

An Assessment of the Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the Juvenile Justice System



An Assessment of the Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the Juvenile Justice System

Table of Contents

I.	Acknowledgements.....	2
II.	Executive Summary.....	3
III.	Introduction.....	5
IV.	Key Findings and Recommendations.....	6
V.	Conclusion.....	22

Appendices

- A. Statistical Profile of Juvenile Justice Caseloads in the Gulf States
- B. Information Gathering Process and Activities
- C. OJJDP conference focus group protocol
- D. Slide presentation used at focus groups
- E. Project fact sheet distributed to site contacts
- F. Focus group sign in forms
- G. Focus group protocols
- H. Thematic field notes

II. Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the help and participation of representatives from state and local juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health and community agencies in the Gulf Coast states. Some of these participants were themselves hurricane survivors who had experienced personal traumas, including horrific damage to their homes, and who were living in devastated communities among buildings permeated by mold and mildew and supplied with only minimal electricity. Many were understandably still exhausted six months after the hurricanes.

Despite these stressful conditions, participants responded to our questions with thoughtfulness, professionalism, and dignity; they gave time to share their experiences, learn from other people about what worked, provide ideas on ways that systems could be improved, and help other communities avoid some of the challenges they had faced. Each demonstrated a firm commitment to improve community preparedness and system operations. It was an honor to meet these individuals and to hear their stories and ideas. Their resilience is an inspiration.

A special note of thanks is due the staff of ICF Caliber. Margaret Rollins, Duren Banks, and Kathleen Wang were part of the early think tank effort to put this project together. They provided the resources to get the project off the ground, served as a sounding board, and contributed ideas.

Lastly, special thanks to Robert Flores and Steve Antkowiak in the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention for their willingness to proactively address both the need to rebuild the juvenile justice system after a catastrophic and the need to enhance the preparedness of systems affecting the lives of youth and families. The opportunity they afforded for dialogue and open communication will promote the improvement of services to justice involved youth in the midst and aftermath of any future crisis.

Susan James Andrews
Project consultant

Susan Yeres
Project consultant

Executive Summary

When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Gulf Coast in August of 2005, the juvenile justice systems in the impacted states were responsible for the welfare of approximately 16,000 youth under their supervision and custody.¹ This report looks at what became of these youth—specifically, how jurisdictions responded to the monumental challenges posed by the storms, what lessons were learned, and how these lessons can be applied to improve the system’s response to future catastrophes.

The information on which this report is based comes directly from juvenile justice professionals who were on duty during and in the aftermath of the storms. Their stories were gathered during a series of nine focus groups conducted between mid-February and early March of 2006 as part of a “hurricane impact assessment” designed and implemented by ICF Caliber under a contract with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The purpose of the assessment was to determine the impact of the storms on the lives of justice-involved youth by gathering an oral history of the chain of events leading up to and following the hurricanes, drawing on the perspectives of state and local professionals both in storm-impacted areas and in areas impacted by massive relocation.

This report synthesizes the experiences and lessons learned gathered from focus group participants under five “Key Findings.” Each finding is accompanied by recommendations to OJJDP regarding how to support jurisdictions and states impacted by the storms in their recovery from the past crisis, and how to help jurisdictions nationwide prepare effectively for future crises of similar magnitude.

Key Finding #1: Prior emergency planning made a significant difference in how effectively detention and correctional facilities responded to the storms, particularly when facilities had networked with other agencies and jurisdictions to coordinate their emergency response plans. These facilities were far better prepared to make and carry out the complex decisions necessary to ensure the safety of youth and communities.

Key Finding #2: Widespread disruption in the operation of juvenile and family courts (as well as probation and child protective services) compromised the safety of youth and communities. However, this disruption has also been a catalyst for reform, revealing ways in which day-to-day operations might be improved, and creating opportunities to build a better juvenile justice system.

Key Finding #3: The incidence of PTSD and other serious mental health problems has risen dramatically — among justice-involved youth, their families, *and* juvenile justice staff — and will very likely continue to rise over the coming months, creating an urgent need for expanded mental health services.

Key Finding #4: Rapid relocation of youth and families resulted in conflict between new arrivals and residents of host communities. Often these conflicts were fueled by cultural differences, including gang allegiances.

¹ This estimate is based on figures from OJJDP’s 2006 Annual Report. See Appendix A for a breakdown by state and offender status.

Key Finding #5: Structured time and activities are critical to re-stabilize the lives of youth upended by the storms. Focus group participants predicted that low rates of crime immediately after the storm would be followed by a surge in problem behavior, delinquency, and crime. Restoring and expanding opportunities for youth to engage in structured activity can help to prevent and contain these problems.

Despite the disruption created by the storms, the aftermath has also opened a window of opportunity for jurisdictions to rethink not just their emergency response plans, but also their day-to-day operations. OJJDP can take advantage of this opportunity by supporting and informing local efforts toward system reform. Many of the recommendations in this report comprise specific steps the agency can take to support local jurisdictions as they rebuild and improve their operations.

In implementing these recommendations, OJJDP will be most effective by keeping in mind two underlying themes that emerged in the analysis of the stories and ideas generated by the focus groups.

