

**NUFFIELD  
COUNCIL <sup>ON</sup>  
BIOETHICS**

**After Hurricane Katrina: a review  
of community engagement  
activities and initiatives**

August 2019

## Summary

This review examines how communities took control of their response to Hurricane Katrina through intracommunity engagement initiatives and how communities affected by Hurricane Katrina were engaged by organisations after the disaster occurred. This examination includes an overview of what 'went well' and what problems arose in those engagement efforts.

The review indicates that communities were not passive in accepting decisions made by authorities that had not engaged with their wishes: where intracommunity decisions had been made, those communities fought for those choices to be upheld by authorities.

Where organisations launched engagement activities, several focused on poor neighbourhoods that were badly affected by Katrina, and the children and young people living there. Fewer examples were identified of older people's engagement by organisations or programmes.

Engagement initiatives identified were, in several cases, reflective of the cultural context of the areas affected by Katrina: in particular, music played a key role in successful community engagement initiatives.

## Background

- 1 Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the United States in August 2005. New Orleans was flooded as a result of levees failing, and approximately 80 per cent of the city's population was forced to evacuate.<sup>1</sup> President George W Bush declared a state of emergency in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi on 27 August 2005, which preceded mandatory evacuation orders in several affected areas of these states, including New Orleans. Many people living in poorer areas of the city were not

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (2015) *Health, resilient, and sustainable communities after disasters: strategies, opportunities, and planning for recovery*, available at: [https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/291/docs/AdaptLA\\_Workshops/Healthy\\_Resilient\\_Sustainable\\_Communities\\_After\\_Disasters.pdf](https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/291/docs/AdaptLA_Workshops/Healthy_Resilient_Sustainable_Communities_After_Disasters.pdf), at page 244.

evacuated,<sup>2</sup> and an estimated 1,200 people died as a result of flooding.<sup>3</sup> This disaster has been described as the result of both an extreme weather event, and of federal negligence.<sup>4</sup>

## Aims of this review

- 2 This review takes a deliberately broad approach to include as wide a range of community engagement (CE) activities and initiatives as possible. Four questions are explored:
  - [How did communities initiate, control, participate, and respond after Hurricane Katrina?](#)
  - [What did organisations do in order to engage communities affected by Hurricane Katrina?](#)
  - [What benefits have been identified from post-Katrina community initiatives?](#)
  - [What problems arose in post-Katrina community engagement efforts?](#)
- 3 The findings of this review will inform the Nuffield Council on Bioethics' project on [ethical issues associated with research in global health emergencies](#), which will be published in January 2020. In addition to taking into consideration emergencies born out of infectious disease outbreaks (for example, Ebola), this project will also explore how health research can be carried out ethically in humanitarian disasters caused by events such as earthquakes, extreme weather events (e.g., hurricanes), manmade accidents (e.g., nuclear disasters), war, and terrorism.

## Methods of this review

- 4 Keywords relating to the event were identified and used to construct search terms that formed the basis for this rapid review. The search terms were entered into Google (in

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Pacific Standard (31 August 2015) *Who didn't evacuate for Hurricane Katrina*, available at: <https://psmag.com/environment/who-didnt-evacuate-for-hurricane-katrina>. See also: Medium (13 September 2018) *Please stop telling poor people to leave town*, available at: <https://medium.com/s/story/this-reason-prevents-thousands-from-evacuating-during-hurricane-season-611e8b38ce01>, which highlights that the financial cost of evacuating in the event of an extreme weather event means that it is not an easy option for many people living in the US to take. As Hurricane Irma approached the US in 2017, some people were concerned about losing their jobs if they chose to follow state officials' advice and evacuate: Money (8 September 2017) *Actually, you can be fired for not showing up to work after a hurricane*, available at: <http://money.com/money/4931562/fired-evacuating-hurricane-irma/>.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates vary by as much as 600: National Geographic (6 January 2019) *Hurricane Katrina, explained*, available at: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/natural-disasters/reference/hurricane-katrina/>.

<sup>4</sup> Bebel C (2009) *The vision has its time: culture and civic engagement in postdisaster New Orleans*, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press).

order to gather grey literature), and Google Scholar. Snowballing of references identified by initial search results yielded further sources from academic journals and grey literature. Abstracts of search results were assessed for relevance and, where pertinent to the aim of this review, each result's own references were followed up. Grey literature – which comprises a large part of this review – was identified through Boolean searching via Google, in addition to papers already known to the author.

- 5 Searches are not restricted to engagement activities that took place during a particular time period after Katrina: however, in most examples identified, activities took place within one-to-five years of the disaster occurring.

## How did communities initiate, control, participate, and respond after Hurricane Katrina?

*“[A]fter Katrina, government assistance alone was never sufficient for recovery; therefore citizens and communities had an incentive to cooperate and provide each other with assistance; therefore citizens and communities were motivated to work together to recover.”<sup>5</sup>*

*“After a disaster occurs, community involvement should be anticipated because people must rebuild their lives.”<sup>6</sup>*

- 6 These statements encapsulate the examples identified in response to this review's first question. Analysis of this question is divided into two sections: the first addresses initiatives driven by Katrina-affected communities (paragraphs [7-18](#)); the second summarises initiatives that were started by organisations but taken up by communities (paragraphs [19-25](#)).

### Community-driven initiatives

Arts-based programmes and initiatives

- 7 Several of the community-driven initiatives identified were arts-based programmes. For example, in 2010, the New Orleans-based Ashé Cultural Arts Center showed a play – ‘Voices Not Forgotten’ – that was written and performed by older people in response to Katrina.<sup>7</sup> Other performance art initiatives instigated by community groups included a production that took place in Lakeview that involved “a theatrical bus tour of the community that stopped at designated sites particularly damaged by Hurricane Katrina. At these sites, original theatrical pieces probing home, recovery, life, and

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<sup>5</sup> Weil F (2011) Rise of community organizations, citizen engagement, and new institutions, in *Resilience and opportunity: lessons from the US Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, Liu A, Anglin R, Mizelle R, and Plyer A (Editors) (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press).

