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