First, collaborative planning appears to be the foundation for an effective response to a crisis. Juvenile justice systems that responded most effectively to the storms were active members of an established, broad-based collaborative body and had a history of cooperative planning. Those who reported that they had been engaged in ongoing strategic planning, valued program innovation, and used evidence-based practices, had far fewer problems with responding to the crisis. In short, collaborative planning within community networks improved emergency response, even when those networks were established to further goals other than emergency preparedness.

Second, the impact of the storms on youth, families and juvenile justice professionals is likely to continue for years. Ongoing risk and needs assessment and flexibility in service organization and delivery will be necessary as the long-term impacts unfold and evolve. Perhaps the best promise for enhancing the system's capacity to effectively respond to a catastrophe is to continue listening to focus group participants, learning from their stories and ideas, and building on the lessons learned by bringing juvenile justice community partners together to develop strategies, structures, and processes to more effectively respond to emerging issues and prepare for future crises.

Introduction

When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Gulf Coast in August of 2005, the juvenile justice systems in the impacted states were responsible for the welfare of approximately 16,000 youth under their supervision and custody.² This report looks at what became of these youth—specifically, how jurisdictions responded to the monumental challenges posed by the storms, what lessons were learned, and how these lessons can be applied to improve the system's response to future catastrophes.

The information on which this report is based comes directly from juvenile justice professionals who were on duty during and in the aftermath of the storms. Their stories were gathered in a series of nine focus groups conducted between mid-February and early March of 2006. For many of those who participated, the focus group was the first opportunity to discuss their experiences with others who had faced the same challenges. For all, the trauma of the storms was still fresh, as they were themselves survivors, subject to enormous stress, often without homes, suffering the loss of loved ones, and living in devastated surroundings.³ Despite these personal setbacks, they took the time to share their stories, learn from others, and contribute ideas to guide other jurisdictions in preparing for future catastrophic events.



New Orleans Lower 9th Ward
surroundings.³

The idea for the focus groups originated with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. In the winter of 2005, OJJDP contracted with the National Training and Technical Assistance Center at ICF Caliber to design and implement a “hurricane impact assessment” in the states of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas, drawing on the perspectives of state and local professionals both in storm-impacted areas and in areas impacted by massive influx of relocated storm survivors. The purpose of this assessment was to determine the effect of the storms on the lives of justice-involved youth by gathering an anecdotal oral history of the chain of events leading up to and following the hurricanes. At a preliminary focus group held in Washington, D.C. in January 2006, Gulf Coast State and local representatives provided input into the development of a set of questions. (See Appendix C.) Focus group participants and contacts were assured that this project was not intended to find fault with how agencies responded to the hurricanes, but rather to inventory the breadth of activities conducted and inform the development of future responses to events of similar magnitude and devastation.

This report synthesizes the information gathered from focus groups under five “key findings.” In shaded boxes are examples of participant comments transcribed during the focus groups. Each finding is accompanied by recommendations to OJJDP for how to support jurisdictions and states in their recovery from the past crisis and to better prepare for future crises of similar magnitude.

² This estimate is based on figures from OJJDP's 2006 Annual Report. See Appendix A for a breakdown by state and offender status.

³ At the time of the focus groups, office buildings barely had electricity and were permeated by the smell of mold.

Key Finding #1:

Prior emergency planning made a significant difference in how effectively detention and correctional facilities responded to the storms, particularly when facilities had networked with other agencies and jurisdictions to coordinate their emergency response plans. These facilities were far better prepared to make and carry out the complex decisions necessary to ensure the safety of youth and communities.

Jurisdictions across the Gulf Coast region varied in their capacity to respond to a crisis and therefore had diverse experiences with the two hurricanes. While even the best emergency plans were challenged by the magnitude of the devastation inflicted by two storms occurring so close together, coordinated planning did make a difference in timely decision-making, evacuation, communication, information sharing, and staffing.

Decision-Making

Jurisdictions and their detention facilities in the storm-threatened areas had to determine: who could be released to families and who needed to remain in a 'secure' setting; whether to evacuate or "ride out the storm"; where and how to evacuate; and who would staff the effort.

Detention facilities that had an emergency plan anticipated these decisions by arranging for a judge to come to the facility two days prior to the storm to write orders for release and movement, specifying who could be released to families and who needed to be moved to other secure settings. Detention facilities that did not have a plan, or did not perceive the potential devastating threat, had a much harder time because they had to make these decisions at the last minute or in the midst of the storm.

One of the lessons learned by jurisdictions making evacuation decisions was that some of the original decisions to detain needed re-examination: If it was safe to release the young person to their family, would it have been reasonable to have had the juvenile in non-secure detention or at home in the first place? As a result, jurisdictions are now re-evaluating their confinement criteria and considering alternatives. This is especially the case in communities where the detention physical plant has been damaged or destroyed.

"[In detention] we had no air conditioning (after the storm) and no windows that could be opened. Staff were taking the kids' clothing home with them to wash because there was no electricity...After 4 or 5 days, we came out... and conducted hearings with flashlights to get kids out of detention." - Judge

In some facilities left intact by the storms, youth had to be released to families or evacuated simply because the facility lacked emergency generator capacity to supply air conditioning in secure buildings with locked windows and doors.

Evacuation: Where to Go?

Because detention facilities operate within a County or Parish, independent of other facilities within the state, each facility needed to make its own plan for where to evacuate. In Louisiana, a loosely organized state association of detention directors had developed agreements to share resources and/or to serve as a back-up for another facility in an emergency. In other states without a state network, coastline facilities generally had made an agreement with another facility (generally to the north) to house evacuated youth. These agreements were either verbal or in writing; however, none were mandated by any government entity.

