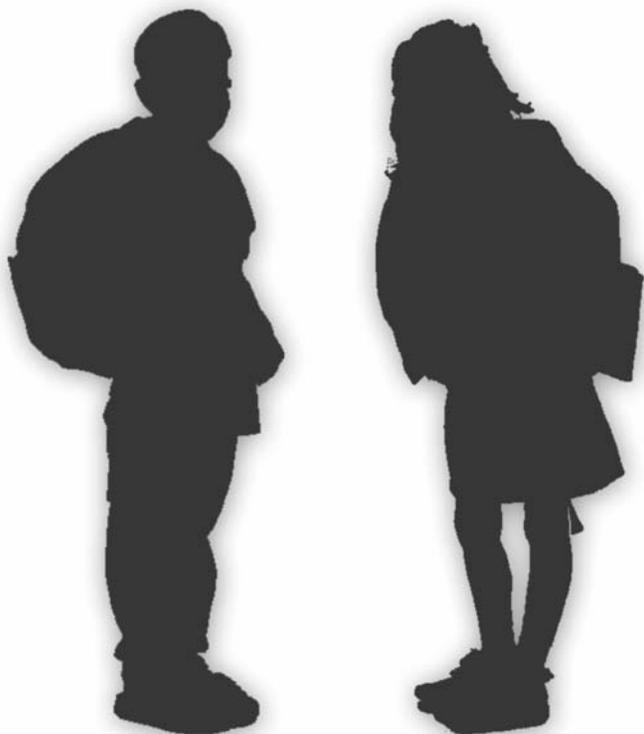


# Disaster Relief Agencies and Schools:

## Working Together to Ensure School Enrollment and Success

A Handbook for Local Liaisons and State Coordinators



Connecting Schools and  
Displaced Students Series  
Winter 2006



This document was produced under U.S. Department of Education contract ED-04-CO-0056 0001.

For more information on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Program, contact the U.S. Department of Education, Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs (SASA), Office of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Phone: 202-260-0826

Website: [www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html)

For additional information on providing assistance for schools serving students displaced by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes, visit Hurricane Help for Schools at <http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/index.html>.

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) is a national resource center of research and information enabling communities to address the needs of children and their families and of unaccompanied youth in homeless situations.

NCHE is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is housed at SERVE at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Phone: 800-308-2145

Website: [www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche).

For additional information and resources on providing assistance for schools serving students displaced by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes or other disasters, visit [www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche) and click on Disaster Relief Efforts.

## Introduction

Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, mudslides, fires, earthquakes, terrorism, and school lock-downs: A wide variety of disasters can profoundly impact schools and create an urgent need for comprehensive support systems. Collaboration between school personnel and relief agency staff is imperative to keep the educational needs of displaced children included in needs assessments and in planning for disaster relief.

The following questions and answers provide information designed to help State Coordinators for Homeless Education and Local Homeless Education Liaisons (hereafter called “local liaisons”) in their efforts to collaborate with relief agencies on the state and local levels.\* The national partners in homeless education are also working with FEMA, the Red Cross, and other relief agencies at the national level to increase their awareness of homeless education programs and to support greater collaboration between relief agencies and schools.

Although many of the needs and challenges confronting children and youth displaced by disasters are the same as those faced by other students experiencing homelessness, the priorities and structures of the relief agencies that serve them may be very different. In the wake of disasters, relief agencies are focused on providing the kinds of emergency assistance that families need to cope with the immediate trauma. The benefits of the school setting for children of displaced families are not always recognized as a top priority for relief agency staff and others whose tasks address food, clothing, shelter, and safety. Yet, the services offered by schools and relief agencies complement each other, and if coordinated can provide families, children, and youth with a seamless continuum of housing, nutrition, employment, medical and mental health, educational, and other services.

\*Different school districts use different titles for their Local Homeless Education Liaisons. They may also be called the McKinney-Vento Project Coordinator or the McKinney-Vento Liaison.

## Relief Agency Basics

When responding to disasters, schools may be called upon to collaborate with a variety of relief agencies. But who are those agencies, and what do they do?

### FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA)

Through its Individuals and Households Program, FEMA provides housing assistance to people whose homes are damaged or destroyed in a disaster. The program also provides assistance for medical, dental, funeral, and transportation costs. People who lose their jobs due to a disaster may apply for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), which provides weekly benefits to individuals who are unemployed and not eligible for regular unemployment insurance compensation. Through an agreement with FEMA, the American Bar Association offers free legal counseling to low-income individuals. FEMA's Crisis Counseling Program also provides supplemental funds to state and local mental health agencies for short-term crisis counseling services.