<sup>6</sup> Nelson M, Ehrenfeucht R, and Laska S (2007) Planning, plans, and people: professional expertise, local knowledge, and governmental action in post-hurricane Katrina New Orleans *Cityscape* **9(3)**: 23-52, at page 43.

<sup>7</sup> Brenner L (2010) Storming the nation: post-Katrina New Orleans, documentary theatre, and civic responsibility *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* **20(2)**: 15-38, at page 29.

death were performed.”<sup>8</sup> In 2018, the Ashé Center hosted another event where survivors of Katrina “came together to tell their stories and to give thanks to the many people who helped them during their times of need.” Participants were all provided with fabric squares which they could decorate or embroider in order to express their feelings. The squares were then assembled by a quiltmaker and exhibited at a public gallery.<sup>9</sup>

- 8 Post-Katrina community-driven initiatives also included storytelling and story-listening. For example, one paper notes that “standing on front lawns covered in debris, at local cafés, in airports, online, at gas stations, and other byways in and out of the Crescent City – everywhere New Orleanians found each other, they asked for, narrated, and listened to each other’s storm stories”.<sup>10</sup> Storytelling also featured in a mini-grant awarded by Transforma, a five-year initiative which “sought to expand opportunities for artists to use their creativity in the rebuilding of New Orleans by exploring the relationship between art making and issues such as education, health, the environment, and community development.”<sup>11</sup> Transforma’s 2110 Royal Stories aimed to “promote social interaction, engage the imagination, and build confidence and listening skills”. Transforma provide the following summary of the project:

*“2110 Royal Stories provided a space for empathy and story sharing within what is sometimes a lonely living situation for elders, many isolated from friends and family. During each session, participants were encouraged to share stories related to a single theme. This encouraged friendship among participants, many of whom had not previously interacted. At the end of the residency, there was a celebration for our storytellers, during which residents shared stories with a broader community. The project encouraged the sharing of the memories of the elderly in a post-Katrina environment, which will foster a more coherent and thoughtful rebuilding of the city.”<sup>12</sup>*

- 9 ‘Active listening’ was also encouraged by the Drew Disaster Relief Project for its student volunteers.

*“We ask the students [to] participate in ‘active listening.’ Many of these people [affected by Katrina] have a story to tell and sharing that story with some young person who has spent two days on a bus, and slept on church floors just to be*

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<sup>8</sup> Transforma (2010) *Transforma: 2005-2010*, available at: <https://www.transformaprojects.org/pdfs/transformaBook.pdf>, at page 31.

<sup>9</sup> Ashé Cultural Arts Center (2018) *Pieces of peace: quilt exhibition*, available at: <https://www.ashecac.org/new-events/2018/12/7/pieces-of-peace-quilt-exhibition-spirit-reach?rq=katrina>.

<sup>10</sup> Michna C (2013) Performance and cross-racial storytelling in post-Katrina New Orleans: interviews with John O’Neal, Carol Bebel, and Nicholas Slie *TDR/The Drama Review* **57(1)**: 48-69.

<sup>11</sup> Transforma (2010) *Transforma: 2005-2010*, available at: <https://www.transformaprojects.org/pdfs/transformaBook.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, at page 66.

*there to help them take the next step in getting back into their homes, is more important than I ever imagined.”<sup>13</sup>*

10 Music initiatives also featured in the community’s response to Katrina. The Roots of Music initiative, for example, was co-founded by a musician local to New Orleans – Derrick Tabb, a drummer in the Rebirth Brass Band – after funding cuts to school music programmes after the hurricane.<sup>14</sup> The scheme offers free music tuition to children from low-income families. One news piece on the scheme notes that “its powerful gold-outfitted marching band has become a highlight on Mardi Gras parade routes, attracting international attention for its singular mission to bring music back to New Orleans children following music program fallout in local schools after Hurricane Katrina and the levee failures.”<sup>15</sup>

#### Intracommunity volunteering and ‘service’

11 Volunteering and ‘service’ also feature as examples of community-driven responses to Katrina in the literature. One thesis notes, for example, that after a Mississippi couple’s home was destroyed by Katrina and subsequently rebuilt by volunteers, they decided to embark on a week of ‘service’ each year, suggesting that this signals “a desire to pass forward the support they received after the catastrophe which impacted them”. The author reports that this is one of several examples of people who have “built this week of service into their lives in the aftermath of having their homes similarly rebuilt in the aftermath of Katrina.”<sup>16</sup>

12 Volunteering efforts also supported a community healthcare network, which “is now an important source of care for a population that historically had relied on the public hospital and emergency rooms for primary care.”<sup>17</sup> Outside of healthcare contexts, a grassroots recovery project – Safe Way Back Home – supported a community-labour partnership. Local people were hired and volunteers from inside and outside New Orleans were recruited and trained to deal with ‘cleaning up’ after Katrina. A paper which sets out the project’s aims notes that “participants highlighted the community-based, environmental justice emphasis of the project by pointing to the need for

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<sup>13</sup> Brenner L (2010) Storming the nation: post-Katrina New Orleans, documentary theatre, and civic responsibility *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* **20(2)**: 15-38, at page 29.

<sup>14</sup> The Roots of Music (2019) *Homepage*, available at: <https://therootsofmusic.org/>.

