



Campaign  
For YOUTH

## **CAMPAIGN FOR YOUTH**

### **Considerations for Youth and Communities Impacted by Hurricane Katrina**

The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina challenges this nation on many fronts: to be compassionate in aiding the victims and reverent in honoring the loss of life; to be effective and efficient in the rescue and relief efforts; to be visionary, inclusive, and expeditious in the rebuilding of community and of lives; and to be reflective as a Nation on the powerful lessons from this tragic experience. The members of the Campaign for Youth recognize that we are called upon individually and collectively to lend our talent, our resources and our expertise to the massive rebuilding that this Nation must undertake.

As attention focuses on the rescue and recovery efforts, we raise our concerns for the youth and young adults from the impacted areas of the Gulf, especially those who were evacuated. Even before the hurricane hit, thousands of young people were adrift, lacking sufficient education, without jobs, and without skills. Now compounded by the trauma of the devastation, the loss of home, community, family and friends, these youth are probably in the most tenuous situation, because they are the most likely to be overlooked and inadequately accommodated. Thousands of them have been evacuated to communities where they will likely overwhelm whatever education and social support structures may be provided to meet their education and labor market needs. Without focused attention on the needs of these youth we may well find that they simply swell the ranks of the vulnerable, disconnected youth in the communities in which they land.

We must challenge the entire network of youth serving organizations nationwide to rise to the occasion and assure that this doesn't happen. If ever there is a time for youth programs and practitioners, youth serving systems, advocates, and communities to unite, set aside turf, and blend their expertise, it is now! It should be part of an overarching national vision that as we restore the hurricane ravaged communities, as we rebuild New Orleans and the Gulf area, we must restore hope and promise to these young people by making them an integral part of the rebuilding effort and poised to take their place in the economy of the revitalized community.

**Campaign for Youth** advances the following recommendations:

- 1. Create a large-scale “Community Restoration and Youth Development Effort”** that would provide work opportunities, academic and occupational skills development, and support to youth 16-24 in the communities impacted by the hurricane and those communities that are absorbing substantial numbers of evacuees. We believe that some proportion of these youth will want to return to their home communities and that they should be encouraged to do so and be part of the restoration. The goal of the “Community Restoration and Youth Development Effort” is to create a healthier environment for these youth whether they choose to integrate into a new community or want to return home. We believe it is important for the revitalization of their spirit to tie them civically to the rebuilding effort and channel their talent and energy constructively. This is an opportunity to stimulate and nurture youth leadership.

Such an effort should be comprehensive and should integrate the following components:

**Work Component** that provides jobs and wages to youth and engage them in meaningful projects that 1) work to restore the hurricane-ravaged communities, 2) repair the physical infrastructure in the communities that received the evacuees, or 3) provide opportunities for on-the-job training in skill areas that will be needed in the reconstruction projects.

**Service Component** to provide meaningful opportunities for young people to serve their communities by rehabilitating or creating public spaces, renovating public buildings, restoring housing, tutoring school children, assisting in the delivery of public health services to the elderly and frail, among other service opportunities. It is important that young people have the chance to help others, not just receive assistance.

**Academic Component** built on successful alternative educational approaches that exist in the community or proven models that work with youth with low literacy levels and put them on the path to academic credentials.

**Occupational Skills Component** to impart the skills in demand as part of the rebuilding effort as well as those that will be needed when New Orleans is once again a vibrant city and the Gulf Coast restored. A broad mix of skills in construction, electronics, utilities, environmental restoration, computers, hazmat, medical support, agriculture, hospitality and entertainment, etc., will all be required. Communities should make creative use of the work place, community college, and industry alliances to generate non-traditional approaches to training and credentialing.

**Support Component** operated out of community-designated physical location(s) that can serve as a one-stop center for affected youth. Trained staff should be available to assist youth in navigating the various systems, services and resources and to help them attend to their health care, housing, education and economic needs. These staff should provide mentoring support and guide young people as they plan for the future.

2. **Stimulate the Business-Youth connection** by identifying those occupational areas that will be in demand communities where the youth are now living or in the Gulf area if the youngster wishes to return; and allowing subsidized employment for youth in those industry and occupational areas (with the businesses providing the supervision and one-on-one mentoring).
3. **Establishment of a temporary residential capacity** as close as is feasible to the major reconstruction effort to provide intensive training to prepare young people to return to the Gulf Coast area to participate in the various phases of rebuilding. For many youth, shelter and stability will be a problem. Providing interventions focused on creating a pipeline of young workers coupled with first-source hiring agreements will greatly enhance the economic prospects for these youth.

- 4. Build on and enhance the delivery capacity of local youth service providers** to expand service and support to accommodate the increased demand. Resources should be channeled to communities to build a coordinated strategy for serving both young hurricane victims and disconnected youth who reside in the communities. Especially in the Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana region, the service and support networks should be expanded to assure that as many youth as possible can remain near home while obtaining appropriate training, education, service opportunities, and counseling while preparing to participate in the rebuilding process.

The delivery capacity of the existing network of providers- both local deliverers and national intermediaries- should be augmented to bring the best talent and expertise to bear in crafting expeditious solutions. This represents an opportunity to restructure our approach to poor disconnected youth in distressed communities.

- 5. Facilitate a peer-to-peer network** among communities and TA providers to allow the expeditious sharing of best practice and the exchange of staff to provide hands-on assistance in start-up, expansion, or replication of innovative interventions.

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*The Campaign for Youth was established in 2002 in an effort to build a united voice for vulnerable and disconnected youth in this nation.*

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