



RESPONSE TO HARVEY

Texas Appleseed has over a decade of experience in projects related to disaster recovery. Post-Katrina, Appleseed worked with survivors who were displaced and living in Houston. The experience we gained led to continuing work in the wake of the three hurricanes that followed – Rita, Ike and Dolly – which devastated large swaths of the Texas coast. Since the beginning of this project and through Superstorm Sandy, we have been part of an evolving conversation around best practices with national, state, and local groups including Appleseed Centers in Louisiana and Alabama and organizations in Mississippi and New Jersey.

As a consequence, **Maddie Sloan**, Director of our Fair Housing and Disaster Recovery project, is **one of a handful of experts in the state** on each phase of the disaster recovery process, from emergency services, to short-term recovery, to long-term rebuilding. A few **highlights from Appleseed's work include:**

- In 2006, Appleseed co-counseled a class-action suit to prevent FEMA from cutting off emergency housing assistance and rendering homeless more than 50,000 low-income evacuees of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Along with other interventions, FEMA ultimately **extended their deadline for housing assistance by almost a full year.**
- In 2009, Texas Appleseed and our partner Texas Low Income Housing Information Service successfully advocated basing the model used for distributing \$3 billion in Ike & Dolly federal disaster recovery funds on need, resulting in an **additional \$208 million for the Houston-Galveston region.**
- In 2010, Appleseed and our partner Texas Low Income Housing Information Service signed a HUD-approved Conciliation Agreement with the State related to the distribution of Ike & Dolly recovery funds. This agreement **increased funding for home repair and reconstruction to the lowest income families by 150 percent.** This agreement also **guaranteed the rebuilding of public and affordable housing** and created a **first-of-its kind mobility program** that allowed homeowners to move out of disaster vulnerable areas.
- In 2010, Appleseed also worked with local partners and with the city of Houston to **allocate \$30 million in housing funds to the rebuilding of single family homes** destroyed by Ike.
- In 2011, Appleseed worked in partnership with local organizations in the Rio Grande Valley to ensure that **\$14 million of disaster recovery money was used to create an engineered drainage system in the colonias**, which suffered the worst Hurricane Dolly flooding. Poor drainage had left standing water in some of these communities for weeks after the storm.
- In 2013, Appleseed worked with local partners, the regional Council of Governments and housing authorities to ensure public housing units in the cities of Orange and Port Arthur were **rebuilt in safer, higher opportunity areas**, consistent with nationally recognized best practices.

LESSONS LEARNED:

What Texas Should Be Doing in the Coming Months

Texas should **rely on the expertise gleaned from 10 years** of administering disaster recovery programs spanning four major hurricanes: Katrina, Rita, Ike, and Dolly. Texas should:

- **Avoid reinventing the wheel by taking advantage of the state's institutional knowledge**, tapping into the expertise of those who have administered federal disaster recovery programs.
- **Monitor and be prepared to supplement FEMA damage assessment and unmet need data.** FEMA data will largely determine future allocations of federal funding and has historically been incomplete, underestimating damage, particularly for renters and low-income communities. This could be particularly problematic if Irma makes landfall and pulls FEMA staff and resources currently assessing Harvey damage away from Texas.
- **Carefully monitor FEMA's administration of short-term recovery programs, using its own resources if necessary** to ensure that habitability repairs – including replacing roofs and removing mold-infested materials – are completed in a timely manner. Short-term recovery has a significant impact on the success or failure of long-term recovery. A house that could be repaired today will have to be torn down later if repair is delayed. Making resources quickly available for habitability repairs will hasten economic recovery, ensuring that people can return to jobs, schools, and communities, and will reduce the cost of providing aid to those who are displaced.
- **Be prepared to supplement local capacity by providing technical assistance or, where needed, run statewide programs** to alleviate the burden. Planning around longer-term recovery should take into account the differing capacities of local governments, some devastated by the disaster, to design and administer complex federal programs. Capacity issues have resulted in long delays in setting up programs, getting aid out, and in inequitable recovery resources for communities in different areas of the state.
- **Remember that equitable recovery is successful recovery.** Although Texans at all income levels have been affected by Harvey, the communities that are disproportionately impacted and have greater difficulty recovering are often the most overlooked. Rebuilding all communities to be more resilient should be established as a priority early in the process.
- **Incorporate the input of survivors in the short- and long-term recovery process.** The best information about unmet needs will come from the people directly affected.

Texas Appleseed looks forward to working in partnership with others at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure that lessons from past disasters are understood, and that past mistakes are not repeated. Texas will be working its way through recovery efforts for years to come. There will be many discussions about whether and where to rebuild housing affected by the storm, how infrastructure funding will be allocated, and what resources will be available to help low-income homeowners and renters either repair homes or relocate to safer areas. Texas Appleseed is committed for the long haul to working on these issues as they arise.

