

New Houston group tackles children's post-Harvey food, housing needs

Focus will be on food insecurity, housing issues

By **Cindy George** Updated 10:08 pm, Monday, October 23, 2017



Photo: Juanito M. Garza, San Antonio Express-News



Dr. Robert Sanborn is president and CEO of Children at Risk.

Inadequate food and housing is an immediate threat to children in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, according to a group of Houston-area nonprofit leaders who are seeking to ensure youngsters are the priority of recovery efforts.

On Monday, members of the newly formed Hurricane Harvey Children's Recovery Collaborative announced strategies to protect the area's youngest residents following the late-August storm and over the coming years of community restoration efforts.

Bob Sanborn, president and CEO of Children at Risk, said 117,000 children in Harris County and more than 2 million among the dozens of storm-impacted counties were "significantly impacted" by flooding.

"A lot of vulnerable children are still in need of help," he said.

During a news conference in the lobby of the Houston Food Bank, Sanborn announced that the collaborative is focusing on food insecurity, housing challenges, child care issues and mental health among other areas.

Jenifer Wagley, deputy director of Avenue CDC, called on FEMA to extend housing vouchers for displaced families until at least the end of the year.

"There is no safety net for families. So, if the vouchers run out, there's nowhere for people to go," the housing nonprofit leader said. "Families should not have to go month-to-month and not know if they're going to get to stay in the hotel that they're in and not know where they're going."

Brian Greene, president and CEO of the Houston Food Bank, said food insecurity is driven by choices between housing costs and nourishment.

"The challenge that we as a community now face is that for tens of thousands of households, they now are going to have a longtime extra burden," he said.

For many, that means paying rent or a mortgage and utilities on a flood-damaged home while pouring additional resources into temporary housing.

"Historically, we know that the way that these households cut to meet expenses is on nutrition and quantity," Greene said. "That's the flexible expense that they have."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency sent an additional 24 million pounds of disaster relief supplies to the food bank that is almost exhausted, Greene said, but another 25 million pounds of FEMA aid has been approved that will get the food bank through the next six months.

Houston City Council District B member Jerry Davis said adverse childhood experiences can have long-term consequences far into adulthood. He advised city residents who need help to seek information about food, child care and other recovery resources at community centers.

The collaborative, which includes more than 60 organizations, continues to work on its plan. Sanborn noted that the immediate and future needs of children are "not going to be solved quickly."

Those who need help or guidance should call 211. Avenue CDC is offering housing counseling at 713-864-9099.

Matt Johns from Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston added that the storm is an "invisible disaster" for undocumented children and families who do not qualify for much of the aid.

<http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/New-Houston-group-tackles-children-s-post-Harvey-12300506.php#photo-8015554>