

Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund
Qualitative Impact Evaluation

Prepared for:
Mercy Corps, Gulf Coast Hurricane Recovery Program

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Executive Summary

Background and Mercy Corps Response

Hurricane Katrina had a devastating impact on Southeast Louisiana and Gulf Coast communities by destroying infrastructure, networks, and inflicting a sense of loss on virtually everyone. Youth and children, as well as their parents and guardians, were uniquely impacted by the interruption of daycare services, education, and cultural enrichment programs. In response to a needs assessment conducted in December of 2005, a partnership formed between Mercy Corps and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. This partnership created the Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund which awarded grants to over 80 innovative programs focused on youth welfare.

Impact of Granted Programs

The Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund had a meaningful impact on the youth who participated in the programs, and it went even further to assist parents and guardians, and even whole communities struggling with hurricane recovery. Specifically the programs helped rebuild healthy communities, renew capacities of service-providing organizations, support families, and encourage positive youth development. The most important impacts on youth development included, creating a sense of normalcy and structure, providing safe spaces for self-expression, and exposure to new skills and concepts. These influences on youth resulted in discovery of new talents, increased self-confidence, and an enhanced sense of social responsibility. The programs encouraged healthy development in an environment that is challenging these normal processes. The positive influences on youth extended to their families, and even to the neighborhoods and communities in which they live.

Identified Needs and Gaps

Over one year after Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Coast region is still struggling with fundamental deficiencies in social services and basic standards of living. The evaluation participants identified issues they are struggling with in their communities including, a lack of assistance programs for basic needs and services, or an inability to access them if they do exist; weakened social support networks; mental health counseling and emotional support; and a lack of recreational opportunities for youth.

Recommendations

Based on identified youth and community needs, as well as innovations and ideas of the programs, this evaluation offers several recommendations for future youth programming in post-disaster environments. Community centers, youth drop-in centers, community-based mentorship programs, and school-based mental health support and case management are specific interventions discussed in the evaluation. General elements of any youth program should include normalcy and structure, individualized attention, inclusion of family, cultivation of trust, and fulfillment of basic needs.

Background

The Gulf Coast communities in Louisiana and Mississippi experienced the severe impact of Hurricane Katrina in numerous and complex ways. The storm and its aftermath destroyed civil infrastructure, social networks, and disrupted virtually every facet of life for area residents. Children and youth, as well as their caregivers,¹ were uniquely affected by the disaster. The interruption of services for daycare, education, and cultural enrichment threatened to compound the emotional and practical struggles already experienced by these groups. These struggles included displacement; financial burdens; and considerable grieving over loss of community, personal belongings, and even loved ones.

An assessment of available educational and organizational youth-oriented services in Orleans Parish presented to Mercy Corps in December of 2005 gauged local capacity and needs for youth programming. Surveys, interviews, and document review revealed uncertainty regarding the extent to which schools and non-profit organizations, whose capacities had been significantly reduced by the damage, would be able to fulfill the needs of youth and communities. Service providers were grappling with issues such as structural damage to facilities, reductions in staff, and funding cuts. These needs identified by the assessment required thoughtful programming, as well as significant funds and resources to ensure that the youngest survivors of Katrina received the care, support, and stability essential in a post-disaster environment.

A partnership forged between Mercy Corps and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF helped meet these needs by creating a grant program that supports innovative youth programs in Southeast Louisiana and Gulf Coast Mississippi. At the close of these programs, qualitative data was collected from a representative selection of grantees through focus groups and interviews to evaluate the impact of the funding on youth welfare.² It was clear the programming benefits extended far beyond the youth to reach their families and communities as well. This synthesis of the data collected from the youth, their guardians, and program staff describes positive impacts of the programming, as well as persistent needs of the beneficiaries. The insights of these individuals provide an opportunity to enhance existing efforts and develop even more effective youth programming in future post-disaster environments.

Mercy Corps Response

In response to the post-Katrina needs assessment conducted in New Orleans, Mercy Corps developed the Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund to address the instability and dearth of services for youth in Louisiana and Mississippi communities. A key element of the program was the collaboration between Mercy Corps and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF, the donor partner. The purpose of the grants program was to assist existing organizations and schools in providing youth services for a specified period of

¹ In this document, the term “caregiver” refers to parents, guardians, daycare providers and early childhood educators. The terms “parents” and “guardians” will be used interchangeably to refer to adults who care for youth in the home.

² For a description of the methodology used for the report, including a list of the 8 programs included in the evaluation, please see Appendixes A and B.

time. In facilitating this return of services, the grants also had the potential to help organizations leverage additional funding from other sources.

Criteria for Grant Applicants

In order to be considered for grant selection applicants had to be an existing organization whose programming had been interrupted by Hurricane Katrina. The grants program specifically targeted licensed day care providers; schools (pre-school to grade 12) and their extracurricular and psychosocial programs; and non-profit agencies providing youth programming. In general, the programs focused on academic support, sports, the arts, life skills, and mental health services.

Funding Priorities included:

- *Equipment or materials to resume or enhance a community service or program:*
For example, playground equipment for a daycare center or school; arts and crafts supplies; furniture for a classroom; sports equipment; and teaching materials.
- *Re-establishing services or developing new youth services:*
For example, a consultant or trainer for sports or arts activities, especially as they contributed to creative expression, life skills, and healing; operating funds to hire daycare service providers as a short-term bridge to future funding; and funding a part-time social service provider in a school.
- *Fees and scholarships to support vulnerable family access to youth services:*
For example, tuition support for children to attend daycare; and fees to attend camps or programs for children in financially burdened households.

Grant Awards

The U.S. Fund for UNICEF and Mercy Corps partnership awarded grants to 39 applicants in Orleans, Jefferson, St. Tammany, and St. Bernard parishes in Louisiana, and Hancock and Harrison counties in Mississippi. A review committee evaluated all applicants using a standard set of criteria and awarded grants based on the degree to which the application matched funding priorities and other application criteria. Mercy Corps also awarded additional grants through a discretionary mechanism. Overall, over 80 youth-oriented programs received assistance from the Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund. The grant amounts ranged from \$2,000 to \$26,000 in value and totaled approximately one million dollars. Some specific examples of funded programs included arts camps, literacy training, daycare, mental health support, and yoga.³

Impact of Granted Programs

The Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund (GCYPRF) had a far-reaching and multi-faceted impact on the beneficiaries. Directly, it provided constructive, positive, safe, and enriching activities for youth participants; however, the benefits also impacted the wider systems relevant to youth. These systems included families, schools, and the

³ A complete list of the grant recipients can be found in Appendix C.

broader neighborhood communities. While all programs were unique, common themes and experiences emerged from conversations with the beneficiaries. The following discussion describes how the grants helped rebuild healthy communities, renew capacities of service-providing organizations, support parents and families, and encourage positive youth development.

Rebuilding Healthy Communities

One of the most important ways that the GCYPRF affected communities was by re-establishing services and activities that had existed before the hurricane. The staff members implementing the youth programs brought a commitment to rebuilding back into the neighborhoods and helped to establish normalcy where for so long disorder had dominated. In discussing community impact, one service provider commented, “I think people just saw life. People saw a little bit of normalcy amidst all the chaos that was going on...I think it would have been comforting to some of the folks to see that going on.” This sense of normalcy contributes to a future orientation; a hope that things will continue to improve, especially when children are involved.

In addition to reassuring communities of progress, these programs solidly filled some glaring gaps in services. The return of services addressed the communities’ concrete needs, including case management, child care, mental health support, young adult education, and physical fitness. By addressing these needs with programs that occupy children, parents were available to contribute to community recovery by working on damaged homes and returning to jobs. Many parents, such as the plumber and electrician who had their children in grant-funded daycares and camps would have been otherwise unable to work. Without these valuable services in the community, recovery would have been slower and much more frustrating than it already was. Creating assets that fill important needs is a key element of community building, especially for communities that have lost most of their services and infrastructure.

The programs established new networks, collaborations, and relationships with other community groups and organizations, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and local schools, making it easier and more efficient to provide services. These connections and reconnections helped to develop a community network for donations, sharing of information and resources, and providing referrals. In addition to network creation among community organizations, parents also benefited from supportive networks. In one program, some parents decided to form a monthly support group for hurricane-related issues. This relationship-building is a sustainable outcome of the programming in that it paves the way for future collaborations.