<sup>15</sup> The Advocate (20 July 2018) *The Roots of Music education program moves into the Marigny*, available at: [https://www.theadvocate.com/gambit/new\\_orleans/music/article\\_4f816fe2-8c2f-11e8-b3c3-b77c07c2c95c.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/gambit/new_orleans/music/article_4f816fe2-8c2f-11e8-b3c3-b77c07c2c95c.html).

<sup>16</sup> Bates S (2014) ‘Just another hurricane’: the lived experiences of everyday life in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill *University of Glasgow*. PhD thesis, at page 219.

<sup>17</sup> DeSalvo K (2011) Delivering high-quality, accessible health care: the rise of community centers, in *Resilience and opportunity: lessons from the US Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, Liu A, Anglin R, Mizelle R, and Plyer A (Editors) (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press).

community mobilization and partnerships with labor to expedite recovery in marginalized neighborhoods that had been ignored by government agencies.”<sup>18</sup>

13 In the Holy Cross area of New Orleans, a neighbourhood association resumed weekly meetings after Katrina and aimed “to provide a forum for returning residents to reconnect and discuss strategies for rebuilding the devastated community. In so doing, they also created a safe place for community members to express their emotions.”<sup>19</sup> (However, this approach had limitations, as discussed at paragraph [71](#).) Umbrella groups were also formed to coordinate community groups “and bring them together in addressing the challenges of disaster recovery.” These groups included the Neighborhoods Partnership Network, the Beacon of Hope Resource Center, and Sweet Home New Orleans. These groups “share the mission of helping their member groups gain capacity and autonomy, find areas of common concern on which they can work together, find synergies on issues that would otherwise produce competition or conflict, and, perhaps more important, learn from each other.” Local eating and drinking establishments in New Orleans also began “to serve as civic engagement nodes” after Katrina: meeting places for people who weathered the storm.<sup>20</sup>

14 In Lakeview, ‘block captains’ emerged as a further initiative driven by community members. This initiative “grew organically out of the need to act quickly in the post-storm crisis environment.” The former president of Lakeview’s Civic Improvement Association provided the following account of the initiative:

*“One of the first things we did was say, “Okay, we need to get in touch with people as best we can,” and the best way we can do that is to see if we have people that we know and then that one of them knows on every block in Lakeview... And we created a block captain network, where through everybody knowing somebody in Lakeview, we got somebody to volunteer to be the information officer for a particular block.”<sup>21</sup>*

15 The agency exhibited by communities ‘fighting back’ is further exemplified in its response to ‘outside’ rhetoric. For example, in March 2012 The New York Times Magazine’s front page described the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans as a ‘Jungleland’.<sup>22</sup> A community organiser from the Ward – Jenga Mwendo – wrote a strong response to the piece:

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<sup>18</sup> Morello-Frosch R, Brown P, Lyson M *et al.* (2011) Community voice, vision, and resilience in post-Hurricane Katrina recovery *Environmental Justice* **4(1)**: 71-80.

<sup>19</sup> Meyers D, Allien CE, Dunn D *et al.* (2011) Community perspectives on post-Katrina mental health recovery in New Orleans *Ethnicity & Disease* **21 (3, supplement 1)**: S1-57.

<sup>20</sup> Campanella R, and Koritz A (2009) “Bring your own chairs”: civic engagement in postdiluvial New Orleans in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press).

<sup>21</sup> Weil F (2011) Rise of community organizations, citizen engagement, and new institutions, in *Resilience and opportunity: lessons from the US Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, Liu A, Anglin R, Mizelle R, and Plyer A (Editors) (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press), at page 208.

<sup>22</sup> New York Times Magazine (25 March 2012) *The Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans gives new meaning to 'urban growth'*, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/magazine/the-lower-ninth-ward-new-orleans.html>.

*“The New York Times Magazine recently ran a story on my home, the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, a place one of the most powerful newspapers in the world insensitively dubbed a ‘Jungleland’. Contrary to the article residents of this community are not reconciled to life in the wilderness and we don’t live in an untamed mess of overgrowth or in a forgotten wasteland. We are not resigned to anything; we are fighting to revive our community...[W]hile writing about broken people, vacant lots and weeds may be sexy journalism, the community needs the outside world to understand how implicit and unconscious bias caused by a history of racism pummeled us.”<sup>23</sup>*

16 Ms Mwendo also formed a “coalition of backyard gardeners as an effort to reconnect community members and to help heal the neighborhood after the storm.”<sup>24</sup> The Network sets out that its mission is “to sustain and strengthen the historically self-sufficient and deeply rooted community of the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward of New Orleans, LA using our own food growing traditions as a platform to build community, revitalize the neighbourhood and preserve our cultural heritage.”<sup>25</sup>

17 An article which focuses on rebuilding efforts after Katrina provides a further account of community activism which pushed back against Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) – a commission that sought to rebuild the city – and took control of the decisions that affected their neighbourhoods:

*“Fearing they would be prohibited from rebuilding, residents immediately resisted the BNOB Land Use Committee proposals and began proving the viability of their neighborhoods... Soon, however, the residents’ discussion shifted from proving neighborhood viability to taking charge of the recovery because they felt less confident that the leadership was in fact leading.”<sup>26</sup>*

18 The proactiveness of community members approach has been noted as an indication that they took “the project of recovery into their own hands”.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Initiatives taken up by communities***

19 Communities also took up initiatives established in the first instance by third party organisations. Most of the examples identified were cultural or arts-based activities.

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<sup>23</sup> Ebony (9 May 2012) *Jungleland? New Orleans community activist rejects NY Times depiction of 9th Ward*, available at: <https://www.ebony.com/news/jungleland-new-orleans-community-activist-rejects-ny-times-depiction-of-9th-ward/>.

