay in NYC of original 3000, 2250 still in NYC

Lydia Valencia—New Jersey Puerto Rican Congress

* Puerto Ricans in New Jersey
	+ Most of Puerto Ricans have been dispersed throughout the state due to manufacturing in the north and farming in the central/south
	+ Populations are starting to concentrate in cities—large evacuee population in Camden, NJ
* NJ PR Congress meeting coincided with aftermath of Hurricane Maria and served as a catalyst to do fundraising to help the island and evacuees
	+ Got NJ armory for donated goods and transport to island
	+ Received support from governor Chris Christie—he had a relationship with the PR population in NJ
* 50 Puerto Rican officials throughout the state, but they don’t talk/organize as a unit--They need to coordinate
* New NJ governor went to PR—didn’t get a grasp of the dire conditions throughout most of the island, was only shown the affluent/less severely impacted parts of San Juan
* Commission on PR Relief—members reached out to organizations doing relief
	+ Commission submitted a report—but nothing happened
	+ Jan 2019 Commission reconvened, but not much has been done
* 1000 children and 3000 families came to NJ from PR
	+ More from PR via FL and NY
* Puerto Rico will be hit again by a hurricane, people are still trying to get out of PR and sending their children stateside
* NJ PR Congress installed a generator in a hospital/clinic in central PR
	+ Coordination—more effective if there was better coordination between all the efforts
	+ Need coordinating bodies in Puerto Rico and stateside
	+ Need to figure out best avenues to get funds and goods to those in need

Nilda Iris Ruiz -- Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha, Inc.

* APM—founded in 1970 by Vietnam vets in Philadelphia who organized to provide services around mental health, social services
	+ Today has an operating budget of $55 million dollars
	+ Other orgs in Philly – ASPIRA, Esperanza, Congreso Concilio
		- PR orgs best and strongest, but don’t work well together in Philly
* Philadelphia is the 2nd place Puerto Ricans are migrating after Florida
	+ Pre-Maria fiscal crisis brings PR orgs together to create Unidos PA’AR
		- Coordinate for Irma and then Maria
	+ Greater Philly Long Term Recovery Committee established
	+ Able to secure a warehouse in Philly and in PR for supplies
	+ Challenge of who to give money to and found it hard to give money—what organizations are making good use of money donated and getting it to the people in need?
		- Received too many donations stateside—gave money to buy good needed on the island to infuse money into the island
		- Gave money to artists and projects
* Started getting evacuees and the city was completely unprepared
	+ Tension—there are a lot of poor and people in need of services already in Philly
	+ Tried to look to models of how Philly assisted evacuees from Katrina
	+ Housing and assistance
		- Were able to establish a superpreference for 54 families to essentially jump the line
		- Found housing in good areas
		- $500,000 in funding for evacuees
		- 2 caseworkers via APM
	+ Fundraising—Greater Philly Long Term Recovery Committee
		- 17 voting members, 15 non voting members
		- Got critical resources and developments
* Challenges
	+ Rapid housing – vouchers for 1 year, evacuees get vouchers that are good for 1-2 months at a time makes it hard to secure housing
	+ Furnishing houses—have a warehouse for “shopping” to fill home with furniture/goods
	+ Case management
	+ Employment for evacuees
	+ Language—NO resources for citizens who don’t speak English
	+ Mobility/Transportation—housing/jobs may be outside public transit areas
	+ Legal services
	+ Emotional/spiritual care
	+ Gaps—deposits, upstart expenses, government benefits
	+ Those lacking FEMA numbers are hard to support