One important element of the programming, specifically for the arts-oriented programs, was the incorporation of local traditions in culturally-specific activities. Mardi Gras beading and quilt-making were unique ways to honor local culture and instill community pride. One dance instructor included elements of New Orleans and St. Bernard parish traditions in her activities and conversations with the youth. Parents also recognized the need to remind their children where they come from. As one parent said, “Nurture our culture. You know, what is New Orleans?...Teach them about, this is your home, this is why your mom is proud to be a New Orleanian; why your grandmother was

proud to live here.” Exploring and celebrating local culture with the youth participants is a way to help them recognize and commemorate their community strengths.

A valuable attribute of the programs that impacted the broader community was the promotion of a culture of giving and social responsibility. Some programs recruited volunteers from local schools providing an opportunity to do service in the community. Other programs taught skills, such as basic literacy, that facilitated becoming a “...viable part of a community, as opposed to being someone who just requires a constant entitlement,” as one instructor framed it. Within the programs formed small communities of support amongst the youth and the staff members. One teaching artist was impressed by the transformation of the youth participants:

...to watch the camp become a community in itself; just a regular working community, like family. You went in there during lunchtime, you had some of the older kids in the kitchen helping, serving, checking on the younger kids to see if they were OK. That was just really special to see that. To see everybody working together, as one unit, was very special.

Parents also recognized these transformations and the long-term impact they could have on community, and even society. As one parent said:

Programs like this, I think they offer a view of what could be better....It teaches the kids how to work together, how to come to positive conflict resolution, how to handle things a lot better than the people that came before them. And I think the benefit is really going to take hold in the future, future generations. They're going to be able to teach us a thing.

Renewing Capacity of Organizations

The grants provided not only resources and funding to the recipients, but also provided stability to programs that often operate on a grant-by-grant basis. The post-Katrina climate of uncertainty threatened organizations’ ability to maintain services, and in some cases even threatened their survival. One agency, discovering that their office had escaped catastrophic damage, paused to regroup:

And we weren't sure where funding was going to come from this year. We never know, because that's what we live on...We were re-evaluating everything in the middle of September. And still, we knew that half of New Orleans was gone so that means maybe half of our funding was gone...So it was important for us to have this grant because we just didn't know. We didn't know our future at that point.

When the grants were awarded, these organizations had the ability to move forward and resume serving their communities as needs increased exponentially.

In addition to resuming services with the funds received from the GCYPRF, the program went one step further in helping to leverage additional resources from other

funding sources. One agency director stated that the grant, "...made a huge impact on the fact that the other grants that we're writing are going to be very successful because of the fact that we were successful with Mercy Corps." This mechanism contributes to consistency of services because it allows the organizations to maintain their presence in a community; this fosters trust and relationship building.

The grants helped to establish structure and normalcy, not only for the communities they served, but also for the staff members of the recipient organizations. These individuals were also struggling with post-hurricane loss, including jobs, income, and even a reason to get out of bed. One daycare director said running the daycare was, "...the best thing I could have done because I sat everyday in my little parking lot in my itty bitty trailer, looking at total destruction. And I'm about children and childcare, so being able to get back into a normal situation was very good mentally." Other staff members said support services made available to them by the grants helped them to cope, and actually made a positive difference in overall job performance. The grants made it possible for staff members to reclaim their helping roles, ultimately enhancing the capacity of these organizations.

Support for Parents and Families

The role the granted programs played in the lives of parents and families is hugely significant. The programs provided temporary relief when it was most needed, alleviating their anxiety and stress over what to do with their children. Services were so limited, and even non-existent in some areas, that parents had few options for childcare. In many cases children could not be left at home due to hazardous conditions, even if a baby-sitter happened to be available and affordable. In practical terms, the programs provided a safe place for children. As one parent stated:

I couldn't even leave my children at home with a home sitter because the yard was torn up, debris everywhere... You know, we had four feet of water in our house. It floated off its piers, so it had to be demolished. So even though we had FEMA trailers there, the house was still there falling over onto our FEMA trailer. I mean, is that a place for kids to be?... And you need peace of mind to go to work. You don't need to be worried...

On a deeper level, the stress relief may have been even more valuable. Peace of mind was in short supply. An early childhood mental health care provider believes, "Some of the families are just on the edge. They're just teetering on the edge." One parent validated this by describing the difficulties of having children at home when dealing with so many other issues: "Because having to be at home, and having to deal with insurance, FEMA, this, that; plus add on top of that three little children under the age of four, stress level is through the roof." She went on to explain how getting her child into a program alleviated some of that stress for her.

Once parents and guardians were able to get their children into the various programs, they benefited even further from direct support services such as case management and mental health offered by the funded programs. In many cases these services were provided not only to the youth, but to all family members. One employee

of an agency providing emotional support to families dealing with serious health issues described the impact she felt her agency had on their client families: “I think that it is helping them to lift the hearts and the souls and the minds of some of these families. Like they know there's somebody there if there's an emergency. There's somebody there who cares.” A parent receiving mental health support described the impact of having these services available to her:

...because literally, I feel on the verge of a nervous break down. You know, there's no closure to anything...trying to move forward with your life but you can't...It was nice to be able to talk to someone and get their perspective on you know, what I can actually do to better the situation as it currently is...There's a lot of people who are still hurting and having to deal with this on a daily basis. This has been absolutely devastating.

Programs have also provided referrals for assistance with WIC, food stamps, housing, and legal advocacy to client families.

Some of these family support services helped to equip guardians with techniques and coping mechanisms for addressing issues with their children and other family members. One counselor stated that in working with the parents, “...once you teach them the tools and they implement it at home, they feel empowered...And not only giving them tools to work on parenting issues, but also, how to calm down, how to relax, which I find is helpful for them.” A parent described issues of fear her child is struggling with and how mental health services have helped them cope:

...if he sees the sun, if it starts to cloud up, and the sun goes behind the clouds, he starts getting anxious. ‘I don't want the rain to come Momma...’ Because he's still dealing with that. He still mentions several things about the storm, and so our counselor has been teaching him how he can better cope. And teaching me coping skills to help him be a little less fearful and whatnot.

One student described how she taught her mother breathing exercises she had been using in a school program, and how they used these together to help them through difficult situations, specifically in dealing with other family members. Not only did this provide a tool, but it also empowered the student to teach a loved one something healthy she had learned from her program. Others commented that higher patience levels stemming from stress management decreased mistreatment in families.⁴ This aspect of programming is sustainable in that long after the services are gone, individuals still have the capacity to draw on these tools and strengths for difficult situations in the future.

Once parents had someplace safe and stimulating for their children to be, they were able to attend to pressing needs weighing on them; in most cases returning to a job or working on a damaged home. Adults were left to handle adult problems without the

⁴ One mental health counselor even stated, “I think it's going to reduce ultimately, the cases of abuse. Because we have seen, after Katrina and last school year, huge amounts where we've had to report abuse cases, and kids coming to school with marks, and a lot of issues like that. It's gone down, so I think we have more families that we're able to kind of lower the stress for and take it and normalize it, and make it OK.”

children having to be involved. As one mother explained, “And the one year old already knows how to put the phone to his ear, so that kind of makes me feel guilty...Poor kid, that’s all he sees his mom doing is being on the phone.” Not only is it more difficult for parents to handle issues when they have children at home, but their stress is detrimental to the emotional health of their children. A parent discussed how having her child in a head start program meant that she did not have to worry as much about the effects of Katrina on her child, because she was in school.

Another important aspect of parents being freed to resume employment was the return of income. Most parents would not have been able to work without some type of programming for their child. One parent discussed the realities of unemployment post-Katrina:

And then the whole life would suffer for the whole family. Because you can't pay bills. And the bills still came in. Oh, that next month, you still had bills to pay. You know, you didn't have the money, didn't have the job, but you had the bills.

For these reasons, the ability to return to work and start generating income was instrumental for parents. The programs were essential in allowing families to survive in an uncertain and thoroughly damaged environment, while also providing caring and stimulating activities for youth.

An additional financial impact of the youth programming for families was that it helped maintain affordability and accessibility of services. At a time when so many other goods and services were becoming more expensive and difficult to obtain, the youth programs met families’ needs. Costs of summer programs were described as prohibitive for some parents, but the purpose of the funded programs was to reduce barriers to youth participation. In one case, the funding helped a daycare owner keep her prices at the same level as before the storm. Because this was the only operating daycare center in the entire parish, this pricing was a huge relief to parents. Another center was able to provide free daycare on a temporary basis until families were able to regain some income and other daycares reopened. Arts camps provided free or low-cost programs with high quality services and unique learning opportunities for the children. A teaching artist for one of these camps commented on the community reaction to the low costs by saying, “I don’t think people could really fathom that it was just \$25.00. That was just too good to be true.” In addition to providing free services, a young adult education program further reduced barriers by supplementing transportation and childcare for some of its students. This helped them to more consistently attend their literacy and GED preparation classes. Many of the funded programs targeted low-income households and populations in need. Their inclusiveness was hugely beneficial to families struggling with lack of information, lack of resources, and mounting financial burdens.

