

CSBG Spotlight:

Florida Community Action Agencies Step Up in Disaster Relief

by Beenu Puri

At the close of the 2004 hurricane season, many communities in Florida were faced with the huge task of disaster recovery. Due to the magnitude of the hurricanes, virtually every county underwent some sort of emergency situation. In those counties, there were Community Action Agencies working with federal teams and local volunteers to assist the community in post-disaster relief. Below are a couple of stories that showcase how CAAs catalyzed the community's resources.

MID FLORIDA COMMUNITY SERVICES, INC.

Mid Florida Community Services, Inc. (MFCS) was working hard in preparation for the hurricane season by distributing important materials regarding transportation services and supplies that would be needed in the event of an emergency. After the hurricane the agency worked diligently with Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) to assist the community.

The staff of Mid Florida Community Services, Inc. worked with FEMA personnel to canvas impacted areas to determine the recovery needs of the community. The agency also assisted with energy payments so families could use their limited funds to replace food lost at least two times due to lengthy power outages. Because the families in the community could not go to work after the hurricane, many lost pay and needed further assistance with energy and rent payments. Some families under Section VIII had to even evacuate their homes post-disaster to have repairs made on their homes. CSBG funds were utilized to assist the families during the first month and enable them to obtain standard housing and worked with other agencies offering assistance to offer referrals for the families.

MFCS also devoted time and resources to assist the elderly during the hurricane season. Over 3,000 personal hygiene and care packages were delivered to those directly impacted by Hurricane Charley (outside of MFCS's service area); supplied over 18,000 meals to seniors in the agency's area; coordinated debris removal with FEMA for 20 elderly individuals, and made numerous referrals for appropriate recovery resources.

To gather additional resources, the agency worked with Head Start families to obtain donations, made constant referrals for assistance, helped those families who became homeless at the holiday season, and coordinated with youth groups to enlist their help in debris removal.

Despite the disaster aftermath in the community, MFCS was successfully able to help those individuals in desperate need. The agency owes its success to the close working relationships between the community and the agency, having a dedicated staff and a strong volunteer base.

LAKE COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY, INC.

As Hurricane Frances took its time and moved across the State of Florida, it left damage that Lake County has not faced in 100 years. The strong winds and heavy rains caused much destruction to

the homes and properties of lake county residents. Social services agencies began to come together and collaborate with each other and provide services to households.

Many households were without electricity for 7 days or more. As a result of the power outage, many lost food and needed the extra cleaning supplies to help get them through these times.

The staff of Lake Community Action Agency, Inc. (LCAA) was very concerned about the well being of those affected and even though FEMA was immediately on the scene, there were those who needed more comprehensive services. LCAA saw the need and stepped up to do what was necessary to be a part of the healing process. Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) staff began to collaborate with community partners and together LCAA, First United Methodist of Eustis and Carver Heights Ministries of Leesburg contributed \$2000.00 to purchase food and cleaning supplies to be distributed. 81 families received food and or cleaning supplies.

LCAA staff, volunteers from First United Methodist and the community prepared the boxes and distributed the goods. Also, a local Masonic Lodge helped with driving and delivering the food. For more information on these and other agency relief efforts, please contact Hilda Frazier, Planning Manager, Florida Department of Community Affairs, at Hilda.Frazier@dca.state.fl.us.