

KIDS OF KATRINA PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Overview

Resiliency for People with Disabilities builds on the core competencies of the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities (MSCCD). This includes advocacy for individuals with disabilities and their families to promote inclusion in the workforce, education, housing and every aspect of community living, information and referral and education via the Mississippi Parent Training & Information Center (PTI). The project will strengthen all these areas and seeks to benefit persons with disabilities, as well as associated staff, family members, caregivers and volunteers.

Mary Troupe, Executive Director will provide disability specific disaster preparedness training throughout Coastal Mississippi. Central to our project is assisting with the long-term recovery of children with disabilities; we will assist students through the use of various therapeutic art medias and modalities as a vehicle of self-reflection and recovery. Further, through our Parent Teacher Information program (MSPTI) parents of children with disabilities will be guided in how to best advocate for their children in school, including the creation of their Individual Education Plans (IEP) that would cover the emotional and mental impact and the path for the student's recovery. Although our focus is on students with disabilities and their families, we recognize that many were affected by Hurricane Katrina are in need of emotional support and guidance to access needed services to move toward long-term recovery.

Julie Propst, Program Developer and Jason Lee, MSPI Project Assistant conducted 34 art groups throughout the lower three coastal counties. Groups consisted of students in Exceptional Education Programs (in school settings) and Mental Health Day treatment programs. Additional art groups were held at El Pueblo and the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Biloxi. The Department of Mental Health proved invaluable as they allowed us to come into the therapeutic day treatment programs that were divided into small, age specific groups. Having additional staff available through the mental health center and school districts provided individualized assistance during the activities.

Many of the students served were labeled as "problems" or "at risk" in their schools due to disruptive behaviors. These art experiences were an opportunity to excel with little or no restrictions. As the pictures will indicate, the children loved having unlimited art materials and freedom of expression. The children all asked when we were coming again and the teachers loved having a positive experience in the group. Teachers used many of the comments from the children in future group and individual sessions.

The primary focus of services was the 3 lower coastal counties.

However, the caretakers participating in the conferences and retreats came from throughout Mississippi and Louisiana.

Jackson County-Hurley, Escatawpa, Ocean Springs, Gautier, Pascagoula, Van Cleave

Harrison County-Biloxi, Orange Grove, Long Beach, Turkey Creek, Gulfport,

Mississippi City, Oak Grove, Pass Christian, Lyman

Hancock County-Kiln, Bay St. Louis, Pearlinton, Waveland,

Louisiana-New Orleans-Spirit of Justice Retreat

Jackson, MS-Spirit of Justice Retreat

An unexpected benefit was the opportunity to model behavior interventions during the art activities.

Often as the groups began, teachers would attempt to establish unnecessary rules and limits. We counteracted this through allowing free expression and unlimited art supplies. The children responded by sharing and showing respect to group members and teachers. They loved sharing their work at the end of group and could not wait to have their parents come to class to see the work created.

One of the most challenging but rewarding groups was working with the children at El Pueblo, a Latino community support program in Biloxi. The children spoke limited English, but understood the concept of making prayer flags. As the group progressed, we learned to communicate affectively through artistic expression. As the pictures show, artistic expression is a universal language.

We will seek additional funding to continue this program and would like to include adults in the artistic expression. Some parents who came with their children participated and it became very evident that this form of emotional expression was a benefit to them as well. They expressed a great desire to have opportunities for art programs related to their own personal trauma. We had several parents break down when they saw the art work of their children and when the parents participated and let their fears and emotional out. Educators and mental health professionals also expressed their interest by coming to the group and were often were drawn to the expressions on a personal level.