Positive Youth Development

The funded programs positively contributed to youth development in numerous ways. The theme of returning to normal routines and activities was discussed with respect to communities and families, but developmentally, establishing normalcy is much more

crucial for children. For example, one parent and daycare owner discussed how important basic consumer services like fast food restaurants and grocery stores were to her children:

We need a McDonalds...My kids want to go to McDonald's at least once, twice a week. I mean, you're laughing, but it's a sense of normalcy for them...The kids couldn't even wait to go to their first day at Winn Dixie (grocery store) because they used to go with their parents before the storm...because it all has to do with something for their normalcy and getting back into what they did before the hurricane.

Another parent expressed concern for one of her younger children:

...my one year old, as far as mental health, I don't think that there's any concern there, but developmentally, there's been some issues. Because we're not on a schedule, we're not on a routine. The child hasn't even been able to sleep in a crib or in his own room.

Another daycare provider expressed a similar concern: “these children needed...a routine, some place to go, other kids to be around...A place to feel safe. I've still got one right now that if she hears a loud noise, she starts screaming. She thinks a hurricane is coming.” These children, including infants, are experiencing intense emotions and adjustments even fourteen months after the hurricane has passed.

The programs addressed these issues by providing a place for the children to go every day, and by establishing a consistent and constructive tone. By setting guidelines and fostering an environment of mutual respect, those working with the youth established safe, healthy, and nurturing environments. These environments gradually encouraged attitude shifts and positive behaviors in youth participants. In commenting on one organization’s consistent approach to work with children, a teaching artist noted:

We were the same way every day; we had the same rules every day. We didn’t bend; we didn't make exceptions. These are the rules and you have to follow them. It was summer and we wanted them to have fun, but at the same time, there has to be some kind of structure there...And accepting responsibility. And they really got that. They took ownership of the camp, and they wanted their camp to be better.

The counselors and instructors used different tools and strategies for setting these tones, including poster boards with rules written out; handbooks discussing issues such as listening, focus, trust, and respect; and in one case, a daily unity circle at the start and end of each camp day. One teaching artist,

...saw similar things that you would see whenever you have the adults setting a certain kind of a tone. They (the children) just seemed to really appreciate it. You know, birthdays, special days, we would sing for them. They were kind of standoffish in the beginning and warmed up toward the end.

Some implementers described fewer “explosions in behavior,” moving “from rambunctious to more calm and polite,” and a specific child who, “as opposed to leading the folks who were causing the disruption, he was leading the folks who were trying to get it done.”

The youth also recognized these behavior changes in themselves. One student in an education program said that in order to participate, “I had to stop hanging around with a lot of people. I had to stop wanting to fight so much...So I just had to just change my whole attitude.” Other youth discussed the calming effects of some of the programs, including anger management, stress relief, relaxation, and increased patience. The youth seemed to appreciate these opportunities to focus on positive activities.

The normalcy established by the programs allowed children to be children; to engage in youth activities; to play. While this benefit sounds simple, the current environment of stress and loss in which youth are living elevates its importance. As one daycare provider stated, “...after the hurricane, they were all coming back to nothing. All the kids were coming back to no toys; they were all coming back to no house.” In speaking with some of the youth participants, field trips were a highlight often mentioned. Going to the zoo, the pool, the bowling alley, or the IMAX were needed treats. Some groups had to travel significant distances out of their damaged communities to get to these places, but that made it even more meaningful. An arts instructor discussed her approach to reducing adult worries and concerns for the children:

I just continued to do things that they liked and that they enjoyed post- and pre-Katrina...Just so they could feel like, they didn't have to think about that they have to go home to their trailer, or their house wasn't there. So we just talked more of the lighter subject.

For children, normalcy is playing with other children, engaging in fun activities, and interacting with caring adults focused completely on their needs. The funded programs provided this.

They also provided an alternative to unhealthy environments and activities, increasing youth safety. One parent appreciated how a summer camp kept his son occupied: “You know, kids like to hang out and sometimes, you know, idle minds, idle hands, it's not a good thing. It's the devil's playground.” Many people pointed out that a lack of recreational opportunities for youth leads them to devise their own forms of entertainment, including unproductive and destructive ones. Some youth recognized this as well. One student said, “I've got to be busy doing something. And I'd rather be busy doing something positive than negative.” In diverse forms, these programs provided positive outlets. One program exposed youth to a healthier lifestyle through yoga. Others helped with anger management, stress reduction, and concrete services such as GED preparation. They all increased youth health and safety in some capacity.

Another impact of the programs was the creation of emotionally safe environments for expression, especially as it related to the hurricane. Activities and discussions helped to normalize youth's experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Some of the programs were tailored specifically to mental health needs. A mental health counselor described the progress she had made with a student at an early childhood center:

I have one little client...really traumatic...they left their home due to the high flooding and had to stay under the overpass for a few days. And exposure to violence, looting, grandfather is out there with a shotgun...But just amazing how I started the session where she wasn't saying anything, to now she's just opening up to develop that rapport. And just seeing her express herself, express her feelings, and communicating them is just...I had a great session today.

Other programs provided children with emotional support just by recognizing that need for expression, honoring it, and incorporating it into activities:

Leaving like the discussion open for the kids to voice all their concerns and everything through their art. Everything would go back to Katrina. Somehow it goes back to Katrina. So we were definitely like...art teachers, but we were acting as mental health professionals in a certain way. Just because of the nature of being so close to the storm.

The specific approaches to providing this emotional support for the children was less important than the manner in which these adults accomplished it. They established trusting relationships with the children that fostered honesty, openness, and communication. In doing so, they strengthened their resiliency. As one teaching artist said, "...we wanted to...turn something that is a negative into a positive, so that they could kind of come back and...take back some power." This helped the youth to integrate the hurricane into their experiences and regain a sense of control.

The individualized positive attention that the youth received from program staff was very valuable. Though most of the programs centered around group activities, the teachers, counselors and instructors placed extra emphasis on one-on-one interactions. One teacher noted,

I don't think a lot of these kids get recognized for anything positive. So we kind of went out of our way, when we saw them doing something good, to acknowledge it. To let them know that good attention matters too. They get enough negative attention.

Staff put this into practice by noticing small behavior changes and verbally acknowledging them to the youth, or even giving them a hug. Other more educationally-oriented programs recognized that "some youth do not work well in a classroom setting, and they need to be working one-on-one with someone," as one instructor stated. These programs were responsive to youth needs and planned their curriculum accordingly, allowing students to choose how they wanted to learn. Youth reinforced this by noting how much they enjoyed the one-on-one attention. This may be an indication of something that is missing in other aspects of youth's lives, especially in post-hurricane environments where resources and energy are in short supply. As one parent and childcare provider stated, "...children may not necessarily be getting the same thing they got from us before. Because the hurricane used us up. It really did." Receiving individualized positive

attention, as the funded programs provided, helps to instill a sense of security in youth, and allows them to develop confidence in their abilities.

The programs also helped youth build relationships and socialize with each other, as well as with adults. In the current environment, youth have had to make significant adjustments to people, places, and activities, and this has the potential to negatively impact child development. Even children who returned to their homes found themselves in a foreign environment that they had to adjust to. Parents seemed to be worried about socialization of their children. One parent commented,

...with this Katrina situation, it was hard for him (his son) at the time to associate with other kids because in my neighborhood, we didn't have too many other kids around at that point in the summer. You had a lot of parents still debating whether or not to come home.

By participating in these programs, the children and youth benefited from the opportunity to meet new people and interact with other children, a healthy and normal developmental process. One daycare provider described the change in one of the children from the beginning to the end of the summer program:

Watching him at the beginning, he was real quiet. All he would do is read books. Just really didn't want to talk. But by the end of the summer, he was all playing. You know, back like, where he should be. You know where he has friends...being like a normal 8 year old boy.

In addition to practicing socialization during the programs, the children also enhanced their own self-identity. For younger children, this was learning about a sense of self. One parent observed the change in her daughter through playing with other children at daycare: "She was very very shy until she first came here. And then she started developing: I am Sally,⁵ I have my own opinions, and I don't care what you say...I am who I am." Older children learned a bit more about individual perceptions and points of view. A program director pointed out the role of art: "And the arts talk to them about what do you think? Really getting at creative processes and personal perspective, and who you are in the world, and what is your place in the community or the larger world." Moving through these stages of learning to play, learning to trust, learning how to be a friend, learning who you are as an individual, and how you fit into your larger community are important developmental steps, and the programs helped to ensure that these youth were not delayed in experiencing them.

