

New Orleans Women's Shelter

THE NOWS STORY: From Tragedy to Hope

Hurricane Katrina left in its wake an astonishing array of problems in the City of New Orleans. It is painfully apparent that two years post-Katrina, the absence of affordable housing combined with previously existing social problems has led to a virtual explosion of homelessness. The number of homeless people in New Orleans has doubled from 6,000 before the storm to 12,000 currently, and the traditional overnight shelters are overwhelmed by people seeking all forms of assistance.

Now that the initial post-hurricane recovery phase is nearing completion, the city is facing the "Katrina Echo Effect." Housing prices have skyrocketed, FEMA benefits have run out, some people have lost their jobs due to unaddressed PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), and others are suffering from domestic abuse resulting from the stress of post-Katrina life.

Families who have nowhere else to go are living in cars, gutted homes they can't afford to rebuild, and abandoned buildings. Nonetheless we must reach out to those most in need

The objective of NOWS is to provide transitional housing for homeless women and children in the New Orleans area and allow them to stabilize their lives while assisting them in establishing an independent, self-supporting and productive lifestyle.

The three pillars of the New Orleans Women's Shelter are:

- 1) a resource rich,**
- 2) safe space that encourages**
- 3) personal empowerment.**

NOWS operates as a family-style transitional women and children's home with a focus on helping women stabilize, learn to set goals and live by a budget, obtain proper medical treatment and other locally available social services, enroll children in school and day care, register for job training classes, secure employment, locate affordable permanent housing, and move on to successful independent living.

The case management staff helps the residents sign up for public programs such as LACHIP and state sponsored child support programs. Those in need of mental health services are taken to local clinics.

Women with domestic violence or substance abuse issues or other special needs are connected with appropriate resources. The residents, primarily Katrina survivors who lost their housing in the flood, are allowed to stay as long as it takes to accomplish an appropriate transition, typically three to six months.

The staff is comprised of volunteers from around the country who apply to serve three to six month periods to work as case managers and provide support for house operations. At night, staff members rotate so that there are always two of them on premises for emergencies. Case management is overseen by Jackie Silverman, who has many years of experience as a senior case manager with a local United Way agency. Volunteer recruitment and direction is overseen by Caroline Heldman, a professor at Occidental University.

A unique aspect of Nows is that it initially began post-Katrina as a grass roots, all-volunteer operation and continues to operate primarily by the effort of volunteers from around the country. In December 2006, realizing the importance and ethical duty to help others in the community who are struggling, Congregation Gates of Prayer and its members came on board to initiate improvements to the facility and in June 2007, Gates of Prayer became the fiscal sponsor for Nows. Fund raising and financial management of Nows is overseen by Dan Silverman.

For additional information please contact Dan Silverman dsilverm@aol.com (504) 616-5903 or Jackie Silverman Jackie9634@aol.com (504) 202-7394. Donations may be sent to Congregation Gates of Prayer, 4000 W. Esplanade, Metairie, LA 70002 and should be identified as for the New Orleans Women's Shelter. Tax deductible acknowledgments are sent on a timely basis.