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GOOD STORY

Save the Children's Hurricane Preparedness Workshops

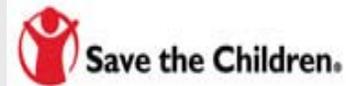
SUMMARY

Save the Children organized and conducted hurricane preparedness workshops that taught children in schools and camps how to prepare for the 2006 hurricane season. The workshops used age-appropriate books to facilitate discussions about hurricanes and evacuations.

BACKGROUND

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, ultimately becoming the costliest natural disaster in US history. It destroyed critical infrastructure and personal property in Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi and displaced hundreds of thousands of citizens. The storm impacted the mental and emotional health of thousands of Gulf Coast residents, particularly children.

Save the Children participated in Gulf Coast response and recovery efforts by providing physical and emotional support for children and families through after-school programs, summer camps, and psycho-social programming. Staff members working on these programs realized that familial and community stress caused by Hurricane Katrina's devastation often made Gulf Coast children feel distressed and confused. Parents felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities and tasks of crisis response and recovery and had less time and energy to meet the physical and emotional needs of their children. As a result, children felt abandoned and were ignorant of what had occurred. Save the Children decided that to mitigate these psycho-social effects in the future, children should learn how to prepare for hurricanes and other emergencies.



[Save the Children](#) is an international, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children in poverty and other crises.

GOALS

The hurricane preparedness workshops helped children understand the value of emergency planning and preparedness in a child-centered and enjoyable way. The program also:

- Supported children in encouraging their parents and guardians to create a family preparedness plan;
- Developed a sense of competency for children in any emergency situation; and
- Gave children tools and materials that assisted them in developing preparedness skills and beliefs.

DESCRIPTION

Save the Children designed a series of child-centric workshops to teach children how to prepare for the 2006 hurricane season. Save the Children staff members conducted 329 workshops between May and November 2006. The workshops helped 6,626 children from the Gulf Coast prepare for the next hurricane season and for future emergencies.

Save the Children's hurricane preparedness workshops utilized age-specific physical activities, stories, and games to introduce children to emergency preparedness in a non-threatening and easily understandable way. The workshops provided children with a sense of how important it is to prepare for an emergency as well as with specific methods and tools they can use to prepare.

Workshop Agenda

Each workshop lasted for 1 hour and had 3 main components: physical activities, a safety and evacuation discussion, and preparedness backpacks. Save the Children staff members, who acted as workshop leaders, began every workshop with physical activities. Using a parachute as a springboard, workshop leaders helped make children comfortable and encouraged them to associate emergency preparedness with fun. Then, workshop leaders facilitated a discussion about things that keep people safe. Finally, workshop leaders distributed preparedness backpacks to give children preparation tools.



The backpacks help children prepare emotionally and physically.

Games and Physical Activities

The first part of the workshop helped introduce the audience to Save the Children and made the children feel comfortable with learning about emergency preparedness. Workshop leaders facilitated introductions at the beginning of each workshop with "name games" where each person identified himself or herself in a creative and fun way. This made children feel comfortable and safe, which motivated them to participate in the workshop. Age-appropriate physical activities allowed children to express themselves, to relax, and to associate emergency preparedness with having fun.

Safety and Evacuation Discussion

Teaching children about safety and evacuation was an essential aspect of the workshops. Workshop leaders engaged children in a discussion about safety by asking them to think of people, places, and things that help them feel safe when they are frightened. This gave the children ideas of what things they could think of in a future emergency to stay calm. During the evacuation discussion, children talked about their own experiences with evacuation during Hurricane Katrina, including what happened, what they took with them, and what they wish they had taken with them. The workshop also uses age-appropriate books to facilitate discussions about hurricanes and evacuations. This gave the children an emotional outlet to discuss feelings they might not have been able to express since the hurricane and also helped the children think of how they might prepare similarly or differently for a future evacuation.

Preparedness Backpacks

Save the Children supplemented the safety and evacuation discussions by giving each child a preparedness backpack filled with tools to prepare for and cope with an emergency. Each backpack contained emergency supplies, such as a flashlight with batteries, personal hygiene kit, whistle with lanyard, and emergency information card. The backpacks also

included items such as a teddy bear, a notebook, crayons, and a pen that children should use to remain calm during emergencies.

Age Specificity

Save the Children recognized that older children receive and respond to information in different ways than younger children do. Therefore, Save the Children designed a curriculum with modifications for different age groups. The main components (including the backpacks) were the same for both agendas. However, the workshop for younger children concentrated more on making children feel comfortable with the idea of emergency preparedness, while the agenda for older children used more complicated and mature games, discussions, and stories.

Program Growth

The hurricane preparedness workshops grew quickly as positive feedback spread throughout the Gulf Coast's childcare network. Save the Children staff conducted the first workshops in early June 2006 in New Orleans and Mississippi. When staff members from other childcare programs, summer camps, and schools in the area heard about the hurricane preparedness workshops, they requested that Save the Children come to their facilities to conduct workshops. By November 2006, Save the Children had conducted 329 workshops along the Gulf Coast. Although no major hurricanes struck the Gulf Coast during the 2006 hurricane season, the children who attended the hurricane preparedness workshops had the tools they needed to effectively respond to and recover from any future hurricane or emergency.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

Child-Centric Design

Save the Children's hurricane preparedness workshops each lasted only 1 hour to cater to children's short attention spans. Physical activity allowed children to associate emergency preparedness with fun and made them feel more comfortable discussing safety and evacuation.

Adaptability

Workshop facilitators chose games, stories, and activities according to the audience's age and geographic location. Facilitators could adapt the program details to ensure that the workshops presented children with emergency preparedness information in the most effective way.

Resources

Save the Children used its own staff to run the workshops and did not charge the schools or communities for the time. Save the Children also paid for most of the backpacks, which cost approximately \$13 each when fully stocked with the recommended supplies.

Links

Save the Children

<http://www.savethechildren.org/>

REFERENCES

Haddow, George. Domestic Preparedness Unit, Save the Children. Correspondence with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 16 Mar 2007.

Save the Children. *Save the Children Hurricane Preparedness Workshops Agenda*. 2006.

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