

2007 NAHRO AWARDS

AGENCY AWARDS OF MERIT IN HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PROGRAM INNOVATION: RESIDENT AND CLIENT SERVICES

OTHER

Katrina Evacuees Services

- 1. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM:** The Fort Worth area received thousands of Katrina evacuees after the devastating hurricane. Realizing the needs of the evacuees since many of them were brought to the area on buses with no or very few personal possessions, the City of Fort Worth provided numerous social services for the Katrina guests. The Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) decided to provide similar services for its evacuee client families through the Disaster Voucher Program by providing on-going information about services and hosting and sponsoring a Disaster Evacuees Service Fair.
- 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM:** The Fort Worth Housing Authority has assisted over 200 eligible HUD-assisted families and/or special needs/homeless families that were affected by Hurricane Katrina or Rita. FWHA employed a Program Coordinator that was from the Katrina disaster area to interview and work with each family to determine eligibility. Having an individual that could empathize with the families and provide additional information on other services gave some comfort in a time of crisis and helped to minimize complaints. FWHA not only wanted to provide housing, but information to promote and encourage self-sufficiency. FWHA held a "Disaster Evacuees Service Fair" in April 2006. Many of the evacuees were in need of mental health assistance, job search assistance, and legal assistance. Several organizations were invited to the Service Fair, including the local mental health agency, local community colleges, Legal Aid, Workforce Development, and the Boys and Girls Club. FWHA worked in collaboration with City government and faith-based agencies to attend monthly "Katrina Recovery" meetings that were planned and scheduled in various locations of the City to provide ongoing and current information and resources to help displaced individuals to become self-sufficient. The above service providers, as well as the Internal Revenue Service, and Catholic Charities, were available to assist families.
- 3. THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM:** As a result of the information provided and with the assistance of the Program Coordinator, many HUD-assisted families are kept abreast of program information and procedures on how to transition back "home", since as the adage goes, "there is no place like

home". Also, because of the support the families are receiving, they are adjusting better in their new environment.

4. **THE COST/FINANCING OF THE PROGRAM:** Administrative Fees are provided by HUD. There is a special one-time initial placement fee for each family housed under a Disaster Voucher Program housing assistance payment contract. FWHA also receives an administrative fee for every month the family is under lease with Disaster Voucher Program assistance.
5. **INNOVATION:** The Disaster Evacuees Service Fair that was conducted not only provided needed information about disaster relief, employment, educational programs and transportation service; it reunited friends and acquaintances from the disaster area which helped to boost evacuees' morale. By employing a Program Coordinator whose sole responsibility is to handle all disaster related concerns, it has allowed the agency's regular work flow to continue without much disruption.