Even facilities that had evacuation agreements in place encountered problems when they needed to move both girls and boys; there were instances when there were no back-up beds available for girls.

The unusual occurrence of two successive storms put enormous strain on the facilities that evacuated after Katrina into areas that were then threatened by Rita, thus requiring a second movement of youth. Some facilities did not have a second back-up identified and had to scramble to find beds. In Louisiana, for example, the coastline facilities were evacuated up to the Lake Charles area; but when hurricane Rita threatened *that* area, a second move had to be executed.

State-operated correctional facilities faced fewer challenges than local detention facilities — partly because most are in northern parts of the Gulf States and so were not impacted by these two storms, and partly because there is a well-defined network of resources provided by other state operated institutions. If they *had* been impacted by the storms, their greatest challenge would have been the large size of the population to be moved. Some would have had access only to adult settings which might have been adequate in the short-term but would perhaps have violated core requirement of the JJDP Act. There were no longer-term housing options available. As in detention facilities, they would have lacked back-up beds for girls.

As it turned out, the only state-operated correctional facility that needed to evacuate was a secure commitment facility with 312 beds in the Beaumont Port Arthur area in East Texas. They worked in tandem with the State to partner with adult corrections for bus transportation. They found sufficient bed space by utilizing other facilities and expanding contract care with private providers. Even though they sustained significant damage to their physical plant, they anticipated moving back into the facility in March – just seven months after the storm. However, if the storm had hit when they were at maximum capacity, they would have had to rely on adult facilities for temporary housing.

Lack of fuel was a major problem during evacuation. Vans and buses transporting youth ran out of gas and supplies when they were stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. And even though these vehicles were evacuating confined youth, there was no agreement with law enforcement to get priority access to alternative routes.

Communication

The ability to communicate — with emergency response organizations, families, staff, and jurisdictions outside the impacted area — was critical to the safe movement and appropriate care of youth in the juvenile justice system. Every detention and correctional facility encountered problems with some or all of these lines of communication. Ultimately, this impacted public safety, because information about juvenile justice involved youth was not available to pass on to relocation areas.

Some barriers to communication resulted from larger systemic inadequacies. For example, some states lacked the kind of “211” system operating in other states, where a back-up communication grid automatically picks up when the regular grid goes down. Other barriers were the result of more localized problems. As examples:

- Professionals trying to contact others in the chain of command found outdated information on websites or in phone directories;
- Juvenile facilities did not have state-of-the-art communications equipment or access to special radio frequencies when land lines and cell towers went out of commission;
- Even when land lines were working, the juvenile justice system had not been given priority access to phone service.

Access to Information

There was a widespread breakdown in communicating critical information about juvenile-justice-involved youth. Some facilities had instituted a system of emergency cards with vital information for each youth. When the facility was evacuated, the card moved with the youth to enable the new facility to make decisions about medical care and education. But when youth were moved without records, the facility to which they were evacuated lacked information for making these decisions.

Many detention facilities were challenged by limitations of their case-record back-up system. If their records were backed up only in the facility and not in a location outside their area, they could not access records after evacuation. Because of the potential threat to records that had been backed up in locations north of the original storm (that could have been impacted by the second storm) there was a need to find a secure and safe method for locating back-up information in areas less likely to be adversely affected by a catastrophic event during the same period of time, including the possibility of housing data in other states.

Staffing

Detention and correctional facilities were faced with staffing challenges. Some staff were released from duty just prior to the storm to take care of their own evacuation needs, leaving only a skeleton crew. When the crisis lasted longer than a few days, released

"Have an Alpha, Bravo, Charlie team. Not just for a hurricane, but for terrorism and also because of chemical hazards from local industry, any disaster. They [staff] will understand that wherever they evacuate...the A team goes, the B team reports in five days, then relieved by the C team five days later."

– Detention director

staff could not be found, and there were no clear plans or orders for their return, leaving the staff on duty overtaxed and without any prospect of relief. The exception was a site that had put in place an emergency staffing plan to rotate and relieve staff on duty every few days. Each

staff member had a clearly documented set of responsibilities and a timeframe for rotating into their roles.

In communities where facilities were so badly damaged they had to be shut down, staff faced unemployment. At the same time, other facilities outside the storms' impact were looking for additional staff to accommodate newly relocated youth. Unfortunately, there was no procedure in place for matching these complementary needs. When there was an opportunity to share this information at one of our focus groups, positions were immediately offered to employees who had been laid off.

In areas where detention facilities continued to operate during and after the storm, staff were further burdened when foster care youth and youth who were roaming the streets were brought in because law enforcement could not locate their family or a shelter.