<sup>24</sup> Passidomo C (2016) Community gardening and governance over urban nature in New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* **19**: 271-7.

<sup>25</sup> Backyard Gardeners Network (2013) *Homepage* available at: <http://backyardgardenersnetwork.org/>.

<sup>26</sup> Nelson M, Ehrenfeucht R, and Laska S (2007) Planning, plans, and people: professional expertise, local knowledge, and governmental action in post-hurricane Katrina New Orleans *Cityscape* **9(3)**: 23-52, at page 41.

<sup>27</sup> Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (2007) *Lessons from Katrina: how a community can spearhead successful disaster recovery*, available at: <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/lessons-katrina>.



- 20 Communities' cultural interests received "massive assistance from musicians, artists, and others in cultural communities throughout the nation and around the world."<sup>28</sup> For example, well-known musicians local to Louisiana – Harry Connick Jr and Branford Marsalis – conceived an idea to construct a 'musicians' village'. The aim of the village was to establish a community for New Orleans' musicians, "many of whom had lived in inadequate housing prior to the catastrophe and remained displaced in its aftermath." This, suggests an explanatory note about the scheme, provides "a leading example of how a meaningful vision and focused efforts can provide immediate relief as well as long-term hope for the survival of [New Orleans]."<sup>29</sup>
- 21 Music was also used to engage people affected by Katrina in the form of a 'Hurricane Choir' set up in Baton Rouge by Martin Meader, an Australian choral leader, six months after the hurricane. Evacuees and survivors rehearsed together over a 12-week period and performed in three public shows. In addition to establishing the choir, its organisers were also keen for the mental health outcomes to be monitored during rehearsals. 85% of choir members agreed to take part in the mental health research project, which concluded that 75% of choir members reported a loss of optimism in Katrina's aftermath.<sup>30</sup>
- 22 A collective of artists and creative professionals was also founded after Katrina by Transforma (see paragraph 8), which gave out several small grants, one of which supported a puppetry arts initiative at Colton School in New Orleans. Fifteen young people in the ninth grade worked with puppeteers and storytellers to develop puppets for a Mardi Gras float. At workshops to develop the float, Transforma notes that the young people "became empowered by the freedom to express their frustrations about the former president, George [W.] Bush, and his treatment of the city during Hurricane Katrina."<sup>31</sup>
- 23 The Seventh Ward Artist Residency – also funded by a mini-grant from Transforma – invited visual artists, writers, landscape architects, musicians, filmmakers and photographers to work with young people's and adults' groups in the Seventh Ward for a period of six weeks. The project aimed to "identify needs in the community and initiate creative resolutions." Transforma assesses that in the Ward, "we have a deep need to inform and equip community members with the means to address and discuss social issues that immediately affect our psyches, particularly in relation to disenfranchisement, violence, opportunistic development, education, and health and particularly in the wake of Katrina."<sup>32</sup> Transforma also funded 'Home, New Orleans?',

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<sup>28</sup> Weil F (2011) Rise of community organizations, citizen engagement, and new institutions, in *Resilience and opportunity: lessons from the US Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, Liu A, Anglin R, Mizelle R, and Plyer A (Editors) (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press), at page 213.

<sup>29</sup> Ellis Marsalis Center (2019) *About: Musicians' Village*, available at: <https://ellismarsaliscenter.org/musicians-village>.

<sup>30</sup> Harvey R, Smith M, Abraham N *et al.* (2007) The hurricane choir: remote mental health monitoring of participants in a community-based intervention in the post-Katrina period *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Undeserved* **18(2)**: 356-61.

<sup>31</sup> Transforma (2010) *Transforma: 2005-2010*, available at: <https://www.transformaprojects.org/pdfs/transformaBook.pdf>, at page 64.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, at page 71.

a community-based art-focused network of artists, coordinators, neighbours, universities and schools formed after Katrina. Four areas of New Orleans – Central City, Lakeview, the Seventh Ward, and the Ninth Ward – were the hubs for “community development and recovery through the visual or performing arts and directly involve residents from the local community.”<sup>33</sup> In a summary of the project, Transforma observes that “interneighborhood collaboration is one goal of this project, especially since New Orleans is a city of proud and sometimes insular neighborhoods.”<sup>34</sup>

24 Further cultural engagement drew on a ‘story circle’ method. The i-Witness Central City story site project (2007–2011) enabled residents and visitors to New Orleans “to use cell phones to call and hear a first-person story about something that happened right where they were standing. In the years following Hurricane Katrina, this work was crucial to strengthening counterhegemonic collective memories in Central City in response to state and federal development projects that were working to displace thousands of low-income, nonwhite residents from the neighborhoods in order to make room for gentrification.”<sup>35</sup>

25 Other non-arts-based examples of community agency instigated by other organisations include a scheme with residents from the Lakeview neighbourhood. Along with the University of New Orleans’ planning faculty, residents created their own organisation – the District 5 Neighborhood Recovery Group. This group created seven committees that met each week to discuss topics including communications and community engagement, and coordination between the area’s other neighbourhood associations.<sup>36</sup>

### **What did organisations do in order to engage communities affected by Hurricane Katrina?**

26 This section highlights organisations’ and the US Government’s efforts to engage communities affected by Katrina. It focuses first on initiatives aimed at entire communities (paragraphs [28-40](#)); and second on those aimed specifically at children and young people (paragraphs [41-50](#)). The section ends with a brief note on the role of the US Government, and subsequent reports of its role (paragraphs [50-51](#)).

27 However, it is important to note that, despite the wide range of examples of community engagement instigated by organisations, it has also been suggested that official plans did not include a role for community groups as part of post-Katrina recovery efforts.