The funded programs introduced youth to a variety of new experiences. Youth were exposed to new skills, creative outlets, technology, concepts, and knowledge. These discoveries uncovered previously unexplored talents and competencies. Some examples of unique opportunities for the children included filming a movie, writing songs that were recorded onto a CD, learning digital photography programs, mastering yoga positions, and quilting. One teaching artist recalled a child who excelled in photography:

⁵ Not her real name.

James⁶ just had this awesome eye...I mean, we want him to be a photographer or cinematographer or something, because the pictures that this kid took were amazing. And they were doing stuff with the Photoshop and he would come up with these awesome colors. And just superimpose all kinds of....I mean this kid, he's got some vision that other kids ain't seeing. Definitely.

Even for some of the youngest children, the programs provided stimulating activities. One parent commented on the impact of daycare on her son: "Well I don't think it was just a daycare. I mean he came home singing songs... he's learning, he's pretending. He's not even two years old and he's already pretending. You know and that just blows my mind..." Even on field trips accomplishments like getting strikes at bowling and skating without falling down were meaningful for the children. These activities helped the youth build self-esteem.

In carrying the themes of knowledge and skill even further, the programs contributed to a culture of learning for youth. The children's activities, relationships, and experiences expanded their perspectives and opened them up to new possibilities. One summer camp brought in a group of young adults from New York to work with the children, and guardians appreciated this "fresh perspective" and "new side of thinking." One child liked learning about New York, which he would not have otherwise been able to do. Another parent noticed how his daughter had learned to write from different perspectives. A literacy program taught one student about winter darkness in Scandinavia and another about the length of time required to form a diamond. Both students were enthusiastic about this new information. The instructor was too because, as she stated, "this is what learning is all about. The surprise of learning something you didn't know, about other people somewhere else." She continued,

...there's a lot of these young people that really want to learn. They come in here and they're writing...they're reading, they're asking questions. They really want to know. They realize that they're missing something. They know that. That's a sad thing, but it's also a good thing.

It is a good thing because it inspires youth to reach for something; to extend their abilities and their realm of knowing. These programs have been able to respond to that. As one father put it, "Programs like this give the kids a chance to see something brighter. To say, hey, I'm not going to settle."

Strengths of Grantees

The organizations and programs evaluated exhibited strengths that contributed to their positive impact on the youth, families, and communities. These strengths should be noted as strategies and values that all youth-oriented programs should seek to embody. One such strategy was a holistic approach to programming through recognizing the need to work with the entire family, rather than the youth in isolation. The ability to look beyond surface issues to identify underlying situations that may be contributing to

⁶ Not his real name.

problems is another effective approach. Many programs were able to either address these directly, or provide referrals for other services.

Programs also strove to reduce barriers to receiving services by making it difficult for youth and families to find reasons not to participate. Some examples are solving transportation issues with rides or bus tokens, providing childcare for parents who were themselves receiving services, and subsidizing costs. This required awareness on the part of program implementers, and sensitivity to the issues their clients were struggling with. One adult education program waived the traditional requirements to signing up for their program. If youth had lost their student ID, social security card, or birth certificate, they were still allowed to participate. This kind of approach ensures that everyone who would like help has access to it.

Another strength many of these programs exhibited was flexibility and adaptability. They were responsive to the needs of their clients, and were willing and able to modify their programming accordingly, rather than putting the onus on the youth and families to change. Some had difficulties finding locations to hold youth programs in the damaged communities, but were resourceful and creative in solutions. Others were forced to go door-to-door to recruit children for summer programs as traditional communication networks were lacking. The program implementers were insightful, creative, sensitive, and tenacious in getting valuable services to those who needed them.

Program Limitations

Though the programs' positive impacts have been significant and even immeasurable in the extent to which they may have guided or influenced these youth, some limitations must be noted. The nature of a grant is that it imposes time restrictions on program implementation. These grantees would have been even more successful with their programs if they had fewer restrictions on time. In some cases, program staff voiced a desire to continue their programs, but had run out of time. For many programs success depended on relationships formed between the implementers, and the youth and families. One teacher at an early childhood center offering mental health counseling spoke about the parents' readiness to access mental health services: "...they need it, but they're not to the point...to where they're open enough to let you in." It takes time to establish trust and many programs felt that they had formed productive relationships just as their programs were ending. As one teaching artist said, "we were consistent for four weeks in the summer and look what came of that. Just think the impact we'll have with the kids over a longer period of time."

Related to time are issues of sustainability. Many programs spoke of the need to offer continuous services by maintaining a long-term presence in the community. Some programs were in the process of looking for funding to continue their services, but were uncertain about the future of their programs. Several also voiced concern over what would happen next summer when even more children have returned to the area. The funding certainly realized its goal of providing temporary assistance and bridging gaps in services until organizations and communities could regroup, but long-term responses to youth needs are also necessary.

Identified Needs and Opportunities for Intervention

Many needs, gaps, and problems were identified by those who participated in the evaluation. Well over one year after Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Coast region is still struggling with fundamental deficiencies in social services and basic standards of living. Some, such as lack of affordable housing, governmental inefficiency, displacement, and poverty, though mentioned often by respondents and often the root cause of problems, lie outside the scope of recommendations offered in this evaluation. These issues undoubtedly deserve attention, but this document will focus on issues that lend themselves to simpler solutions easily implemented in future assistance programs.

Needs and Gaps

Social service and assistance programs are inadequate to meet the needs of populations in Southeastern Louisiana and the Gulf Coast. Even very basic necessities, such as housing, are still missing for some. In some cases, these were pre-existing needs that have been exacerbated by the hurricane. The director of a program for young adults described the realities for her clients:

They're just missing the basic sort of secure home environments that most people just take for granted. They may or may not have a home to go to. They may or may not have a bed in that house. They may or may not have food in the kitchen. They may or may not have electricity. They may or may not have a washer/dryer. They may or may not have quarters to wash their own clothes...Like very basic things that we're dealing with that are just not being taken into consideration.

These programs helped to fill a gap for many families, but the supply of services has not been adequate to fill the demand.

In instances where the services and assistance do exist, the lack of communication and information dissemination makes them unattainable for those who do not know how to access them. Reliable information is in short supply. As one parent said, "Information is the reason we're in this boat that we're in right now." A daycare owner expending considerable effort to access help for her clients described her plight as "a fight." The hurricane damage broke down communication networks and people in need do not know how to access help.

Several respondents expressed concerns over environmental hygiene. Some individuals referred to "toxic soils" and even "death and destruction spores" as colorful descriptions for the environmental hazards caused by oil spills and Katrina damage. Whether or not these fears have been supported with scientific findings, they are real fears of people living in these communities, and certainly impact their perceived quality of life. In some cases, because of these anxieties and the lack of health care facilities, families have elected not to bring elderly family members back into these environments. Providing childcare support in some families, the missing grandparents decrease the number of resources parents have to rely on.

Weakened social support networks were another challenge identified by the evaluation. Fewer resources and mounting stressors are contributing to unstable home environments. Families are forced into uncomfortable living situations such as small trailers, or sharing a house with extended family. As one parent said, “No one knows how to fully deal with this.” Pre-existing domestic problems have been exacerbated by the effects of the hurricane and children are caught in the middle of these tensions, and even explosions. The erosion of social support networks is taking its toll on care givers and children alike.

Mental health counseling and emotional support was another identified need. One parent recognized this:

So the entire community is absolutely devastated. And people are not dealing with it well. We have 70 year old couples who are committing suicide together. You know, I mean, just people don't know how to deal with it, and then on top of that, there's no mental clarity. And no one has ever been through this before, so there's no guide to help you.

Youth program implementers also observed this need in their work with children. One teaching artist commented, “I see a real need for mental health counselors to work with kids. I think there's a lot of...unhealthy stuff going around that's unchecked, that gets ignored.” Youth that have trouble expressing themselves may be led to destructive manifestations of their emotional issues. This is also a concern for adults as many believe that abuse has escalated in post-Katrina environments.

Respondents also reported that youth have nothing positive to do in their free time. Recreational outlets and activities are missing in many communities. Youth felt particularly strongly about access to fun activities and having somewhere to “just go, listen to music, play basketball, just chill” as one young man expressed. Adults were more concerned about the alternative activities youth were engaging in. As one parent said, “The youth are at a breaking point where they can go the good way, or the bad way...So if something specific is not implemented rather quickly, you know, we have a serious situation on our hands.”