Recommendations to OJJDP

- Create and disseminate a Guide for the development of Local Juvenile Justice Continuity of Operation Plans (COOP). The Guide would promote comprehensive planning through collaboration and networking, both locally and with other regions and states.
- Develop a series of short 'how-to' and informational publications to help jurisdictions address gaps identified in the findings of this study. Topics might include: developing portable emergency records, transport guidelines for evacuation of detention and correctional facilities, IT guidelines for data back-up and retrieval, and a compendium of Federal resources that support planning for disaster and relief.
- Collaborate with the Office of Homeland Security and other Federal entities to provide technical assistance to Counties/Parishes and states for developing plans and infrastructure to respond to a catastrophic event. Forge Federal inter-agency agreements to make technical assistance, training, and other resources accessible to the juvenile justice system.
- Convene a cross-regional juvenile justice forum to share strategies and "lessons learned" in areas impacted by the storms. Of particular interest would be: communication strategies, contingency plans if the back-up plan fails, transportation, forms and documents, access to resources, and coordinated planning protocols. Support this effort with the development of a web-page (perhaps a blog) for networking and disseminating information.

- Sponsor regional forums to develop networked planning and communication among local juvenile justice jurisdictions, detention facilities, and state juvenile justice offices and facilities.
- Drawing on “lessons learned,” assist states in developing performance standards to guide the rebuilding and enhancement of detention and correctional facilities — both their physical plants, and their operations. These standards should ensure a capacity to coordinate with other facilities and states in response to a catastrophic event.
- Invest resources in the Gulf Coast states to expand the OJJDP Performance-Based Standards project. Initiate contact with detention facilities in the region (focusing on those that are rebuilding or are making significant repairs and changes to the physical plant) to help them create a physical plant and organizational structures that facilitate effective emergency response.
- To allow for flexibility in addressing emerging needs after a catastrophic event, develop a procedure to reduce restrictions on uses for earmarked money.

Key Finding #2

Widespread disruption in the operation of juvenile and family courts (as well as probation and child protective services) compromised the safety of youth and communities. However, this disruption has also been a catalyst for reform, revealing ways in which day-to-day operations might be improved, and opening an opportunity to build a better juvenile justice system.

Courts

In the juvenile court system, as in juvenile detention and correctional facilities, the storms disrupted vital decision-making before, during, and after the storm. In some areas, court personnel, law enforcement, and child protection workers could not reach a judge to obtain decisions about release, confinement, or movement of youth, and there was no back-up plan for another chain of command. When youth from one jurisdiction moved to another, there was no provision to move judges into the new jurisdiction to hear these cases.

"In the flooding we lost every record. We should have had those records computerized. Twenty years of records are lost." - Court Administrator

In some locations, decision-making was further complicated by the loss of records, especially when back-ups kept in the same building were also lost. Without an out-of-state or out-of-region back-up capacity, judges and staff had little information to work with.

As in the detention and correctional facilities, staffing was problematic. There was a need to re-start court operations as soon as the storm was over, but if the governor or a local official had released or laid off court personnel, staff could not be found.

Even when courts were functioning, judicial decision-making was challenged by a shortage of detention beds. During evacuation, many juvenile court judges were forced to reduce the size of the detention population and release youth to their families. Six months later, some areas continued to lack detention beds because their facilities had been destroyed or damaged. This shortage of beds forced a rethinking of the criteria for detaining youth, particularly status offenders. One jurisdiction reported that the judge would no longer hear status offense cases



St Bernard Parish Juvenile Drug Court
The water line is marked by mold

unless it had been demonstrated that all other appropriate services had already been sought and used. As a result, after just a few months, there had been a significant reduction in the number of status offense cases brought into court.

In one case, the shift in priorities for detention led to tension between the prosecutor and the judge. Only one bed was available, and the prosecutor insisted that it was needed for a youth with a drug possession charge to maintain a policy of zero tolerance. Instead, the judge gave priority to another youth with a weapons charge.

Despite all these problems, a number of judges said that they viewed the impact and aftermath of the catastrophe as an opportunity to build a new and

“I had to rebuild my house [and made changes]. Maybe you don’t have to rebuild the same old (juvenile justice) system. This is our chance to build something better.”

– Judge

better juvenile justice system by reducing backlogs, reducing reliance on detention beds, creating more alternatives to detention, and revamping the operations of the court.

Probation

Probation services were completely disrupted in hard-hit storm areas. Some probation officers left the area, and some were re-assigned to provide security at other locations and could not cover their duties. Those who were members of the National Guard became unavailable when they were deployed.

At the same time, in the midst of the massive relocation, youth were simply lost from the system. These included youth on community supervision, those housed in group homes that were evacuated, and those who had pending court dates but were in non-secure settings. When families of court-involved youth evacuated, the receiving community had no way to know the youth had arrived unless the parent or youth chose to contact local authorities. (A story was recounted about the mother of a relocated family who called law enforcement to ask for advice about her son. He had been on community supervision and in treatment as a sex offender, and she wanted to know what to do about getting him supervision and services in their new community.) Even when relocated youth could be found, there was no quick mechanism to transfer jurisdiction to a new location in another state because the court of origin was still disrupted.

“[Six months after the storms]... 132 kids are missing on probation.”
– Probation officer

It is noteworthy that in one jurisdiction with a juvenile drug court, over 90% of youth

who were participating in the JDC program initiated contact with the probation department just after the storm. In comparison, less than 45% of the regular probation caseload had reported or been found after 5 months.

Child Protective Services

The storms presented unique challenges to the child protection system—to foster parents, shelters, and the children themselves.

“Federal monies should follow foster care kids wherever they are located.”
– Child protective services worker

Foster parents, as they struggled to find food and shelter or decided to relocate out-of-state, faced the hard realization that they could no longer care for their foster children. In some counties, foster parents attempted to bring children to child welfare shelters only to

find these shelters overwhelmed and unable to help. Many shelters did not have an evacuation plan and were unable to move or place the children already in their care.