Most, but not all, federal assistance is in the form of low-interest loans to cover expenses not covered by state or local programs or private insurance. People who do not qualify for loans may be able to apply for a cash grant.

To apply for FEMA assistance, survivors must register at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362).

#### What kind of housing assistance does FEMA offer?

*Lodging Expense Reimbursement* to cover the cost of short-term lodging, such as hotel rooms.

*Rental Assistance* based on fair market rents, to cover three months for homeowners and one month for renters, with additional assistance for up to 18 months total.

*Funds for Home Repairs* for homes that can be made livable by repairs.

*Home Replacement or Permanent Housing Construction* in certain special circumstances.



#### Federal Resources on the Web

Resources for Teachers: [www.fema.gov/kids/teacher.htm](http://www.fema.gov/kids/teacher.htm)

Resources for Students: [www.fema.gov/kids/](http://www.fema.gov/kids/)

Mental Health Resources: [www.mentalhealth.org](http://www.mentalhealth.org)  
[www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/TraumaticEvents/tips.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/TraumaticEvents/tips.asp)

## Relief Agency Basics

### THE RED CROSS

The American Red Cross provides relief services to communities affected by disasters, including food, water, short-term shelter, counseling support, and assistance with family reunification. It also offers services in five other areas: community services for needy populations, support and comfort for military members and their families, the management of blood and blood products, educational programs that promote health and safety, and international relief and development programs. The Red Cross has 900 local chapters and is staffed by 35,000 employees and nearly one million volunteers. It is a non-governmental agency that spends an average of 91 cents of every dollar on humanitarian services and programs.

#### *The Red Cross on the Web*

To find your local chapter: [www.redcross.org/where/where.html](http://www.redcross.org/where/where.html)

Classroom resources (many available in a wide assortment of languages):

"Facing Fear: Helping Young People Deal With Terrorism and Other Tragic Events": [www.redcross.org/disaster/masters/facingfear/](http://www.redcross.org/disaster/masters/facingfear/)

Helping Young Children Cope With Trauma:  
[www.redcross.org/services/disaster/foreignmat/1303en.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/foreignmat/1303en.pdf)

Community Disaster Education Materials: [www.redcross.org/pubs/dspubs/cde.html](http://www.redcross.org/pubs/dspubs/cde.html)

Recommended Emergency Supplies for Schools:  
[www.redcross.org/disaster/masters/supplies.html](http://www.redcross.org/disaster/masters/supplies.html)



### THE SALVATION ARMY

The Salvation Army is a Christian church, founded in 1865 to advance the Christian religion, promote education, relieve poverty, and pursue other charitable works. Today, over a million employees and volunteers work in 109 countries in programs that focus on health, education, social services, and emergency disaster relief. Disaster relief is provided through the Salvation Army's Emergency Services Program, a section of the Programme Resources Department of International Headquarters. For more information, visit [www.salvationarmy.org](http://www.salvationarmy.org).

## Relief Agency Basics

### NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER (NVOAD)

NVOAD is a membership organization of approximately 40 disaster response agencies that coordinates the planning efforts of those agencies and serves as an information clearinghouse. For example, during the Gulf Coast hurricanes, NVOAD organized daily conference calls between relief agencies and FEMA and other federal government agencies. State and regional VOADs also exist.

#### *NVOAD on the Web*

[www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org)

Emotional and Spiritual Care Guide for Disaster Survivors:  
[www.nvoad.org/articles/ESCCchapterB.pdf](http://www.nvoad.org/articles/ESCCchapterB.pdf)

Long Term Recovery Manual:  
[www.nvoad.org/articles/LTRManualFinalApr232004a.pdf](http://www.nvoad.org/articles/LTRManualFinalApr232004a.pdf)



### COORDINATED ASSISTANCE NETWORK (CAN)

CAN is a network of seven charities that participate in community-led preparedness and response coalitions focusing on best practices to serve those in need. CAN partnered with FEMA to develop a web-based database to share information between agencies. For example, during the Gulf Coast hurricanes clients who agreed to have their information entered into the database could simply provide it once, rather than having to register information separately with each agency. For more information, visit [www.can.org](http://www.can.org).

