



## Leading the way for Louisiana recovery

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Joint Field Office

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# FEMA Corps Members Answer the Call to Serve

By Heather Webb

On Oct. 1, 2012, I was among the very first group of FEMA Corps members to start working with FEMA. After training for seven weeks, the time had come for my peers and me to apply everything we had learned. With our bright blue shirts on, we eagerly walked into the Baton Rouge Joint Field Office (JFO) ready to get the job done.

Our group contains many different personalities, each with a different reason for joining the program. Some members are fresh out of high school, others have graduated from college and don't know what to do with their degrees, and some simply want to have an adventure while traveling the country. Personally, I had just graduated from college and was tired of simply learning about social problems; I wanted to help fix them. Despite these differences, one definite theme stands out among all of us: "I wanted to do something bigger than myself."

In a generation that has grown up surrounded by technology and self-interested social networking, many young adults want to dedicate their time to serving others. FEMA Corps members are a testament to this notion as they dedicate 10 months to living and working as teams on projects specifically related to disaster response and recovery with FEMA. Serving members of the community is an essential part of our existence. "I serve because I enjoy helping others," said FEMA Corps member Oliver Lieberman, "I don't feel fulfilled unless I'm serving."

Kelsey Treuil, a FEMA Corps member working in Public Assistance said, "I like to serve because I feel indebted for the life that I have and I like having the ability to give back." We all feel that dedication to the FEMA mission and look forward to serving as much as we can.

As FEMA Corps members, we are excited to be the very first group of FEMA Corps, even when a few surprises come our way. Already, we have all heard the phrase "FEMA flexible" more times than we can remember and have definitely embraced that lifestyle. For example, multiple FEMA Corps teams currently reside in the Initial Operating Facility. We sleep on cots, take showers in portable trailers, and avoid the non-potable water.



FEMA Corps member Heather Webb (R) works with Research and Writing Specialist Laura Guzman.

Many team members have converted the lockers to closets, and Corps member Alex Azzi has created makeshift end tables out of cardboard and duct tape. Jenna Santure describes the situation as "interesting; it is definitely an experience." However, flexibility is nothing new to us. Traveling in a 15-passenger van for hours with 11 bodies, luggage, backpacks, laptops, boots, guitars, food and other items ensures that each FEMA Corps member will already be fairly flexible!

Throughout the experience in AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps training in Vicksburg, Miss., FEMA-specific training in Anniston, Ala., and arriving here at the JFO, FEMA Corps members have been struck by an overarching sense of family. We have not only been embraced by our AmeriCorps team but have now been accepted into a new FEMA family. Corps member Sarah Howe said, "Walking into the office where we will be working almost felt like home. It was so welcoming." Katy Cobb, a FEMA Corps member working with logistics, added, "Everyone is very nice and patient while instructing us on how to use the machines and such." We appreciate the hospitality we have found within the FEMA employees and feel privileged to serve alongside such inviting individuals.