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<sup>33</sup> Transforma (2010) *Transforma pilot projects*, available at: <https://www.transformaprojects.org/pdfs/transformaPilotProjects.pdf>, at page 51.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Michna C (2013) Performance and cross-racial storytelling in post-Katrina New Orleans: interviews with John O’Neal, Carol Bebel, and Nicholas Slie *TDR/The Drama Review* **57(1)**: 48-69, at page 60.

<sup>36</sup> Evans P, and Lewis S (2009) A reciprocity of tears: community engagement after a disaster, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press).

The success of these groups has, it has been suggested, contributed to the ‘rewriting’ of the role of such groups in future community resilience.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Initiatives aimed at entire communities affected by Katrina***

The role of faith-based organisations

28 It has been suggested that faith-based organisations (FBOs) and churches represented “a critical dimension of disaster relief and recovery”<sup>38</sup> after Katrina.

*“From tiny storefront congregations to deep-pocketed denominations, the communities of faith arrived first. In the harrowing hours and days after Hurricane Katrina, when survivors roamed the desolate streets in search of water, food and medicine, (religious) groups – not FEMA, not the Red Cross, not the National Guard – provided dazed residents with their first hot meal, their first clean water, their first aspirin.”<sup>39</sup>*

29 In Baton Rouge after Katrina, “a large, informal, loosely structured, interdenominational group of faith leaders was immediately called into being and began meeting weekly, continuing to [the] present day. Several hundred participants have taken part in the meetings, helping organize immediate relief, create case management programs, collect and distribute information, coordinate congregational efforts, and develop longterm disaster contingency and recovery plans”.<sup>40</sup> The Salvation Army and smaller FBOs – particularly local churches – were also able to meet the needs of hard-to-reach communities.<sup>41</sup> African-American religious ministers brokered relationships with the larger disaster-response community during and after Katrina, and also acted as “moral agents and social justice advocates on behalf of Katrina and Rita evacuees.”<sup>42</sup>

30 It has also been suggested that the role of FBOs was particularly key given difficulties faced by larger organisations whose safety policies impacted on their ability to respond. One report, for example, notes that the American Red Cross’ safety policies and efforts “to protect service providers may have prohibited it from operating in some

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<sup>37</sup> Community and Regional Resilience Initiative (2008) *Community resilience: lessons from New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina*, available at: [http://www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/docs/CR\\_Lessons\\_Hurricane\\_Katrina.pdf](http://www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/docs/CR_Lessons_Hurricane_Katrina.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Alawiyah T, Bell H, Pyles L *et al.* (2011) Spirituality and faith-based interventions: pathways to disaster resilience for African American Hurricane Katrina survivors *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* **30(3)**: 294-319.

<sup>39</sup> National Disaster Interfaith Network (2014) *Working with US faith communities during crises, disasters and public health emergencies*, available at: [http://www.n-din.org/ndin\\_resources/FGS/FieldGuide-HighRes.pdf](http://www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/FGS/FieldGuide-HighRes.pdf), at page 39, citing Philadelphia Inquirer (23 August 2006) Faith in action: faith-based groups early and enduring: before agencies aided Katrina’s victims, religious groups did.

<sup>40</sup> Patterson O, Weil F, and Patel K (2010) The role of community in disaster response: conceptual models *Population Research and Policy Review* **29(2)**: 127-41.

<sup>41</sup> Government Accountability Office (2005) *Hurricanes Katrina and Rita*, available at: <https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06297t.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (2008) *Understanding the role of African American churches and clergy in community crisis response*, available at: <https://jointcenter.org/sites/default/files/UnderstandingRoleofChurches.pdf>.

harder-to-reach areas” and with disenfranchised groups. Therefore, local churches were observed to meet the “charitable needs of hard-to-reach communities.”<sup>43</sup> A similar observation is made by another paper:

*“The great geographic scale of destruction and the intensity of Hurricane Katrina, combined with the perception that government and organizations like the American Red Cross could not take care of all of the resulting problems, prompted action by many local organizations that had never served in a disaster relief capacity. Despite their lack of experience, these FBOs became, among other things, shelter operators, builders, case managers, caregivers, and providers of shelter, food, and medicine. Although their effectiveness improved quickly, their lack of initial training and experience proved to be a challenge.”<sup>44</sup>*

### Cultural and arts-based initiatives

- 31 Several initiatives developed for communities affected by Katrina had an arts-based focus. These included a partnership between community members, academics, and filmmakers to set about providing members of the community with video cameras so that they could “research issues of concern, communicate their knowledge, and advocate for change.” Ten members of a community living in central New Orleans took part in this 18-week project, which led to a 22-minute film that premiered to over 200 city leaders and residents. In an assessment of the programme, it is noted that the project “enabled partners to connect with each other, engage neighbors, and capture the history, current reality, and future issues that most concerned them.”<sup>45</sup> The film director Spike Lee also produced a documentary – *When the levees broke: a requiem in four acts* – which presents and engages with New Orleans’ residents first-hand accounts of the disaster.<sup>46</sup>
- 32 After Katrina, a classic rock radio station – “in a city reputedly more interested in musical escapism than civic discourse” – switched from a music format to all-talk programming led by local hosts. The reason for the switch was “post-Katrina information hunger.”<sup>47</sup> The media played a further role in engaging communities affected by Katrina when The Times-Picayune launched a column devoted entirely to announcing meetings that were taking place in order to respond to the disaster.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Government Accountability Office (2005) *Hurricanes Katrina and Rita*, available at: <https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06297t.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> National Disaster Interfaith Network (2014) *Working with US faith communities during crises, disasters and public health emergencies*, available at: [http://www.n-din.org/ndin\\_resources/FGS/FieldGuide-HighRes.pdf](http://www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/FGS/FieldGuide-HighRes.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Catalani CECV, Veneziale A, Campbell L *et al.* (2011) Videovoice: community assessment in post-Katrina New Orleans *Health Promotion Practice* **13(1)**: 18-28.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Variety (17 August 2006) *When the levees broke: a requiem in four acts*, available at: <https://variety.com/2006/film/awards/when-the-levees-broke-a-requiem-in-four-acts-1200514102/>.