Opportunities for Intervention

The needs identified by this evaluation lend themselves to areas for programmatic intervention. Strengthened social service networks and organizational collaborations is one such way to approach community recovery. Enhanced cooperation would improve how information is shared and disseminated in communities. If community needs were promptly defined, and organizations collectively planned their interventions and shared resources, services would be provided much more efficiently. Information on services would likely also be easier to access. This opportunity for intervention is applicable not only to youth-oriented services, but to all community work.

Another opportunity for intervention is the provision of emotional support and mental health services. An important aspect of this approach would be education for parents and guardians addressing the impact of stress on youth, as well as techniques to address it. Many teachers, childcare workers, and parents believed that adults did not

recognize the negative impact of their stress on children. Providing these services would strengthen social support networks that families could turn to in times of difficulty or crisis.

Even before mental health and emotional issues can be addressed by interventions, basic human needs must be fulfilled. Issues such as housing and physical health should be programmatic priorities. Concrete services through case management to meet these basic needs are an essential component to any intervention that hopes to improve the welfare of children. Rising costs of insurance, rent, and utilities have created a climate of chronic financial stress for families in this post-disaster environment, and people need guidance and assistance in moving forward with recovery.

Additionally, the creation of safe recreational spaces to engage youth is another programmatic opportunity. Violence in varying degrees and forms has become a regular and familiar experience for youth, even on a daily basis. It will continue to shape their experiences unless they are offered alternatives. Opportunities to provide structure and stimulation should be taken advantage of as opportunities to positively influence youth development.

Recommendations

This evaluation identified numerous successes of the beneficiaries of the Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund. Using these successes, the strengths of the organizations, and the needs identified by the program implementers, the youth, and their parents and guardians, this evaluation concludes by offering several recommendations to inform future youth programming in post-disaster environments.

General themes to be considered and incorporated in any youth program include:

- *Normalcy through structured activities and consistent programming.*
Providing some stabilization in the midst of disorganization is important for the emotional health and development of children.
- *Individualized positive attention.*
Youth need and crave this attention, and are often deprived of it when families experience stress and schools suffer a strain on resources and personnel.
- *Inclusion of family.*
Care givers and families should be incorporated into interventions as much as possible. Stress in children may be a symptom of problems at home, and parental participation is an important component of youth work.
- *Trusting relationships.*
Providing effective services requires trusting relationships between program implementers, and youth and their guardians. Trust is achieved by demonstrating a commitment to the community through consistent service delivery, or by partnering with a trusted community entity.
- *Fulfillment of basic needs.*
Basic human needs must be met before positive youth development can occur. Ensuring that housing, food, health, and a general sense of safety are established should be priorities in youth programming.

The following recommendations stem from the evaluator's synthesis of the data collected, and in some cases are the specific ideas of program implementers, parents, or youth who participated in the evaluation. Where appropriate, ideas were combined to provide a comprehensive vision to guide future interventions.

Community Centers⁷

Community centers were often mentioned as a need by those who participated in the evaluation. These centers would allow not only youth, but all community members to access resources such as after school care, adult education programs, recreational sports and activities, community meetings, case management, and counseling. The center site would be a local high school or middle school. Using a school as the physical site is practical because it is an entity and location with which all community members are familiar. Families have established relationships with schools making it more likely for them to access services and activities there. An additional benefit is that a center like this has the potential to draw in parents and guardians who are less involved with their children's scholastic activities. Providing free and needed services in a familiar location is a strategy that could combat this apathy. Providing so many services in one place is also convenient for community members. The schools/centers would stay open until the late evening to accommodate all schedules.

Youth Drop-In Centers

A drop-in center is another vision of program implementers stemming from the needs of the at-risk youth they work with. This type of center would serve youth only and would ideally be open 24 hours a day. It would serve several functions, the most important of which would be a safe place for youth as an alternative to being on the street, or in an unsafe home environment. Not only would it provide a refuge, but it would have showers, a kitchen, and recreational space. Additionally, case management would be available, as well as career counseling and job training. A drop-in center has the potential to reduce youth exposure to violence while also providing positive resources, assistance, and services to individuals who are growing up in disadvantaged environments.

Community-Based Mentorship

Adults working with the youth recognized and expressed concern over the disconnect that occurs in communities during an individual's transition from childhood to young adulthood. This relates to the theme of learned responsibility that surfaced often during discussions of youth programming. Youth need guidance along their journey to adulthood and presently, that seems to be lacking for them. Mentorship programs would be a way to increase the positive individual attention that is so important to healthy youth development, while also imparting life skills, encouraging identity formation, and teaching social responsibility. While this learning occurs formally or informally for some

⁷ This recommendation came from a teaching artist and is an innovation that may take place in a local high school.

fortunate youth, it is apparent that it is not happening for far too many others. These programs would be based in the community, led by community members, and would be culturally relevant.

School-Based Mental Health Support and Case Management

Mental health counseling is an important intervention to have in place in post-disaster environments. Youth and families are struggling with experiences and stressors that they have never encountered before. They often do not know how to handle and integrate these stressful and even traumatic experiences, and find themselves stuck, unable to move forward. Additionally, families have to confront chronic sources of stress, such as rebuilding and financial burdens even after the disaster has passed on. Professional support may be necessary to navigate these emotions and learn tools to master them. Advocacy through case management would also be a component of services to aid families in obtaining concrete assistance.

To effectively implement a program like this, the culture surrounding mental health support and assistance would need to be demystified and de-stigmatized. Including an educational component for all parents would help to normalize mental health support while increasing awareness of available services. It would also inform parents of the effect their emotions, and how they handle them, have on their children. These services would be provided in the schools because they are familiar, trusted, and convenient entities for parents and guardians. Because it is not unusual for parents to be in the schools meeting with teachers and staff, they would benefit from a degree of anonymity with respect to the kinds of services they are receiving.

Conclusion

The Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund made it possible for programs to offer innovative youth services to communities and families with significant needs for various types of assistance. The impact of the grants program was powerful. The youth programs it funded contributed to rebuilding healthy communities, renewing capacities of service-providing organizations, supporting parents and families, and encouraging positive youth development. Specific impacts on the beneficiaries included establishing normalcy and structure in damaged communities; giving parents the time and peace of mind to work on their families' recovery; facilitating social reconnections and fostering new relationships; providing support for youth and adults struggling with hurricane-related stress; imbuing youth with self-confidence through discovery of new skills and positive attention; and creating a culture of learning and social responsibility. By improving youth welfare, especially at this pivotal point in hurricane recovery, the youth grants fund has made a meaningful contribution to the youth participants, their families, and the communities they live in. This contribution is long-lasting because it has the potential to influence youth and the decisions they make in their futures.

The evaluation also identified persistent needs and problems of beneficiaries and their communities. These needs are significant but lend themselves to workable solutions to consider for future assistance programs. In general, a lack of social assistance, weak information dissemination systems, feeble social support networks, a lack of mental

health support, and few recreational opportunities for youth were named by participants as needs and gaps in services. In response to these needs, specific recommendations offered by this evaluation include community centers, youth drop-in centers, community-based mentorship programs, and school-based mental health support and case management. In any effective youth intervention however, the following elements should be included: normalcy through structured activities, individualized positive attention, inclusion of family members, cultivation of trusting relationships, and fulfillment of basic needs. The ideas and recommendations offered in this evaluation provide a guide to inform future youth programming in post-disaster environments to ensure effective recovery and improve the welfare of children, their families, and communities.

Appendix A

Evaluation Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation⁸ was to qualitatively assess the impact of programs funded by the Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund on youth participants, their families, and the communities in which they live. Eight programs from Louisiana and Mississippi were selected by Mercy Corps to represent the 80 grant recipients. Over a period of four weeks, the evaluator collected data through focus groups and in-depth interviews with youth participants, their parents and guardians, and implementers of the youth programs.

Materials

Faculty from Tulane University's School of Social Work developed general focus group and interview guides. The evaluator adapted the guides to each program, making them specifically relevant to the program activities. The questions were also modified slightly throughout the course of data collection based on which ones elicited the richest responses.

Consent and assent forms for the adult and youth participants were developed by Tulane faculty as well. Each participant reviewed and signed a form before the interview or focus group to ensure that they understood the purpose of the evaluation, their role in it, potential risks to participation, confidentiality of responses, and their right to terminate their participation at any time. For children under the age of 16, parents signed a consent while the children signed assent forms.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of responses was explained fully in the consent forms, and was again reviewed orally by the evaluator at the beginning of each interview or focus group. Participants were assured that no names would be used in the evaluation, and that all written and audio records of interview sessions would be destroyed upon completion of the evaluation. Confidentiality was protected even further by omitting the names of organizations throughout the report.

