

United Way of Greater Milwaukee Announces \$50,000 in Long-Term Assistance for Katrina Evacuees



October 17, 2005

Nearly 700 Katrina evacuees are today struggling with a new set of challenges that range from housing to counseling to legal aid. The transition from evacuee to Milwaukee resident clearly presents a new set of problems.

That is why United Way of Greater Milwaukee initiated a mini-grant fund distribution process for agencies that could provide long-term assistance to Katrina evacuees. Today, United Way of Greater Milwaukee is announcing an initial investment of an additional \$50,000 in five agencies that emphasize these long-term solutions and empower those who now call Milwaukee home

After the abbreviated request for proposal process, United Way of Greater Milwaukee has, thus far, granted the following agencies additional dollars in support of services to Katrina evacuees:

- **Red Cross** – Housing

One of the most pressing challenges for evacuees trying to make a home in the Milwaukee-area is housing. While a host of options in the City are available, coordinating the services is equivalent to the work of two part-time positions. Therefore, United Way is funding these positions to help individuals find housing quickly and efficiently. The Housing Coordinator positions will work on a contractual basis, spending approximately 20 hours per week until December 30th. The coordinators will develop a coordinated housing referral process and assist with the successful placement of Katrina evacuees into housing.

- **Counseling Center** – Mental Health Services

Between 600-800 people affected by Katrina are currently living in the area. A recent survey of State Fair residents found that up to 70% may remain in Milwaukee. Mental health issues are a major impediment to the success of the evacuees. After Hurricane Andrew, 25% struggled with serious diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder many months after the disaster. United Way is therefore funding a team of trained graduate level professionals from The Counseling Center to provide mental health services for those in need.

- **IMPACT** - Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse Services

According to a recent news feature, "Hurricane Katrina displaced thousands of people with addictions from their treatment programs and support networks, added strain on people who may have been walking the line between moderate use and addiction, and put millions at risk of turning to alcohol or other drugs..." IMPACT will provide alcohol and other drug abuse services to evacuees at the Tommy Thompson Center and throughout the community who are in need of, and whose substance abuse treatment was interrupted by Hurricane Katrina. The proposed activity will provide screening, assessment and referral services, as well as awareness of available substance abuse services in the Greater Milwaukee area for evacuees stationed in the community. Evacuees who are in need of, and whose substance abuse treatment was, interrupted by Katrina, will have access to alcohol and drug abuse assistance.

▪ **Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee, Inc.** – Legal Services

Given the recent influx of more than 500 Gulf Coast evacuees with devastating legal problems into what is now the seventh poorest American city, Legal Aid Society provides limited legal assistance including information, referral, advice and counsel. Referrals to Legal aid received many requests of help from Gulf Coast residents who have doubled up in homes in Milwaukee, but receive no services at the State of Emergency Operation Center

With the financial support of United Way of Greater Milwaukee, Legal Aid Society will be able to provide services free of charge to those with household income under 150% of the federal poverty guideline. Legal Aid services will remove the legal obstacles to self-sufficiency and begin to restore a sense of personal well-being for evacuees who face devastating legal problems.

Examples include: concerning debt relief, housing, insurance claims, complex home mortgages and car loans, unemployment benefits, home foreclosures and deficiencies, landlord/tenant disputes about rental obligation and security deposits in now-abandoned housing, the denial of public benefits to Medicaid or disability income, lost legal documents, identity problems, and custody guardianship and education of displaced children.

▪ **New Concept Self-Development Center** – Counseling, Employment,

New Concept Self-Development Center primarily serves low-income African American Families. United Way of Greater Milwaukee's additional support will help meet the needs of Katrina evacuees through a variety of services. Services are available to all, with an emphasis on outreach to fathers, and include:

- Counseling
- Employment
- Parent Education
- Anger Management
- Father-Friendly Activities
- Information Workshops (ATODA, mental health, stress reduction, child support, etc)

United Way of Greater Milwaukee's main goal is to improve lives through sustained change. Each year, United Way invests over \$30 million dollars in the community, with nearly \$2 million in programs that work to *break the cycle of poverty*.

United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Katrina - Background

Since Hurricane Katrina, United Way has arranged for 2-1-1 IMPACT (the crisis information hotline) to have an on-site presence at the Tommy Thompson Center whereby a trained information referral specialist from 2-1-1 at IMPACT can direct evacuees to needed services. Professional IMPACT staff will have access to an online database, which has helped connect people to a variety of programs. Last year, United Way allocated over \$375,000 to 211 @ IMPACT

“United Way of Greater Milwaukee substantially invests each year in disaster relief programs,” said Sue Dragisic, president of United Way, “But we must also provide direction to where the evacuees begin to rebuild their lives through support of our existing network of services. We must commit to both short-term and long-term solutions.”

United Way of Greater Milwaukee invests in what matters most, improving lives. United Way multiplies the impact individuals have to make a difference by bringing together the financial and human resources of the whole community. For more information on United Way, visit us at www.unitedwaymilwaukee.org or call 414.263.8100.