Youth in foster care were desperate to contact their biological parents, but there was no mechanism in place for connecting or reuniting these families. As a result, youth sometimes took matters into their own hands. In one area, teenage brothers in separate foster care homes both ran away to reunite with their mother; to accomplish this, one stole his foster parents' car. The youngest child, also in foster care, evacuated with his foster family and could not be found by child welfare workers.

Although it is certain that abuse and neglect occurred in the aftermath of the storms, phone numbers for child protection services were not working, and people attempting to file reports did not know who to call. Even when new cases of abuse and neglect were identified, placements were lacking because there was no plan in place for alternative shelters or foster homes.

Recommendations to OJJDP

- Facilitate the development of an expedited interstate compact system for response during catastrophic events.
- Support an effort to convene the Supreme Courts of the Gulf States to establish cross-state jurisdiction in family-court matters (including dependency) in the event of a disaster, and to develop a protocol that promotes continuity through a disaster. (The protocol might include: regulations that account for the suspension of bench rotation in emergency situations; and websites that are regularly updated with judge contact information, on-call scheduling, the chain of command, etc.).
- Provide technical assistance to help the region create a model for “mobile courtrooms.” Publish a monograph of strategies for re-establishing court operations in devastated areas and building a capacity to ‘move’ the court team (either physically or electronically) to hear cases in other areas where court-involved youth have been relocated.
- Convene a forum to share judicial lessons-learned and the opportunities for court improvement that result from these lessons. Based on the forum, publish a set of recommendations for systems reforms that will improve the emergency response capacity of the juvenile and family court.

Key Finding #3

The incidence of PTSD and other serious mental health problems has risen dramatically — among justice-involved youth, their families, and juvenile justice staff — and will very likely continue to rise over the coming months, creating an urgent need for expanded mental health services.

Focus group participants in all the storm-impacted states emphasized the emergence of mental health disorders as a major and growing consequence of the storms. Even six months post-storm, the trauma continues to take an emotional toll. In particular, symptoms of PTSD are increasingly apparent: children cry and become anxious when it rains; families announce that at the next hint of a storm they will flee the area; domestic violence reports are on the rise. Relocated youth and those returning to their homes are experiencing anxiety, loss, grief, and anger that put them at risk of aggression, substance abuse, and other problems. Major depression is also widespread; one community has seen eight completed suicides since the storm.

These same impacts extend to juvenile justice staff who are under enormous pressure, both financial and emotional. With their homes destroyed but the mortgages still due, most are dealing with their own unresolved grief and family trauma at the same time they carry on with their responsibilities for supporting youth and families suffering the consequences of trauma.

“Kids were traumatized because they did not know where their families were...the staff were as traumatized as the kids for the same reason.”
– Detention worker

Focus group participants predicted that these problems will worsen over the summer months as evacuees return home to devastated areas in order to rebuild. With the onset of a new storm season, it is feared that even people who are now managing to cope could be put over the edge if confronted by yet another storm. This possibility creates an urgent need for juvenile justice staff to be trained to identify the symptoms and behavioral cues that indicate PTSD, depression, and other mental health problems, so that they can make timely and appropriate referrals. At the same time, they need to be made aware that mental health problems are a potential issue for *all* survivors, including the juvenile justice staff themselves.



Canadian National Guard Symbols
For 0 Alive 2 Dead Still Inside

However, the available mental health resources, already stretched to the limit, will be inadequate to accommodate new referrals unless these resources can be quickly expanded. In the aftermath of the storm, many clinics are focused on finding their pre-hurricane clients and simply don't have the resources to address new referrals. Focus group participants reported that people who seek relief for depression are simply being

given medication — without counseling, medication management, or other critical supportive services. Even prior to the storm, mental health had undergone significant cutbacks and clinics were already falling short in delivery of services and supports. Dependent on “unprotected” Federal and State budget items, these programs continue to be vulnerable to further cutbacks. Several mental health clinics indicated that their 2006 funding requests, submitted before the storms, will have to be revised and funds reallocated if they are to respond to this vast and emerging need.

Recommendations for OJJDP

“Predictions are that we will see an increase in domestic violence, abuse, mental health referrals and drug abuse. [People from]Florida came over to tell us what we can expect to see. [In a year]...when they have data...they will see the trends. — Mental health program staff

- Collaborate with other Federal entities (including HHS) to make mental health resources directly accessible to the juvenile justice system. As part of this, expand eligibility for mental health and substance abuse training and technical assistance (TA) to include juvenile justice, and re-designate eligibility for Federal funds given to state level agencies so that juvenile justice populations are included.
- Establish a special pool of TA resources to assist Gulf Coast jurisdictions in the development of mental health courts and/or to assist the regular docket with enhancing the effectiveness of its response to mental health issues of court-involved youth.
- In conjunction with the efforts of other Federal agencies, provide training and TA to improve the system’s response to mental health disorders/issues among youth and staff. Training and TA should address the following areas:
 - Enhancing the system’s capacity (in courts and facilities) to screen, assess, and diagnose mental health disorders in youth.
 - Coordinating with community mental health services to broaden their population to include court-involved youth.
 - Increasing the system’s capacity to detect and respond to storm-related mental health issues for juvenile justice personnel. This might include development of EAP services or referral systems, and procedures for staff respite and relief.
 - Developing an emergency response policy that includes immediate intervention strategies for emerging mental health issues. Particular attention should be paid to youth separated from families, first responders, and staff supervising youth in custody who cannot be relieved from their post.
 - Implementing evidence-based programs to address PTSD and related problems of youth such as substance abuse, aggressive behavior, and anger management.