### OTHER RELIEF AGENCIES

Many community agencies provide essential services to survivors of disasters. These agencies include pre-existing shelters and motels; the faith community; public medical and mental health clinics; public assistance agencies such as housing, employment, social security, and public benefits offices; state and local emergency response teams; and soup kitchens and food pantries. Furthermore, individual community members provide "hidden" services, through informal housing arrangements (doubled-up families), employment opportunities, and donations.

## Working Successfully with Relief Agencies

Like most people, relief agency staff members are likely to know that proof of residency, immunizations, school records, and a parent or guardian typically are required to enroll children in school. They will also know that their clients are not likely to have those documents. However, many are unlikely to know that under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act their clients do not need those documents. Depending on their familiarity with the public school system, they may also be unaware of the variety of services that schools can provide to displaced families such as medical and mental health care, assistance with basic needs, and support for parents. The result is that they may never approach a school, refer a parent or youth to a school, or even consider school enrollment a possibility.



The challenge for schools is to address these misconceptions so that relief agencies understand that school is a critical resource for children and families in the immediate wake of a disaster. Delaying enrollment until the emergency passes or the family finds long-term housing is both unnecessary and illegal, as a general rule. Awareness of the McKinney-Vento Act and your homeless education program is critical if schools and relief agencies are to work together to support families, children, and youth displaced by disasters.

### Communicate!

Schools and relief agencies agree that the biggest barrier to getting displaced students into school, and keeping them there, is a lack of communication between the agencies and the schools. Communicating early and often will help ease everyone's burden. Relief agencies are being encouraged to do the same.

 **Communication Tip** 

On the state and local level, start building relationships and establishing quick, reliable communication systems with relief agency personnel *prior* to disasters occurring. Starting a relationship during a disaster can be extremely difficult. When strong ties exist before a disaster hits, relief agencies are more likely to respond to requests for information and to collaborate actively with schools during emergencies.

### Teach!

Coordination with relief agencies is impossible if they don't know who you are and what you do. Relief agencies are largely staffed by

(continued on next page)

## Working Successfully With Relief Agencies

(continued from previous page)

emergency volunteers and confront a high rate of turnover, so ongoing awareness trainings about the McKinney-Vento Act and the services you offer are essential. Local liaisons and State Coordinators must incorporate relief agency staff fully into professional development activities.



NCHIE Parent Poster. Available at [www.serve.org/nchieproducts.php](http://www.serve.org/nchieproducts.php)

 **Teaching Tip** 

Provide all local relief agencies with a supply of posters, brochures, and other awareness materials. Invite staff to visit your program and participate in trainings on a regular basis. In high-impact areas, it may help to design a special training for relief agencies. Even if they don't attend, the invitation itself reminds them that you're out there. For example, in Oregon, the State Coordinator for Homeless Education organized a "Liaisons as First Responders" training session after Hurricane Katrina. She found that district leaders came to recognize that having a resourceful and well-trained local liaison in their district is an asset in the case of disaster. A state-level technical assistance resource from Colorado is available at [www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/hkatrina\\_resources.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/hkatrina_resources.htm).

### Learn!

Get to know the relief agencies that are active in your area. Find out about their priorities, funding, and structure, and identify ways your services can help them meet their goals. Collaboration is always more successful when both parties see the tangible things they can gain from working together. Helping relief agencies see how your McKinney-Vento program can complement and support their mission may make working together easier.

 **Learning Tip** 

Relief agencies are judged on how well they meet the immediate, physical needs of displaced people: School enrollment and success likely are not within their mission. Therefore, agencies need to know about the wide range of services schools offer such as nurses, counselors, and other medical and mental health professionals; special education programs; clothing, hygiene materials, and school supplies; automatic eligibility for free meals; services for preschoolers; after-school and extra-curricular activities; connections to local social services and public benefits agencies; and parental support and involvement activities.

## Working Successfully with Relief Agencies

### Share!

Relief agencies are experts in responding to disasters; but you are an expert in working with families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness in your community. Sharing basic information about your schools, school calendar, your program, the McKinney-Vento Act, and the families and youth you serve is essential for relief agencies to be able to provide the most appropriate services.



#### Sharing Tip



Make sure relief agencies are aware of displaced families who are sharing housing with others, living in motels, or staying in fields, campgrounds, or other public areas. Help agencies tailor their procedures to address issues like stigmatization, sensitivity, local gang activity, or other dangerous situations and activities to help students transition smoothly and successfully into a new school.