<sup>47</sup> Campanella R, and Koritz A (2009) “Bring your own chairs”: civic engagement in postdiluvial New Orleans in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press), at page 37.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, at page 28.

33 In a performance art context, two academics specialising in theatre collaborated on an original play about Katrina and its aftermath to raise awareness of the disaster. In 2007, they travelled to New Orleans and interviewed residents from neighbourhoods across the city. Accounts of people's lives before, during, and after Katrina were used to form the basis of a documentary play: *Katrina: The K Word*.<sup>49</sup>

#### Universities' role in developing community engagement initiatives

34 Universities also played a role in developing initiatives to engage members of communities affected by Katrina, particularly in efforts to rebuild. Harvard University, for example, collaborated with – and built relationships with – members of New Orleans' Broadmoor neighbourhood to create a community centre and complete a preliminary neighbourhood plan.<sup>50</sup>

35 Ohio State University's School of Architecture also facilitated an engagement process for community-wide planning to 'recover, rebuild, and renew' the Mississippi coast. Ohio State and representatives of Harrison County started scoping the project by working with people in two affected communities to elicit their requirements for the rebuild. Plans were subsequently developed for six communities. A paper which sets out the aims of the work states that "the planning process engaged local voices to ensure that the community plans represent the interests of the communities by using an approach based on community empowerment."<sup>51</sup> Newsletters and postcards advertising town hall meetings to discuss the plans were produced; flyers for the meetings were sent home with elementary school students. At the town hall meetings, hundreds of community members gathered to share their thoughts on the future of their community. A free phone number and an online discussion board were set up so that community members could call to leave questions and comments about the planning process.

36 The University of New Orleans also carried out a project – Repetitive Floodloss Reduction Project for the State of LA/TX – which carried out outreach work with communities affected by Katrina to reduce their "repetitive loss" as a result of flooding.<sup>52</sup> Other educational organisations also joined with communities in responding to the disaster:

*"Another example of strengthened community connections involved meeting the needs of individuals and families at Renaissance Village, the largest FEMA trailer park in the Baton Rouge area. Area schools, the mayor of the town, social work professors, community practitioners, and agencies as diverse as Big Buddy,*

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<sup>49</sup> Brenner L (2010) Storming the nation: post-Katrina New Orleans, documentary theatre, and civic responsibility *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* **20(2)**: 15-38.

<sup>50</sup> Evans P, and Lewis S (2009) A reciprocity of tears: community engagement after a disaster, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press).

<sup>51</sup> Evans-Cowley J, and Zimmerman Gough M (2009) Citizen engagement in post-Hurricane Katrina planning in Harrison County, Mississippi *Cityscape* **10(3)**.

<sup>52</sup> University of New Orleans Center for Hazards Assessment, Response & Technology (2019) *Recently completed projects*, available at: <http://new.uno.edu/chart/research-projects>.

*Catholic Charities, the Children's Health Fund, and the Children's Health Project met one another and embarked on joint service and research projects.*<sup>53</sup>

- 37 Ten years after Katrina, Tulane University also set out that the development of the city and the surrounding area remains one of its main concerns, "as its programs seek to not only confront immediate issues but integrate community engagement as part of the curriculum."<sup>54</sup>
- 38 In spring 2006, over 10,000 college students from throughout the US arrived in New Orleans for their spring breaks. The students helped people to remove their belongings from their homes and begin work on 'gutting' the houses. A paper which sets out the students' activities notes that "for many people, these college students were providing an incredible service, allowing families to see past the devastation to the possibility of returning and rebuilding. The students worked with neighborhood organizations to survey the basics of each neighborhood: who had returned, who was living in FEMA trailers, where piles of debris remained, and what businesses, schools, and bus routes had returned if any. Many slept on church floors, in empty community centers, and in extra dormitory rooms at the local colleges and universities."<sup>55</sup>

#### Voluntary initiatives

- 39 Voluntary initiatives were also a method through which communities affected by Katrina were engaged after the disaster. These included the establishment of Evacuteer, a non-profit organisation set up in 2009 to train volunteers when future city-assisted evacuations (CAE) occurred. Evacuteer states that its aim is "to augment the capacity of overstretched government agencies during a mandatory evacuation of the City by deploying pretrained volunteers to fill out registration paperwork for evacuees using CAE, and to help guide people, pets, and their luggage onto buses bound for shelter."<sup>56</sup> The organisation has also established 'Evacuspots'.<sup>57</sup> The community cohesion that the programme aims to create is captured by the following statement: "We watched as the levees broke. We watched as the flood waters rose. We watched as New Orleanians were stranded on their rooftops, in the Superdome, the Convention Center, and on the interstate. Now, we come together with a plan, to prevent what happened in 2005 from ever happening again."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship (19 June 2012) *Research after natural disasters: recommendations and lessons learned*, available at: <http://jces.ua.edu/research-after-natural-disasters-recommendations-and-lessons-learned/>.

<sup>54</sup> Metropolis (29 September 2015) *A decade after Katrina, Tulane expands its social innovation agenda*, available at: <https://www.metropolismag.com/cities/top-cities/a-decade-after-katrina-tulane-seeks-to-expand-its-social-innovation-agenda/>.