Key Finding #4:

Rapid relocation of youth and families resulted in conflict between new arrivals and residents of host communities. Often these conflicts were fueled by cultural differences, including gang allegiances.

It could be expected that any sudden, mass migration of a traumatized population would create tensions and conflict as both newcomers and residents of host communities are forced to make immediate adjustments. In the case of the Katrina/Rita evacuation, these predictable dynamics were further complicated by competition for scarce resources, cultural differences, and gang activity.

Competition for Scarce Resources

The residents of the cities and towns to which storm-impacted families were relocated experienced the pressures of instant population growth including traffic, overcrowding in schools, and increased demands on public services such as special education, tutoring, healthcare, and leisure activities. Human-service professionals, already overextended, were confronted with having to choose whom to serve: local people on waiting lists, or new arrivals. These sudden changes created resentment, especially among residents who themselves were still recovering financially and psychologically from past storms, and who perceived greater amounts of money and support being given to survivors of Katrina. Adult resentment spilled over to youth, reinforcing negative perceptions of relocated youth formed at school, and setting the stage for conflict.

Cultural Differences

Many youth and their families were placed in areas that were geographically and culturally dissimilar from their home communities. Some thought was given to relocating families into areas populated by people of the same race; but because race and culture are not synonymous, clashes of culture still occurred. For example, black families from Louisiana/New Orleans differed markedly — linguistically, economically, and educationally — from the black Texan families residing in the public housing where they were placed. In addition, black families coming from New Orleans, a community that was predominantly African American, moved into areas of Houston where the cultural mix was vastly different. As these new families arrived, the Houston community experienced a shift in its mix of cultural groups. All these cultural shifts created disequilibrium, both for local residents and for relocated families.

In some cases, the cultural gap grew out of differences between urban and rural life. Behaviors viewed as problematic in rural areas may be more readily overlooked in larger communities where there is higher volume of behavior problems and crime. When urban youth were moved to rural areas, behavior that had gone unaddressed in their home communities was considered a violation of the school and/or community rules. Consequently, displaced youth have complained that they are treated unfairly, singled out for behavior that they believe is the norm.

The suddenness of relocation meant that there was no preparation or period of transition during which residents and newcomers could anticipate and learn to deal with these cultural differences. Under these circumstances, conflicts were inevitable.

Challenges for relocated youth

Additional cultural challenges faced newly arrived youth as they made their way in the youth culture of the host community. Relocated youth often grouped together in schools and neighborhoods with other youth from their home communities — to find safety and comfort, and to make their transition smoother. At the same time, young people in the host communities, who watched as these new groups formed, felt threatened and perceived the need to fortify their ‘turf.’ In some areas (for example, Baton Rouge and Houston) existing rival gangs even crossed turf lines and came together in order to align themselves against the perceived threat from New Orleans youth. The combination of these two dynamics set the stage for inter-group conflicts.

“These kids come into a new environment and they will naturally group-up. But we would not characterize [them] as a gang. They will shout out signals but we don’t know these groups. They look like a duck and walk like a duck – but it doesn’t necessarily mean they are ducks.”
– Gang intervention specialist

The potential for conflict among youth groups may be compounded by the response of law enforcement and schools who have *assumed* that newcomer groups are gangs — when in fact their members may or may not have been part of a gang in their original community. These negative perceptions are reinforced when relocated youth — unfamiliar with the norms in their new communities — inadvertently commit status and delinquency offenses simply because they and their families are unaware of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable behavior.

Gang activity

One particular aspect of youth culture, gang activity, has posed its own set of challenges to youth and families. Some displaced families who had been relocated into high crime areas did not understand the gang issues in their new home communities. Local officials had to orient these families, alerting them about the colors that they should avoid wearing in order not to inadvertently antagonize the gangs that have a prominent presence in the housing developments.

Displaced youth who are unfamiliar with gangs are vulnerable because they don’t know how to resist the draw of the gang — especially when resources are scarce, and the gang can offer food, clothing, and protection. Then, once involved, these youth don’t know how to get out.

Youth left behind in New Orleans became particularly vulnerable because the gang known as MS (Mara Salvatrucha) -13 is drawn to and thrives in disorganized communities. In the lower 9th Ward this particular gang had reportedly taken over an abandoned apartment complex and was charging rent for people to live there. Focus group participants reported that new gangs are forming in areas impacted by the storms.

Again, mistaken assumptions may confuse law enforcement's response to gang activity. In one incident, a group of youth detained by law enforcement presented themselves as articulate, well-mannered, and cooperative. However, when asked to lift their shirts, the MS-13 gang insignia could be seen on every chest. As a result of this incident, officials have been forced to rethink their stereotypes of gang members, how they behave and how they present themselves.