Data Collection

The process of data collection consisted of digitally voice recording each focus group or interview, and then transcribing the audio into a written document to be used for content analysis. When possible, a back up voice recorder was used. During focus groups, the evaluator moderated the sessions while an assistant took notes on nonverbal commentary and transitions in speakers. The interview and focus group sessions were set up by program staff in locations familiar to all participants (a school, daycare center, or local church) to maximize their comfortability. Refreshments were also provided to convey appreciation for participants' contributions.

⁸ Mercy Corps did not require that this evaluation follow strict academic guidelines for qualitative research.

Data Analysis

Once the data was organized and transcribed, it was reviewed by not only the evaluator, but by Mercy Corps staff and a Tulane School of Social Work faculty member. These individuals met to discuss the different themes emerging from the data and how best to organize them. This triangulation ensured that a variety of perspectives contributed to shaping the final document. Once the major ideas were identified, the evaluator coded the content of all transcripts into thematic groups and subgroups. These groupings became the sections of the report and the final document was written and given to Mercy Corps.

Limitations

One weakness of the evaluation methodology was the influence social desirability may have had on the participants' responses. The participants were the beneficiaries of the funding provided by Mercy Corps and may have felt a need to amplify positive aspects of the programming. The program implementers may have been particularly susceptible to this bias. It is also possible that focus groups forums encouraged excessive agreement amongst participants, and discouraged responses perceived as disagreeable or irrelevant.

It is impossible to know to what extent this bias may have crept into the data, but efforts were made to minimize it. An important component of the introduction to the focus groups and interviews was to establish impartiality to the outcome of the session. The evaluator clarified that she did not work with or for Mercy Corps, but was hired by a third party to conduct the evaluation. She also deflected all attempts to thank her for the funding and instead assured the participants that she would pass on their gratitude to Mercy Corps.

Another limitation to this evaluation was the variation in the amount of data collected for each organization. This was dependent on who was willing and available to participate. For only one organization was data collected from all groups: youth, parents, and program implementers. Sessions also varied in the richness of responses and data elicited.

Finally, in some sessions that included youth participants, they were too young to provide the kind of responses that this evaluation sought. Sometimes it was too difficult to hold their attention and these sessions tended to be short and full of less relevant comments. Even so, it was important to include their perspectives and let their voices be heard in this youth grants evaluation.

Appendix B

Programs Included in Evaluation

The following tables summarize each of the eight programs included in this evaluation, and list the data collection methods used.

Angel’s Place, Metairie, LA (\$20,000 granted)	
Returning to Care Project	
Angel’s Place provides respite care and hospice services for terminally ill children and their families. With enhanced funding, the organization located former patients while expanding their services to new children and families in order to improve their quality of life and reduce stress levels of parents and guardians.	
Data Collection:	1 Focus Group with 4 program staff

Children’s Palace Daycare and Pre-School, Meraux, LA (\$20,000 granted)	
Project Oasis	
This summer program created an opportunity for 50 children living in St. Bernard Parish to enjoy fun activities on field trips outside of their devastated community.	
Data Collection:	1 Focus Group with 5 program staff

KID smART, New Orleans, LA (\$20,000 granted)	
Summer Art Camp on the Porch	
This summer art program targeted 40 youth between the ages of 8 and 16 living in the 7 th ward to use visual and performing arts to help them process their feelings after the hurricane while building resiliency, self-esteem, and a greater sense of community. The program also aimed to train teaching artists in working with youth affected by trauma.	
Data Collection:	1 Group Interview with 3 program staff 1 Group Interview with 3 parents and guardians 1 Individual Interview with a youth participant

Regina Coeli Child Development Center, St. Tammany Parish, LA (\$20,000 granted)	
Children’s Mental Health Support	
In order to address an increase in behavioral and emotional problems among children in head start and early head start programs, this funding contributed to the provision of direct mental health services for the children, as well as mental health training and services for staff and parents.	
Data Collection:	1 Focus Group with 8 program staff 1 Individual Interview with a parent

Young Audiences of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA (\$20,000 granted) Resilience and the Arts	
In partnership with the Unity Project, this large-scale program consisted of arts-infused resiliency training for youth aged 8 to 17 years to discover their strengths and share common experiences with one another. It also included professional development workshops for teachers and teaching artists in working with children in crisis and the role of art in building resiliency.	
Data Collection:	1 Focus Group with 6 program staff 1 Focus Group with 6 youth participants

Youth Empowerment Project, New Orleans, LA (\$18,000 granted) New Orleans Providing Literacy to All Youth (NOPLAY)	
The goal of this project was to provide literacy and GED training to out-of-school youth aged 17 to 24 years in a way that meets their cultural, educational, and emotional needs. In collaborations with My House Center for Learning the program enrolled and is providing educational services to high-risk youth.	
Data Collection:	1 Focus Group with 6 youth participants 2 Individual Interviews with program staff

Center for New Opportunities, Biloxi Schools, MS (\$9,172 granted) Yoga Eases Stress (YES)	
This program used intensive interactive yoga to encourage behavior modification, increase self-esteem, and foster a greater sense of self-control for 40 alternative school students. Learning a healthy coping mechanism helped provide physical and mental stress reduction for the participants.	
Data Collection:	1 Focus Groups with 10 youth participants 1 Group Interview with 2 program staff 1 Group Interview with 2 former youth participants

City of Pass Christian Recovery Program, MS (\$16,949 granted) Temporary Childcare	
By providing temporary free daycare for children aged 6 weeks to 7 years, this program provided uninterrupted learning and stimulation for children while allowing their parents to work to rebuild their homes and their communities. Specifically, the funds were used to purchase modular classrooms that meet state licensing requirements.	
Data Collection:	1 Focus Group with 5 parents and program staff

Total: 8 Focus Groups
4 Group Interviews
4 Individual Interviews

A total of **64** youth, parent, and program staff beneficiaries contributed to this evaluation.

Appendix C

Complete List of Grantees

***The U.S. Fund for UNICEF - Mercy Corps
Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund
Grants Digest for Louisiana***

Angel's Place, Metairie, LA - \$20,000 helps reestablish its services to terminally ill children in the Greater New Orleans area that were interrupted as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Through outreach and volunteer coordination, 30 new children from newborn to age 14 years old will benefit from the full array of social and family respite services provided by Angel's Place.

The Arc of Greater New Orleans, LA - \$ 11,320 supports the purchase of rubber mulch playground surfacing for outside play areas for this community child care center. The center serves 65 children between the ages of six weeks to five years, many who have special needs.

Bishop Perry Middle School, New Orleans, LA - \$18,000 supports its Summer Enrichment and Activity Program, which extends the school year through June and July to provide returning students with academic, sports, and cultural enrichment opportunities. An estimated 30 to 60 students, ages ten to 14, will benefit from this program.

Children's Bureau of New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 supports Project LAST (loss and survival team) which provides mental health services to children and families who have been impacted by Hurricane Katrina and related events. Twenty families reaching approximately 60 individuals will benefit from this project.

Children's Palace Daycare & Preschool, Meraux, LA - \$20,000 funds Project Oasis, a life enriching summer program for 50 children, from age five to 12. This program is one of the few summer youth offerings in the St. Bernard Parish, allowing participants to experience the healing affects of old-fashioned fun.

Country Day Creative Arts Program, Metairie, LA - \$19,080 provides 18 scholarships to economically disadvantaged youth, ages nine to 13, to participate in the five-week Creative Arts Hope Summer Arts Program. This program celebrates differences and children discover the radiance that different people and life-styles bring to the world.

East St. Tammany Rainbow Child Care Center, Slidell, LA - \$20,000 replaces storm damaged interior contents such tables, chairs, mats, storage bins, toys, books, and other basic supplies for seven classrooms. Ninety children, ages newborn to five, and their families benefit from this grant.

The Eyes Have It, Inc, New Orleans, LA - \$18,480 helps provide free vision screening assistance, linkage to full comprehensive eye examination, as well as delivery of free and/or discounted eyeglasses to students in need of vision correction, education and empowerment, plus a continuum of good vision health. An estimated 1,355 youth, ages five to twenty will benefit.

Hope Center, Gretna, LA - \$17,000 helps support an After-School program for 68 children, ranging in age from five to ten, to enhance current services that are offered by the local public schools. Youth Program Recovery Funds will specifically hire an enrichment/social development coordinator and purchase necessary supplies.

