

Executive Summary

Hurricane Rebuilding and Recovery Program:

BACKGROUND: North Carolina suffered its worst natural disasters during the fall of 1999 with Hurricanes Dennis, Floyd and Irene. Hurricane Floyd was particularly destructive. As a result of the devastation, Governor Hunt and President Clinton declared two thirds of North Carolina's counties disaster areas. Recovery and rebuilding efforts were begun as soon as feasible following the flooding. FEMA, North Carolina Emergency Management, state and national religious and non-profit organizations, the Red Cross, Salvation Army and others held public meetings to discuss the recovery and rebuilding plans. One large segment of those impacted by the devastation who are the largest long-term stakeholders have been left out of these discussions. That group is the children and youth of our state.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT

- A survey of middle and high school students was conducted in the twenty-five (25) counties most affected by the hurricanes in February 2000.
- Data analysis of survey results was compiled in March 2000.
- On April 27,2000, a 1 1/2 hour videoconference was held with students from Columbus, Duplin, Edgecombe and Pitt Counties and state officials, including Governor Hunt's Chief Deputy for Administration and Community Outreach, a co-chair of the NC House Appropriations Committee who represents several of the affected counties and serves on the Legislative Study Commission on Children with Special Needs, and a representative of State Emergency Management.
- Following the videoconference, students had an opportunity to speak with county and municipal officials and managers in their home area about local efforts and how students want to be involved
- On May 18,2000 **Inside North Carolina**, a statewide cable call in program broadcast through the Open Public Events Network (OPEN), featured two of the student participants from the videoconference, the Director of the Youth advocacy and Involvement Office and a representative of the North Carolina FEMA Office.
- A written report outlining the survey results, highlights of the videoconference and **Inside North Carolina** program, and recommendations arising from the components of this project will be provided to local, state and federal officials helping North Carolina recover and rebuild Eastern North Carolina (Fall, 2000).

SPONSORS: Public: The Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office of the North Carolina Department of Administration, the Civic Education Consortium, 4-H Youth Development, North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and; **Private:** The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center.

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**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
YOUTH ADVOCACY AND INVOLVEMENT OFFICE
STUDENTS OFFER ADVICE TO STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS
ABOUT HURRICANES VIA SURVEY, TELECONFERENCE AND
STATEWIDE CABLE CALL-IN PROGRAM**

Program Description:

The Challenge: Sponsors of this comprehensive program wanted to provide an opportunity for students to provide input on rebuilding and recovery efforts following the worst natural disasters in North Carolina history. The first step was to develop a survey and get it out to the middle and high school students in the twenty-five (25) counties most affected by hurricanes Dennis, Floyd and Irene. A goal of the survey was to determine how the youth of North Carolina were affected, how involved they are in the relief and rebuilding efforts and should government and private agencies and programs working in these efforts be doing more to get young people involved and meet their needs.

The Civic Education Consortium arranged for social studies teachers to conduct the surveys in their classes for sixth through twelfth grade. Over 12,000 surveys were mailed in early February. Responses from nearly 2800 students were received, which is a statistically sound percentage. Sociology graduate students at North Carolina State University analyzed the data and presented the results in narrative, chart and graph form.

Significant Survey Information:

TEMPORARY HOUSING AND AREAS OF LIFE MOST AFFECTED: Nearly 10% of the respondents had to move into temporary housing and 2.4% were living in temporary housing at the time they completed the survey. Overall, students indicated that School/Work and the Community were the areas of their lives most affected. Students, who had lived in or were still living in temporary housing, were more affected than those who did not have to seek alternate housing.

HOW YOUTH HAVE BEEN OR WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN REBUILDING AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES: Overall, respondents report that youth, as a whole, are not very involved in relief and rebuilding efforts. The youth experiencing temporary housing are significantly more involved personally than those who did not experience temporary housing. The survey showed a gap between the role that youth think they should play and the role they actually play in recovery efforts.

TOP FIVE THINGS YOUTH CAN DO TO HELP WITH THE RELIEF AND REBUILDING:

1. Donate Goods
2. Clean Up

3. Re-build/repair
4. Help People
5. Volunteering

Personal, Family and Community Needs

Personal needs: Schoolwork ranked #1 across race and gender as the need most affected by the disaster, but those who moved into temporary housing ranked housing as the top unmet need. Housing was ranked #2 among males and females of all races, and schoolwork was second among those who had to move into temporary housing.

Family needs: Housing problems ranked as the #1 family need across race, gender and those in temporary housing. Family stress was the #2 concern.

Community needs: Overall and constant across race and gender, youth identified these areas as not being met:

1. Housing Problems
2. Stores/businesses
3. Food/clothing

Youth identified **community needs** more than any other unmet needs. Youth who had lived in temporary housing identified housing problems much more frequently. Those not in temporary housing felt stores/business were their biggest problems.