<sup>55</sup> Webster K, and Simons-Jones D (2009) The Gulfsouth Youth Action Corps, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press), at page 117.

<sup>56</sup> Evacuteer (2019) *About us*, available at: <http://evacuteer.org/about>.

<sup>57</sup> Evacuteer (2019) *Evacuspots*, available at: <http://evacuteer.org/evacuspots>.

<sup>58</sup> Evacuteer (2019) *Homepage*, available at: <http://evacuteer.org/>.

40 'Voluntourism' was also promoted, where faith-based groups, college students, and professional organisations from across the US visited the city to help to clean up and rebuild. One author notes that this "remarkable phenomenon is viewed as a triumph of civic spirit over bureaucratic lethargy."<sup>59</sup>

### ***Initiatives aimed at children and young people***

41 Several initiatives focused specifically on children and young people (CYP) who were affected by the disaster, including one in Renaissance Village, a huge trailer park established by FEMA to house evacuees from the hurricane.<sup>60</sup> An art programme in Renaissance Village involved 400 children working with art therapists to portray and recall their experiences of the aftermath of Katrina. An art therapist who worked with the 'Katrina Kids' notes that the children's perception of houses and homes changed:

*"... they'll draw a house, a tree or a person or whatever. These children didn't draw houses we got triangles... We thought maybe they just didn't know how to draw a house but then a 12-year-old drew a triangle and it was at that point in time that we realized the internal scheme of these children had been changed, that house was no longer a safe place – it was the roof. So many of these children had to be on the roof or they knew the roof was the only safe place to be."<sup>61</sup>*

42 An assessment of the Renaissance Village art initiative suggests that "one method for healing is relying on the first impulses of childhood – picking up a crayon, pencil or paintbrush to scrawl what they have seen and what may lie ahead." The assessment notes further that "for the children of Renaissance Village, surrounded by bleakness and worry, the art therapists' trips mean a great deal." One boy who took part in the art sessions told a facilitator: "I know you love me because you keep on coming back."<sup>62</sup>

43 Another art-based programme established after Katrina was the Hyogo-NOMA Art Therapy Initiative. The initiative provided weekly art therapy for over 250 New Orleans public school children. The school setting was chosen so that the young people "could remain in a familiar, comfortable environment with a built-in support system."<sup>63</sup>

44 A further example of an initiative that focused on CYP was a coalition of community groups working on children's issues called YK. Along with other groups – including Rotary – YK tried 'to make life more bearable' for Renaissance Village residents.

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<sup>59</sup> Campanella R, and Koritz A (2009) "Bring your own chairs": civic engagement in postdiluvial New Orleans in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press), at page 27.

<sup>60</sup> WAFB (27 August 2015) *Katrina victims remember 'Renaissance Village' 10 years later*, available at: <https://www.wafb.com/story/29895832/katrina-victims-remember-renaissance-village-10-years-later/>.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> The Baton Rouge Area Foundation (2007) *Currents: Q3*, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56bba43086db4378db7e026d/t/56ce1b71ab48def3fe95a58d/1456348022299/Currents+3Q+2007+document.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> Hussain S (2010) Art therapy for children who have survived disaster *AMA Journal of Ethics* **12(9)**: 750-3.

Explaining YK's work, Marybeth Lima (Director, LSU's Center for Community Engagement) highlights an issue faced and surmounted by the coalition in the following account:

*"We hit a roadblock when trying to construct playgrounds for kids residing in Renaissance Village. FEMA's position was that Renaissance Village was a temporary community, and that the construction of a playground would encourage people to stay... Renaissance Village was hastily constructed on a cow pasture which had been quickly converted to accommodate hurricane survivors. It contained nothing but trailers, a tall, barbed wire gate around the perimeter, a single entrance with a police check point, and a small mail stop. Anyone who spent a minute inside the spartan, guarded grounds would understand the absurdity of the statement released by FEMA, who was focused on the 'temporary' side of the temporary community equation."<sup>64</sup>*

- 45 The first playground ended up being built a mile outside of Renaissance Village in Baker's town square. Transport was arranged so that residents could access the playground easily. Later, FEMA "finally allowed the construction of community support services, including three playgrounds, inside Renaissance Village."<sup>65</sup> Further, "When FEMA and community groups were locked in a stalemate over whether or not playground and support services construction would be allowed in RV, a famous Louisiana-based company that was providing other services in RV decided to hell with the stalemate. They poured a concrete slab and built a basketball court in the middle of the night, and dared FEMA to tear it down. FEMA did not; the basketball court quickly became a cherished community gathering place."
- 46 Spring break students (see paragraph [38](#)) wanted, especially, to work with children. Operation REACH took onboard the students' enthusiasm and set out to provide summer camps for middle school students affected by Katrina. These became known as the Gulfsouth Youth Action Camps. Universities, foundations, relief organisations, and local agencies all contributed to the scheme. In a report of the initiative, organisers indicate that they knew that the camps "had to make room in the program design for youth to liberate their repressed emotions, discuss unaddressed questions about their experiences, and debrief unfolding events in their lives." The camp organisers therefore designed courses intended to "provoke repressed conversations and agitate youth to action while providing a therapeutic outlet for young people to begin their healing."<sup>66</sup>
- 47 At the Gulfsouth camps, young people were also given the chance to be involved with community work as part of their time at the camp. Some were involved in a community 'beautification' project that involved planting the grounds of a community centre.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Alabama Possible (30 September 2011) *Community at the center of the storm*, available at: <http://alabamapossible.org/2016/01/29/community-at-the-center-of-the-storm/>.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Webster K, and Simons-Jones D (2009) The Gulfsouth Youth Action Corps, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press), pp120-1.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, at page 122.