Housing Authority of New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 supports a partnership with the Children's Defense Fund to provide a literacy-rich summer program for New Orleans public housing youth. The five to eight week program will reach approximately 100 youth, ages five to 18, integrating reading, conflict resolution and social action in an activity-based curriculum that provides social, cultural and historical awareness.

Hynes Charter School Corporation, New Orleans, LA - \$10,000 helps Edward Hynes Elementary School purchase books to replenish the loss of their library. An estimated 728 children per year will benefit from this grant.

Jefferson Performing Arts Society, Metairie, LA - \$7,150 supports Cultural Crossroads, an arts education and cultural enrichment curriculum-based program that integrates science, language arts, math, history, and social skills with the arts. This program will reach 403 youth ranging in age from ten to 15 years old, exposing them to alternate ways of living and learning.

Jefferson Public Library, Metairie, LA - \$10,708 funds the purchase of incentives for children who participate in the yearly summer reading program. The majority of the children in Jefferson Parish are struggling readers and need extra motivation. The summer reading program reaches an estimated 11,000 – 15,000 youth, ages one to 18.

Joseph S. Maggiore Elementary School, Metairie, LA – \$10,650 creates a new youth project specifically designed to meet the needs of post-Katrina students. Using artist residencies, this project develops skills to improve 50 fourth-grade students' performances in English, Reading, Writing and Social Studies while also helping them process the change in their lives.

Kids in Crisis Project, Mandeville, LA - \$17,299 supports the training of mental health professionals in two research-based techniques for assisting with disaster related mental health problems. Thirty mental health professionals will be trained, reaching an estimated 250 family members in the first year.

KID smART, New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 supports an arts summer camp for 40 youth, ages eight to 16, who live in the 7th Ward of New Orleans. This camp will provide ways for participants to process their feelings and heal from the trauma of the hurricane, with a

goal to gain a greater sense of self-esteem and self-empowerment about their role in the future of New Orleans.

Neighborhood Story Project, New Orleans, LA - \$10,000 supports personnel and operating costs of this community documentary program in New Orleans. This program will work with 20 adolescents, helping them to tell the stories of their communities, often misrepresented by the media, and bringing meaningful literature to their neighborhood.

Regina Coeli Child Development Center, St. Tammany Parish, LA - \$20,000 augments mental health services by providing 275 hours of direct mental health services to children and 75 hours of mental health training and services for staff and parents. More than 425 children between the ages of birth to five and their families will benefit.

Special Olympics Louisiana, Hammond, LA - \$20,000 provides needed communications and volunteer coordination staff to help locate and reengage athletes in the Special Olympics training and competition program. An estimated 2,000 athletes, ranging from eight to 25 years of age, will benefit by being offered an avenue to return to normalcy.

Teach for America - Greater New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 funds the recruitment, selection, training and ongoing support for four 2006 corps members. Working to close the achievement gap between lower-income students and their wealthier peers, corps members will serve as full time teachers in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes during the 2006-2007 academic year.

Teaching Responsible Earth Education, Covington, LA - \$20,000 waives tuition fees for 60 fourth-grade students, enabling them to participate in the Earthkeepers program. During this three day program students, teachers and parents participate in a series of concept activities that teach basic life science and environmental concepts, which are fully integrated with classroom curricula.

Volunteers of America, LA - \$15,000 purchases the Voyager Passport Program, an intensive reading intervention that has been proven to dramatically improve the performance of students who are struggling to read. This intervention will increase the effectiveness of Lighthouse After School program at Milestone Sabis School with an estimated 80 beneficiaries.

Young Audiences of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 supports the Unity Project, which will provide dynamic arts programming combined with resilience skills for youth to discover their strengths and abilities while working with others around common experiences. A hundred teachers and teaching artists will be trained, reaching up to 20,000 youth by December 2006.

Youth Empowerment Project, New Orleans, LA - \$18,000 supports the New Orleans Providing Literacy to All Youth (NOPLAY) program, which provides GED and basic literacy instruction to out-of-school youth, ages 17 – 27. NOPLAY's six-month goal is to

enroll and provide culturally appropriate educational services to a minimum of 30 young-adults.

***The U.S. Fund for UNICEF - Mercy Corps
Gulf Coast Youth Program Recovery Fund
Grants Digest for Mississippi***

Bay St. Louis Babe Ruth Baseball, Bay St. Louis, MS - \$15,000 helps reestablish the youth baseball program by replacing physical facilities and equipment that were damaged from Hurricane Katrina. Approximately 40 youth ages four to twelve will immediately benefit from this program.

Bay St. Louis Youth Football Program, Bay St. Louis, MS - \$12,500 helps replace equipment that was destroyed during Hurricane Katrina, enabling youth football and cheerleading programs to resume. Approximately 300 youth ages five to twelve will benefit from this program in the first year.

Center for New Opportunities - Biloxi Schools, MS - \$ 9,172 funds Yoga Eases Stress (YES), a six-month intensive, interactive Yoga program for approximately 40 alternative school students. The YES program helps with behavior modification and increases self-esteem and self-control.

Children's Imagination Station, Long Beach, MS - \$ 13,050 provides computer lab equipment for the Expanding Horizons Program. Funds will also be used to purchase needed commercial kitchen equipment to provide nutritious meals for 124 children, ranging in age from six-months to 12 years.

City of Pass Christian Recovery Program, MS – \$16,949 purchases a modular classroom building that meets states licensing requirements, which provides shelter for child care services for 40 children and allows Pass Christian families to rebuild their community.

Gaits to Success, Kiln, MS - \$20,000 helps provide scholarships and customized equipment to support 50 special needs youth, from ages three to 21, participate in a therapeutic riding program designed to accommodate each individual's physical and developmental needs.

Gulf Coast Women's Center for Nonviolence, Biloxi, MS - \$20,000 purchases playground equipment and appropriate surfacing materials to provide a fun and safe place for children receiving services at the Center. Approximately 20 children ages three to five will be served in the first six months, with an expectation of 2,000 to be served over a ten-year period.

Hancock County Human Resources Agency/Child Development Center, Kiln, MS - \$ 15,000 helps provide parents a three-month respite period from paying day care fees, allowing 50 one to five-year olds participate in the Child Care Recovery Assistance Project.

Hancock County Little League, MS - \$15,000 helps renew little league softball by purchasing damaged softball and concession equipment. Approximately 150 girls, ages five to 18, will benefit from this program in the first year.

Maritime & Seafood industry Museum, Biloxi, MS - \$15,320 helps support seven one-week summer camp sessions, educating approximately 500 youth, ages six to 13, about Mississippi Gulf Coast's unique maritime history and seafood heritage.

Lynn Meadows Discovery Center, Gulfport, MS - \$5,000 supports WINGS Performing Arts, supporting arts programming through day camps and fall touring shows. Approximately 9,860 youth, ages 4 to 18 will be direct beneficiaries.

Methodist Children's Center, Bay St. Louis, MS - \$10,000 helps fund the installation of a commercial kitchen and staff salary to provide low-cost, nutritionally complete meals to approximately 60 children ages six-weeks to five years.

Moore Community House, Biloxi, MS - \$10,000 helps restore playground equipment that was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Approximately 128 children will immediately benefit.

Quarles Elementary Kindergarten, Long Beach, MS - \$8,000 helps purchase chairs and replace rugs and other damaged materials for three kindergarten classes. Approximately 75 children will benefit in the first year.

Small Blessings Preschool, Bay St. Louis, MS - \$15,000 helps rebuild the playground by purchasing ground covering, shredded rubber and climbing equipment, providing a safe place for 30 children to play outside.

Discretionary Grants

Backstreet Cultural Museum, New Orleans, LA - \$6,000 supports the Mardi Gras Indian – Native American Cultural Exchange Program. A delegation of eight adults and nine children from the Fi Yi Yi Spirit of the Mandingo Warrior Mardi Gras Indians will participate in a week long cultural exchange program with children from Apache, Hopi and Navajo Reservations.

Efforts of Grace, New Orleans, LA - \$11,025 supports the Ashe' Cultural Arts Center organize twenty-one summer camp drumming circles, targeting primarily middle and high school students. These events aim to educate the children, teachers and administrators about the cultural heritage and music unique to New Orleans and to spark interest in the creation of drumming clubs and other youth cultural clubs.

House of Lordes, New Orleans, LA - \$9,749 supports a youth based documentary program that encourages preservation of the past, examination of the present and

envisioning of the future. Documentary results will be integrated at the Spirit of Humanity Festival, an arts-based celebration of renewal and rebuilding of New Orleans.

