LESSONS LEARNED FROM OKLAHOMA DISASTERS

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Lessons Learned from Oklahoma Disasters

Statewide perspective:
- Major Oklahoma Disasters
- Local Community Action Response
- Lessons Learned
- Disaster Planning
Most people think of Tornadoes when thinking about Oklahoma-

but we have:

- Major Ice Storms
- Major Hail Storms ($500 million from one storm alone in Oklahoma City)
- Severe Drought
- Wildfires
- Straightline Winds at hurricane force
- Floods
- Earthquakes
Debris Cloud Surrounding the May 3, 1999 F5 Tornado near Moore, OK
Some of the 80 mile long Path of Destruction, May 3, 1999
Tornado
Damage on the ground, May 3, 1999
Tornado Destruction, May 3, 1999
Major Oklahoma Disasters: May 3, 1999 Tornado

- Most powerful tornado recorded: 315 MPH winds
- $1.4 billion in damage, 41 lives lost. Multiple injuries.
- On the ground for 1 hour, 25 minutes
- Plowed a path from Chickasha across central Oklahoma before lifting in Midwest City
- First ever Tornado Emergency issued by the National Weather Service
- Destroyed or damaged over 7,000 homes and businesses
- Oklahoma experienced 72 tornadoes over a 3 day period, with deaths in 8 counties.
Major Oklahoma Disasters:
May 3, 1999 Tornado

- Community Action Agencies mobilized and responded in all counties impacted
- Worked in conjunction with Red Cross, Salvation Army
- Most CAA efforts were after the initial few days, when other emergency services providers were shutting down shelters and other assistance
Major Oklahoma Disasters: May 3, 1999 Tornado – Lessons Learned

- Scope of the Disaster damage led FEMA to conduct an intensive study of the damage and why so much occurred

- Available online at: https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/647
Major Oklahoma Disasters: May 3, 1999 Tornado-Lessons Learned

Major Findings:

- Fastening of the wall sill plate to the foundation needs to be enhanced to prevent uplift.
- Include hurricane straps when fastening roof trusses to the wall framing.
- Use reinforced garage doors to minimize risk of door collapse, leading to compromising the structure.
Major Oklahoma Disasters: May 3, 1999 Tornado-Lessons Learned

- FEMA Report was distributed to all CAAs and other housing organizations in the state since many of our CAAs are Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) and construct single and multifamily homes.

- We need to prepare for post-emergency influx of assistance requests- 3 days or 3 weeks following a disaster is when many low income families need help.
Major Oklahoma Disasters: May 20, 2013 Tornado
Major Oklahoma Disasters: May 20, 2013 Tornado

- $2 Billion in damage
- 24 deaths, many in an elementary school
- News media focuses on one area—and that area gets the attention and most services and assistance.
One small subdivision west of Shawnee, Steelman Estates, was devastated but ignored by the local media.

A low income area, homes and vehicles were damaged or destroyed.

Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency jumped in to help—Weatherization crews from all six counties in their service area assisted with cleanup of the area and securing property.

Central Oklahoma’s Transportation Services provided transportation to the local shelters and to the FEMA disaster assistance locations.

Entire agency mobilized to provide services to the residents.
Community Action focus is on our low income families - many people impacted by the storm were covered by insurance and had other resources - Low income families often do not have homeowners or renters insurance.

Disaster resource centers are often set up some ways away from those most in need - so transportation services are essential.
Major Oklahoma Disasters:
May 20, 2013 Tornado Lessons Learned

- Too many resources in some areas caused logistics issues: too much water, food and clothing!
- The OKC Metro stepped up and provided huge amounts of food, water, clothing and supplies to those in need- stores like WalMart jumped in and brought truckloads from warehouses and arranged to pick up donations at their stores
Lots of assistance offered from other states, especially other Community Action Agencies.

Best assistance you can provide is Money.

Send checks and direct others to send donations to the local community action agency for a disaster area- or send contributions to the state community action association for distribution to the impacted local CAAs.
Critical Needs of low income families in many disasters:

- Clothing they can go buy - no struggle going through piles of clothing to find clothes that fit
- Furniture
- Transportation
- Rental Assistance
- Utility Deposits
- Other unanticipated costs 1 or 2 months later
Disaster Preparedness:

One Community Action Agency’s Approach
INCA Community Services in southeast Oklahoma dealt with a number of disasters including tornadoes and ice storms. They developed an approach to help their communities help themselves:

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”
“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness” was created to address several issues:

- Rural communities in particular, because of their location and in some cases lack of access to immediate post disaster services are vulnerable to disasters more than other populations.