### Strategize!



#### Strategizing Tip



Explain to relief agency staff how basic information from them can help you serve displaced families, children, and youth, so they can feel confident that information they provide will not be misused. Help them draft language to insert in their standard release forms, or provide them with a separate prepared release form to allow them to obtain consent to share necessary information with McKinney-Vento staff.

You need information from FEMA about school-aged children to make sure they are enrolled and receiving services. But the Privacy Act prohibits FEMA from disclosing any information to any other agency without prior written consent. National advocates are working with FEMA so that consent to release information to schools can be part of FEMA's standard intake process with parents. It is important for superintendents and local liaisons to support similar policies on the local level.

### Coordinate!

As relief agencies seek housing for displaced families, it is critical that they are aware of the effects of school mobility on students and schools. Try to participate in disaster planning-and-response team meetings, and educate agencies about the school of origin and transportation provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. Make sure they know how their housing decisions affect the students and the schools, and work with them to make housing placements as

(continued on next page)

## Working Successfully With Relief Agencies

(continued from previous page)

responsive as possible to school placements and calendars. Work to stay in the loop about pending shelter and trailer closings, motel voucher limits, proposed long-term housing, and other predictable mobility patterns.



#### Coordination Tip



If you can't get yourself on your local disaster planning and response team, make friends with someone who can: your superintendent, a school board member, a supporter of your program, a city council member, county supervisor, or other elected official, a colleague, or a friend. You may also consider setting up your own coordinating task force and engaging relief agencies in that effort.

### Cooperate!

Work with relief agencies to make school enrollment and attendance as streamlined as possible. Cooperation with relief agencies may also help enhance cultural sensitivity, as the agencies may have a more extensive network of volunteers of different ethnic backgrounds, faiths, and cultural orientations.



#### Cooperation Tip



Explain your enrollment process for children and youth experiencing homelessness to relief agency staff. Consider the constraints and needs of relief agencies in designing disaster school enrollment strategies, taking into account the time parents must spend registering for housing and other benefits; space constraints in shelters, trailers, or motels; and limitations in staffing and training. If applicable, provide the agencies with a supply of enrollment forms.

### Plan for the Future!

It is essential that schools develop and implement plans for preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a disaster. Many displaced students and families will not return home, and the local schools will be educating and serving those families for months or years to come. Many of them will experience homelessness again as relief agency services end, and they struggle to get back on their feet. Relief agencies like FEMA and the Red Cross have recovery committees that continue to work with displaced families in the months and years after disasters. Get involved in recovery committees and engage relief agencies in tackling short- and long-term planning issues (9 mos., 1 year, 3 years, 5 years out).

## Disaster Relief Agencies and Schools: Checklist for Working Together

- ❑ **Communicate:** Start building relationships with relief agencies now.
- ❑ **Teach:** Provide McKinney-Vento training and awareness materials to relief agency staff.
- ❑ **Learn:** Discuss with local relief agency staff how your program can complement and support theirs.
- ❑ **Share:** Make sure relief agencies know about doubled-up, unaccompanied, and “hidden” homeless students.
- ❑ **Strategize:** Work with relief agencies to develop release forms so they can share information with you.
- ❑ **Coordinate:** Enlist a superintendent or school board member to help you gain access to local disaster planning committees.
- ❑ **Cooperate:** Discuss school enrollment procedures with relief agency staff.
- ❑ **Plan for the future:** Engage relief agencies in long-term planning.

Relief Agency Contact Information

Local Liaison Contact Information



National Center for Homeless Education  
Toll-free HelpLine: 800-308-2145  
[www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche)

This checklist was taken from the publication entitled *Disaster Relief Agencies and Schools: Working Together to Ensure School Enrollment and Success*. This publication is available at [www.serve.org/nche/products.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/products.php).

## Resources from the National Center for Homeless Education

NCHE resources may be found on the NCHE website at [www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche).

Resources include:

- Posters
- Brochures
- Parent Pack Pocket Folders
- Homeless Education Awareness Folders
- Publications
- Briefs
- Web-based Audio Trainings
- Homeless Education Listserv
- Disaster Preparation and Recovery Listserv
- Onsite trainings (by request)

## National Partners in Homeless Education

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)  
[www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org)

National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)  
[www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche)

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP)  
[www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org)

NCHE publications are supported through a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs.



National Center for Homeless Education  
P.O. Box 5367  
Greensboro, NC 27435  
Toll-free HelpLine: 800-308-2145  
[www.serve.org/nche](http://www.serve.org/nche)