Hypersoul, Inc, New Orleans, LA - \$26,000 enables the coordination of a series of cultural events that include traditional Mardi Gras Indians, brass bands and drumming circles for the New Orleans general public. The aim of these events is to create community togetherness and bonding, helping New Orleans rich cultural heritage and music survive.

International Arts Foundation, New Orleans, LA - \$5,000 supports the Children's Global Playground education and cultural workshop. An estimated 500 children and young people will explore the various ways to utilize world music to learn about diverse cultures throughout the world.

Jackson County Children's Coalition, Gautier, MS - \$15,000 supports the Jackson County Daycare Project as it creates a "one stop shop" for parents with children ages 0 – 5 to facilitate the process of finding appropriate childcare. In addition to hiring a Daycare Program Manager, a website will be created and maintained to provide information to parents, daycare establishments, schools and other vital agencies within the county.

Katrina's Piano Fund, New Orleans, LA - \$15,000 assists with the acquisition and distribution of musical instruments to children who lost instruments in the storm. Mercy Corps funds are specifically targeted for children's instruments, whereas the entire program seeks to help a total of 250 musicians.

Kingsley House, Inc., New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 helps support the Kingsley House Summer Camp, providing a safe haven and nurturing environment for approximately 500 children ages 5 to 12. The program utilizes the evidence based programs *Too Good for Drugs* and *Too Good for Violence* curricula developed by the Mendez Foundation.

Live Oak Writing Project, Long Beach, MS - \$20,000 supports seven camps for approximately 200 children in grades one through eight to use visual art and writing as a creative outlet for healing. From these camps an anthology of the students' visual art and writing will be created. In addition, student writing will be submitted to local radio for broadcast.

Lynn Meadows Discovery Center, Gulfport, MS - \$10,000 supports the WINGS Performing Arts Programs which provides arts programming and performances for school children and community. WINGS offers monthly workshops and a performance bases summer camp to children of the Gulf Coast. An estimated 540 workshop participants and 515 performers will be engaged in this program.

Mental Health Association of Mississippi, Gulfport, MS - \$10,000 supports the Comfort for Kids Program by providing trauma training to parents and caregivers to help children deal with post-traumatic stress. Parent and family workshops will be provided as well as "resilience coaching" and counseling for those families needing additional support.

Mississippi Space Services, Stennis Space Center, MS - \$3,480 provides scholarships to 25 children, ages seven to 12 years old, to participate in week-long session of Astro Camp. Astro Camp uses hands-on activities and experiences to increase youth interest in science, math, engineering and technology - inspiring future generations of explorers.

New Orleans Center for Creative Arts Institute (NOCCA), New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 helps off-set costs associated for NOCCA/Riverfront Second Intensive Instructional Session, providing approximately 100 youth a five-week instructional session using the creative arts for healing and recovery.

Operation REACH, Inc., New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 supports the Gulfsouth Summer Youth Action Camp for 300 middle-school youth. This six-week intensive camp provides a holistic, youth leadership program that focuses on social justice, youth empowerment, community diversity and service-learning.

Pass Christian Library, Pass Christian, MS - \$14,920 enables the Pass Christian Library Community Center to offer a safe, clean and welcoming environment for children's activities and programs. Mercy Corps funds purchase basic furnishings and children's library and program materials.

Save the Children, Long Beach, MS - \$26,000 to support the initiative of the Jersey Fire Fighter's Mutual Benevolent Association to build a playground, benefiting an estimated 200 children in Bay St. Louis, MS. This project provides the first handicapped accessible playground in Mississippi.

Shalom Zone Community, Inc., New Orleans, LA - \$20,000 supports the *Saturday Morning Breakfast Club* for youth 13 to 18 years of age. This club provides opportunities for participants to learn about the culinary arts, peer counseling, and share their experience by writing scripts and producing a documentary of their life experiences.

St. Tammany 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Lacombe, LA - \$15,000 supports the extension of preschool and after school programs that serve hurricane-affected children. Mercy Corps funds are used for personnel and approximately 60 four and five-year olds will be served.

St. Tammany Parish Schools – Preschools, Covington, LA - \$10,560 provides a two-day training for preschool teachers on how to support children through trauma. The training will provide teachers the necessary tools to help children who are facing another hurricane season while living in trailers or sub-standard housing during the summer months. 80 teachers and approximately 1,400 students will benefit from this program.

Young Audiences of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA - \$21,050 supports the *ArtsPartners Residencies* in local schools, integrating arts into their regular program and allowing students new ways to learn and grow. Mercy Corps funds are specifically targeted to increase exposure to the New Orleans culture of drumming.

Quick Impact Grants

Bishop Perry Middle School, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 supports the replacement of portable basketball goals, other physical education equipment, and appropriate storage material.

Boy Scouts of America Pine Barr Area Council, MS - \$2,000 provides scholarships to 14 youth from Harrison, Hancock and Jackson Counties for participation in a week-long summer camp program.

Central City Economic Opportunity Corporation, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 helps purchases computer play equipment for the Head Start Program, which services 82 children between the ages of two and five.

Clara's Little Lambs Preschool Academy, Inc, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 replaces a fence was destroyed from the storm, enabling this child care organization to continue services in a safe environment.

Covenant House New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 purchases two evacuation cribs, four Basic Supercycles and two Sliver Rider tandem trikes for the Child Development Center.

Discovery Kids Pre-School, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 helps purchase needed materials such as changing tables, infant crib mattresses and high chairs to reopen this day care that serves 47 children.

Dryads Street YMCA Early Childhood Education Center, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 helps purchase basic supplies for four classrooms that provide care to 40 children between two and four years of age.

First Baptist Church Preschool, Long Beach, MS - \$2,000 replaces music resources for the preschool. 122 children between the ages one and four and thirteen teachers will benefit from access to music.

Harrison County 4-H Clubs, Gulfport, MS - \$2,000 helps offset costs for "Katrina's After View Day Camp" where approximately 100 youth ages five to 18 can recreate and learn in a safe environment.

Harrison County 4-H Clubs, Gulfport, MS - \$2,000 helps offset costs for "4-H Mini Society Camp" for up to 65 youth ages 13 to 18 to learn entrepreneurial, economic and government skills.

Hope Haven Children's Shelter, Bay St. Louis, MS - \$1,800 purchases a new washer, dryer and dishwasher for this children's shelter that received severe damage during the storm.

Kay's Montessori School and Day Care, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 purchases playground equipment for this early childhood educational and after school care program that serves 41 children, ages one to seven.

Louisiana Community Health Connection, New Orleans, LA - \$1,957 helps replace office supplies for this community health center that serves approximately 187 youth between the ages of ten and eighteen.

Mississippi Gulf Coast Blossman YMCA, Ocean Springs, MS - \$2,000 purchases playground equipment for YMCA Before/After School and Summer Camps, providing a safe place for children to play.

Mississippi Action for Progress, Inc, Picayune, MS - \$2,000 purchases two pieces of playground equipment – Springabouts and Springriders - for the Bay Waveland Center in Bay St. Louis.

Miss Molly's Developmental Center, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 helps replace essential equipment such as infant cribs, storage cubbies, and creative toys for this child care center, which will serve 34 children.

Slidell 21st Century Community Learning Center, Slidell, LA - \$2,000 provides recreational and cultural awareness by purchasing art materials and equipment for physical activities.

Sophie B. Write Charter School, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 replaces learning resources such as pencils, paper supplies and dictionaries for 273 students.

St. Mary's Church Youth Program, New Orleans, LA - \$2,000 purchases essential office supplies, which enables the youth program to help 70 ten to eighteen year olds develop job skills.

St. Tammany Parish Schools – Abney Elementary, Covington, LA – \$2,000 purchases 100 uniforms for students in first through fifth grades, reducing stress on parents, students and teachers.

St. Tammany Parish Schools – Covington Education Center, Covington, LA - \$4,000 provides tutoring services for 64 homeless or displaced students who have attended multiple schools throughout the year.

St. Tammany Parish Schools – Pre-K and Preschool Early Intervention, Covington, LA - \$2,000 purchases books for 95 preschool teachers helping them improve their ability to effectively deal with increased stress and trauma among their student population.

St. Tammany Parish Schools – St. Tammany Junior High, Covington, LA - \$2,000 purchases 100 uniforms for students in sixth through eighth grades, reducing stress on parents, students and teachers.

United Way of South Mississippi, Gulfport, MS - \$2,000 supports the “Childcare as a Business” seminar to recruit, train and prepares qualified childcare center owners and directors, improving available services.