Future needs: Youth reported that the top five community needs in the next 6-12 months will be

1. Rebuilding
2. Money
3. Community Service
4. Donation of Goods
5. Clean Up

Though there was no difference among races, the data showed that males ranked money as the top need with rebuilding and community service ranking second and third. Females responded that rebuilding was the first priority, with community service and money ranking second and third.

Successful Relief and Rebuilding Efforts: The most successful mechanism for rebuilding the community have been:

1. Volunteerism
2. Efforts to rebuild homes
3. Community and group involvement
4. Involvement by faith communities

Missing Activities: Youth said the top three activities that should be happening locally but aren't included:

1. People need to help more

2. Clean up efforts
3. Government needs to do more

Overview of Information Highway Videoconference:

Students at the four video sites (Columbus, Duplin, Edgecombe, and Pitt) were consistent in saying they were not more involved in rebuilding and recovery activities because they did not know where to volunteer and/or that adults did not want to work with them. Many had so much emotional stress to deal with they did not have the ability to help and did not want to be a burden to others. Some felt adults did not trust them. Many were so stunned with the amount of devastation they did not know where to start. There was so much confusion as to where people were, even their own extended families, that students felt overwhelmed. Many expressed concerns that students who were not personally affected by the disaster did not seem to care about the people who were displaced and lost most, if not all, of their possessions.

Students expressed concern about the lack of planning to deal with natural disasters and expressed a strong interest in rectifying that situation before the hurricane season of 2000. They asked the State Emergency Management participant what planning activities could be undertaken now through the schools, churches and civic organizations to better plan and be ready to help during future problems. The participants appeared to want to follow up with EMS to put these programs in place in their communities and suggested that this be done across the state.

The participants in the videoconference told moving stories of their personal experiences and of experiences of their families, neighbors and communities. A major theme of their stories was the lack of opportunities for young people and adults to deal with the emotional strain caused by these disasters. They expressed great interest in having programs during school that would help them deal with their concerns. They expressed some relief in hearing that students from other counties had experienced similar problems and had similar feelings.

Students expressed appreciation for an opportunity to provide input: Participants at all four videoconference sites expressed strong appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the survey, for the videoconference and for the attendance by state officials at this program. Students were given the opportunity to talk with local officials at each school site regarding ways they could work with local officials in the recovery, rebuilding and planning activities. The students were asked to give any additional questions to a teacher or 4-H agent at their site who would forward them to the Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office for an answer from the appropriate agency.

Inside North Carolina - Statewide Cable all-In Program:

The May 18th *Inside North Carolina OPEN* statewide cable call-in program devoted the 9:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. timeslot to discuss the survey results and information gained from the videoconference. This program provided an opportunity for callers to ask questions of two students who participated in the videoconference, a representative of

the North Carolina FEMA Office and the Director of the Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office.

Final Report:

A written publication of the survey results and information gained from the videoconference and cable television program will be prepared and disseminated in the fall of 2000. The publication will be mailed to government officials at the federal, state and local levels. These include North Carolina's Congressional Delegation, all members of the General Assembly, the governor's Office, all members of the Council of State, participating schools, Chairs of County Commissioner Boards and County Managers in affected counties, and Mayors and City Managers in affected areas.

Calculation of Actual Savings and Benefits

There is no way to effectively calculate the actual dollar savings resulting from this program. What we do know is that when we leave a large segment of the population of the decision-making process, in this case young citizens, we fail to fully utilize all of our assets. This program has offered young people a unique opportunity to provide insight into the effects of the worst natural disaster in our state's history. Their ideas and continued volunteerism will increase benefits to government in the short run by reducing costs associated with clean up efforts from the current natural disaster. Likewise, students have offered suggestions of ways state, local and regional efforts can be structured to better prepare North Carolina for future disasters. These youth will continue to offer not only their advice but also their energy and effort at rebuilding their community and state. The short and long-term "person power", involvement and good will generated by this program are immeasurable.

Conclusion:

This unique partnership among numerous state government agencies, local government agencies and statewide private non-profits has provided opportunities to learn from and tap a much underutilized population-----youth. Through surveys and inter-active telecommunication programs, young people of North Carolina have been given ways to express to policy and law makers what they feel has impacted them and their families the most during this stressful period in our state's history. Many said they wanted to help, but did not know how or were not given the opportunity. They have said they appreciated having a chance to talk about the disasters and will continue to be involved in recovery efforts, which will take many years to complete. State and local officials now have the benefit of creative and thoughtful suggestions from the youngest of citizens and can now offer safe and meaningful ways for the youth to be further involved.