Recommendations to OJJDP

- Collaborate with the Department of Education to provide training, TA, and program funding to address the impact of cultural shifts on schools.
- Collaborate with the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide resources to public housing that address prevention of youth-related problem behavior due to cultural shift and relocation issues.
- Develop a publication containing guidelines for schools in the areas of policy development, program implementation, process change to address cultural issues related to relocation of youth populations in middle and high schools. Include a focus on staff cultural proficiency as well as strategies for preventing conflict and violence.
- Promote and support the development of training for court and facility staff on the dynamics of cultural shift and on the cultural characteristics (norms) of the relocated population.
- In line with recommendations for Key Finding #5, provide resources (TA, training, grant funding for program development) on gang identification, prevention and intervention.

Key Finding #5

Structured time and activities are critical to re-stabilizing the lives of youth upended by the storms. Focus group participants predicted that low rates of crime immediately after the storm would be followed by a surge in problem behavior, delinquency, and crime. Restoring and expanding opportunities for youth to engage in structured activity can help to prevent and contain these problems.

While structured time is important for youth under any circumstances, in the aftermath of the storms it has become even more important for youth traumatized by loss and challenged by the adjustment to new schools and communities. In these circumstances, structured activities fill many critical needs: by bringing routine to disrupted lives, youth activities are a deterrent to depression, drug use, and other emotional problems; by providing a venue for pro-social interactions, they help to build bridges between newcomers and residents of host communities and contribute to preventing the conflicts that are likely to emerge when groups from different backgrounds are suddenly thrown together; by offering a sense of belonging, they help to undercut the lure of gangs that thrive in devastated areas. Structured activities also ensure regular contact with concerned adults who can identify emerging needs and problems in time to intervene early.

"The fear is that if we don't get things in place..., and people come home, there are no parks, no leisure activities and kids will have nothing to do and will get in trouble."
– Court administrator

Schools

As a central community institution, schools and school-based activities have been especially important to providing needed structure. Everywhere, schools were viewed as a safe haven that parents and youth flocked to after the storm. But even though the Gulf Coast school systems had in place comprehensive plans for emergency response and were some of the first institutions to reopen their doors after the storm, they were unprepared for the magnitude of the demands made upon them. In St Bernard Parish, for example, the school planned to ramp up gradually to an enrollment of 200 students. But that many appeared at the door on the first day of reopening, and within a week, over 1000 students had returned. Parents, it turned out, were driving up to 100 miles to bring their children back to schools that had resumed operations. Ironically, even in storm-impacted areas where schools were operating, there was a national misperception that the community was deserted and that therefore the schools needed no resources.

Schools outside the storm's path were challenged by the influx of large numbers of relocated youth about whom they knew little. They were also dealing with the behavior problems and turf issues that arose as a result of mixing local with displaced youth in large classes and overcrowded hallways. Limited resources such as alternative schools were especially strained.

Despite these strains on their resources, schools contributed significantly to their communities' response to the storms. Beyond their everyday efforts to address the academic, behavioral, and psychological impacts on students, schools also served as sites to provide trauma services for children, for example, trauma groups for displaced youth. In addition, school counselors helped to address the needs of juvenile justice youth and, in some jurisdictions, worked collaboratively with multiple child-serving systems.

Delinquency and Crime Prevention

At the time of the focus groups, six months after the storm, crime rates were not significantly altered in the areas hit by the storm. Detention facilities that were operating did not report an increase in admissions. Most areas reported a decrease in the number of juvenile cases, while others reported an increase in minor offenses and referrals. For example, as displaced families traveled back and forth to their home state, truancy problems emerged. And, as discussed above, drug issues and fighting were reported to be on the rise in school settings.

Only in areas where large populations had been relocated did participants report spikes in crime. In some cases, these were misdemeanors involving relocated youth, mostly related to fights. The most serious report was an anecdote about a relocated youth with a history of committing sex offenses who reportedly committed new offenses just after arriving in another state.

Aside from that anecdote, however, the reports of spikes in serious crime had more to do with increases in *suspected* offenses rather than actual juvenile charges. In Texas, where the detention facilities saw no increase in crime, law enforcement reported more juvenile murder suspects under investigation but not yet charged. Another area with a large number of displaced youth reported an increase in youth suspected of theft and burglary. Law enforcement officers explained that they had not yet made juvenile arrests because they did not yet know the youth who had recently moved into the area or where to find them; they believed that as things settled there would be more juvenile suspects arrested.

The focus-group participants' preliminary assessment was that this phenomenon of relatively low crime rates might well be the calm before a new surge in youth delinquency and crime. They predicted that as youth acclimate to new environments, families return to storm areas during summer, and people get past their initial shock, there will be an increase in problems. These problems will arise as a result of the trauma, a clash of cultures, the opportunity for crime networks to form in devastated areas (see Key Finding #4), and a lack of community resources including structured activities for youth.