- Populations that are limited income, special needs and the elderly frequently do not have the resources or the capacity to respond effectively to disasters and their recovery time is often among the slowest.
Disaster Preparedness: One Community Action Agency’s Approach

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”:

- Built a network of community volunteers via the RSVP/BE READY Volunteer Program which recruits and trains vulnerable, at risk persons and civic groups from INCA’s region.

- Individuals and groups are given the knowledge and skills needed to prepare before a disaster strikes and to better respond effectively.
Disaster Preparedness: One Community Action Agency’s Approach

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”:

- Increases the number of trained community volunteers who can be mobilized to assist their community before, during and after an emergency.
- Seeks to increase engagements between community volunteers and public sector stakeholders to identify vulnerabilities.
Disaster Preparedness: One Community Action Agency’s Approach

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”:

- The BE READY disaster preparedness project includes training, workshops and delivery of disaster preparedness bags to approximately 250 vulnerable persons and civic groups per year empowering them with the necessary training and tools to not only survive a disaster but also assist in disaster situations.
Disaster Preparedness: One Community Action Agency’s Approach

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”:

- Disaster preparedness is not only critical to saving the lives and improving the welfare of elderly, disabled, and low income but can also help a community greatly by saving money on disaster response and recovery.

- INCA-RSVP volunteers assist in training, educating, preparing and distributing disaster kits, materials, and other disaster preparedness related services to equip the vulnerable population with knowledge to help them survive a crisis.
Disaster Preparedness: One Community Action Agency’s Approach

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”:

- Volunteers are clustered based on their location, interests, skill sets and other attributes.
- Staff actively recruits volunteers by reaching out via social media and community outreach visits.
- Civic groups who target vulnerable populations in their communities are also invited along with public sector stakeholders who are encouraged to be engaged in order to gain their support in the initiative.
- Staff meets with eligible persons/volunteers to ensure that those being trained have skills that are utilized, but that they also possess the commitment and drive to be excellent community volunteer leaders enabling them to build the resilience of their communities.
Disaster Preparedness: One Community Action Agency’s Approach

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”:

- Long term, the volunteers trained by this project assist local Emergency Managers, Red Cross Chapters, Health Departments, fire departments, and other stakeholders in their respective community to engage in disaster risk reduction activities.

- Staff help conduct the training workshops hence ensuring that the knowledge gained can be passed along to future volunteers, building the corps of volunteers across the area INCA serves.
Disaster Preparedness: One Community Action Agency’s Approach

“Be Ready Disaster Preparedness”:
The project is continuously monitored and evaluated for progress and improvements that can be made to enhance its effectiveness, especially in terms of the assessing the impact of the training workshops being delivered to participants.
Disaster Preparedness:
General Guides for CAAs

- A formal disaster plan is a mandatory need of every Community Action Agency
- Written procedures need to be developed that address any potential disasters and how to respond to them
- Key staff contact info needs to be kept in hard copy by other staff. Cell phones don’t always work.
Disaster Preparedness: General Guides for CAAs

- Often those impacted by a disaster can include your own CAA staff—prepare for those contingencies.
- A localized disaster can be as simple as your server quitting.
- If not already part of the county or parish Emergency Operations Plan, contact county, city or parish leaders to find out who to talk to. Community Action should be at the table.
Disaster Preparedness: General Guides for CAAs

- CAAs can offer resources to the local emergency management team such as facilities, transportation services, emergency food supplies, even other equipment.

- Make sure CAA facilities are on the local emergency management radar. We found that while local hospitals, schools and nursing homes were targeted as vulnerable sites, most head start centers were not included - yet may house as many as 40 or 50 preschool kids.
Disaster Preparedness: Conclusions

- Community Action Agencies are often at the forefront of services to those impacted by disaster.
- Some disasters can impact the operation of the local CAA in providing essential services.
- A strong Disaster Preparedness Plan will help CAAs cope with most any disaster and recover as an agency and help their community recover more quickly as well.

- Your opinion is very important to us! Please take a moment to evaluate this workshop in the 2018 CAP MLTC. Thank you!