Recommendations to OJJDP

- Convene a forum — for schools, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and schools — on strategies for developing afterschool, evening, and weekend activities for young people in both the devastated Gulf Coast area and in areas where a large number of relocated families are residing.
- Engage national youth development organizations (for example, Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA) and community development organizations (for example, Youth Build and Habitat for Humanity), in a “think tank” to develop initiatives that will engage youth in meaningful roles to rebuild hurricane-impacted areas (for example, a “youth reconstruction corps” that would build new recreation areas).
- Promote the development of outreach to:
 - help youth connect with meaningful activities in both relocation communities and in storm impacted areas;
 - find youth who have not yet re-enrolled in schools or have dropped out of school in the communities into which they have relocated; and,
 - help families connect with services.
- Provide additional resources to schools and law enforcement in the Gulf Coast region for training on gangs, gang prevention, and gang interventions, as these relate specifically to youth.
- Provide technical assistance for schools and other community organizations to institute and/or expand gang prevention programs.
- Partner with the Department of Education to work with schools and communities to develop and/or expand school-based supports for youth impacted by the storms. These supports might include: counseling and life skill development groups (anger management, social skills).
- Provide technical assistance to storm impacted areas to assess community resources, identify gaps, and help develop plans for filling gaps.
- Bring representatives from States and impacted jurisdictions together to discuss how to ensure continuity of supervision for court-involved youth who have relocated to new areas and also for those who return to storm devastated areas in which the court, probation, and detention are not fully operational. The goal of the discussion would be to devise systems to track these youth, transfer jurisdiction (if appropriate), and provide services and supervision.

Conclusion

While the focus groups reported significant disruption in the juvenile justice system, they also pointed to a window of opportunity for improving the system — not just its capacity to respond to large-scale crises, but also its day-to-day operations during non-crisis times.

How did this glimmer of opportunity emerge from stories of devastation? The emergency response plans in place at the time of the storms were geared towards a short-term crisis and did not account for the complex issues posed by an event of this magnitude. As jurisdictions and programs have been forced to rethink how they prepare for a catastrophe, they have become aware of gaps in their operational standards, and this has opened the door to the possibility of system reform, from revamping the criteria used to make placement decisions, to developing new community alternatives for youth, to coordinated case management.

The opportunity for system change is enhanced by professionals who are newly motivated to make these changes. Despite the fact that many of the focus group participants are themselves survivors, experiencing personal trauma and destruction of their homes and communities, they are remarkably resilient. The quality of their participation revealed a strong commitment to enhance the preparation, response, and rebuilding of the juvenile justice system.

OJJDP and its Federal partners can take advantage of the window of opportunity that has appeared in the aftermath of the storms by joining with local people who are interested in doing something about gaps in the juvenile justice system. The recommendations spelled out in this report are the specific steps the agency can take to support local jurisdictions as they rebuild and improve their operations.

In implementing this report's recommendations, OJJDP will be most effective if its interventions are guided by two larger themes that underlie this report's key findings.

First, collaborative community planning appears to be the foundation for both effective emergency planning and long-term system reform. Juvenile justice systems that responded most effectively to the storms were active members of an established, broad-based collaborative body and had a history of cooperative planning. Those who reported that they had been engaged in ongoing strategic planning, valued program innovation, and used evidence-based practices, had far fewer problems with responding to the crisis regardless of its magnitude. In fact, by February, those systems had already made enhancements to their protocols.

In short, collaborative planning within community networks improved emergency response, even when those networks were established to further goals other than emergency preparedness. Thus, assisting communities to develop and broaden their collaborative planning would also help equip them to respond to a catastrophic event. Adding a regional and multi-state dimension to this process would aid individual jurisdictions and programs to address even more effectively the many challenges faced by the Gulf Coast States.

As an aspect of collaboration, juvenile justice needs to be better integrated into large-scale planning for emergencies. It appears that in the past, the juvenile justice system has not been a key player in creating community, regional, or state emergency response plans. OJJDP can play a role at the Federal, State and local levels in emphasizing the importance of juvenile justice's place at the table.

Second, OJJDP's implementation of this report's recommendations needs to take into account the continuing impact of the storms well into the coming years. Given the nature of the devastation and the disorganization left behind by the storms, youth will face continued challenges: the stress of changing schools; family conflict; illegal drug availability; and PTSD following the loss of home, family, and peers. All these factors have implications for system needs in the near and distant future, requiring a heightened awareness and preparedness to address the likelihood of increases in juvenile problem behavior and crime.

The ongoing impact of the storm extends to juvenile justice staff as well as youth. It is important to acknowledge and address the fact that the men and women who operate the infrastructure of the juvenile justice system are also survivors of the storm. We cannot ignore this fact and simply focus on the impact on youth and families. A Federal response to aid the Gulf Coast's juvenile justice system must incorporate supports for the men and women who operate the system.

The continuing impact of the storms means that the Federal response should be both short- and long-term. Resources will be needed to prepare the Gulf Coast communities for the challenges that will be emerging in the coming months and years, and this may require changes in the way that funding is allocated. A number of State and Federal funding sources use 'past year' expenditures to determine future budget allocations. These practices will disadvantage the juvenile justice system in the Gulf Coast region. In some areas the population numbers will be down, yet the needs for the smaller population will be greater. And in those areas where youth and families have relocated, the budgeting process may not be able to make a quick adjustment to significant population change. Supplemental help will be needed to provide added services to youth and families in contact with juvenile justice.

Many of the storms' longer-term impacts are still unknown; as circumstances unfold and evolve, new challenges are being identified each day. Repeated assessment will be necessary to capture and respond to the emerging needs as the area stabilizes and begins to rebuild. Perhaps the best way to conduct these assessments will be to maintain communication with focus group participants and their colleagues. A promising avenue for enhancing the system's capacity to effectively respond to a catastrophe is by listening to and learning from their stories and ideas. Then, building on the lessons learned, OJJDP can bring people together to develop strategies, structures, and processes to more effectively respond to emerging issues and prepare for future crises.