Camp attendees also contributed to the production of a film documentary – *Children of New Orleans: still weathering the storm* – by a volunteer film company from Florida. Taking part in the production allowed the children to have the opportunity both to learn technical skills, and to have their voices heard and stories told.<sup>68</sup> Another documentary – *This is Katrina* – told the story of 19 children from different neighbourhoods in New Orleans which explored the impact of Katrina on their lives.<sup>69</sup>

- 48 An online community and game was also launched three years after Katrina. Youth leaders for Global Kids worked with game developers to create an online community for young people to engage in and experience the ongoing relief efforts in New Orleans. The initiative is explained in the following excerpt:

*“The site provides links to a variety of relief groups as well as information about New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina including multiple timelines, analysis of media coverage, and supporting articles for all information presented. The site also features multiple curricula about Hurricane Katrina including Global Kids’ own workshops for teachers to use as educational tools. Visitors who join the site become part of a social online community and contribute to forums about Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the continuing reconstruction.*

*The site was developed during the past school year by Global Kids Youth Leaders from Brooklyn’s Canarsie High School, who selected the topic of Hurricane Katrina. They worked with Game Pill to create an educational game within a social networking site that focuses on the local heroes that emerged during the disaster while educating its players about the essentials of disaster readiness.”<sup>70</sup>*

- 49 Although outside the main thrust of this review, one example of proactiveness by the military was highlighted by a principal of a high school affected by Katrina:

*“In his [the principal’s] view, the majority of the reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the storm had been directed to the west bank of the Parish until the commander of the Arkansas air force reserve force chose to move his company across the river and helped this Principal clear wreckage from his school grounds. The Principal described this as “a profound moment for the east bank” and an Arkansas state flag signed by every member of this regiment proudly hangs outside his office to acknowledge the work they did for the school.”<sup>71</sup>*

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, at page 121.

<sup>69</sup> Katrina’s Children (2009) *Home page*, available at: <http://www.katrinaskidren.com/web/html/h0100.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Global Newswire, (28 August 2008) *Global Kids to launch online community and game, ‘Hurricane Katrina: Tempest in Crescent City,’ to raise youth awareness on eve of 3rd anniversary of Katrina*, available at: <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2008/08/28/383809/149274/en/Global-Kids-to-Launch-Online-Community-and-Game-Hurricane-Katrina-Tempest-in-Crescent-City-to-Raise-Youth-Awareness-On-Eve-of-3rd-Anniversary-of-Katrina.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Bates S (2014) ‘Just another hurricane’: the lived experiences of everyday life in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill *University of Glasgow*: PhD thesis., at page 157.

## **Government role**

50 No government-initiated CE initiatives after Katrina were identified by this review. In 2011, FEMA – which faced strong criticism of its handling of the disaster<sup>72</sup> – published a document on a ‘Whole community approach to emergency management’.<sup>73</sup> The document makes no reference to Katrina.

51 However, in 2006, special report of the Committee of Homeland Security made the following recommendations:

*“DHS should develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to develop a culture of preparedness in America. DHS should coordinate with state and local officials to ensure that emergency plans are community-based and include outreach and education to the public, through community and faith-based organizations and other institutions to promote individual preparedness based on the risks in their communities. This information should be widely distributed in languages appropriate to the relevant constituencies.”<sup>74</sup>*

*“... states should establish neighborhood pre- and post-disaster information centers at schools, shopping centers, places of worship, and other community institutions, to provide information on evacuations and the location of disaster assistance sites.”<sup>75</sup>*

## **What benefits have been identified from post-Katrina community initiatives?**

52 Several assessments have been undertaken of the effectiveness of post-Katrina community initiatives. This section focuses on what ‘went well’.

### **Heightened community cohesion**

53 Heightened cohesion among the communities that took part in engagement initiatives after Katrina has been observed in several papers. This includes the return or growth of community organisations after Katrina: for example, in the Holy Cross area of New

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<sup>72</sup> See, for example, The Conversation (13 September 2017) *5 things that have changed about FEMA since Katrina - and 5 that haven't*, available at: <https://theconversation.com/5-things-that-have-changed-about-fema-since-katrina-and-5-that-havent-83205>; and the extensive special report of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (2006) *Hurricane Katrina: a nation still unprepared*, available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-109srpt322/pdf/CRPT-109srpt322.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> FEMA (2011) *A whole community approach to emergency management: principles, themes, and pathways for action*, available at: [https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1813-25045-0649/whole\\_community\\_dec2011\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1813-25045-0649/whole_community_dec2011__2_.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (2006) *Hurricane Katrina: a nation still unprepared*, available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-109srpt322/pdf/CRPT-109srpt322.pdf>, at page 626.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, at page 629.

Orleans, and in the city's Vietnamese community, social networks have been observed to contribute to overcoming the storm's disruptions.<sup>76</sup>

54 Solidarity between different groups has also been noted:

*"Because of a pervasive sense that "we are all in this together," faculty and community groups worked more closely than ever before, sharing resources, asking for help, filling in where there were urgent needs, and providing mutual support. This led to a broad exploration of needs, including research needs."*<sup>77</sup>

*"Before the storm, I was living my daily life. The storm changed me... All I think about when I go to work is, "Let me hurry up and get these eight hours over with so I can do my community work". So when I leave my job, I put in another eight hours sometimes."*<sup>78</sup>

55 Generally 'feeling involved' has also been noted as a key contributor to 'healing' after the disaster. One report notes that engagement efforts after Katrina "gave some affected residents an inclusive and healing experience after a wrenching and distressing event."<sup>79</sup> Carol Bebelle, Director of the Ashé Cultural Arts Center commented that a new sense of 'we-ness' emerged in New Orleans following Katrina.<sup>80</sup> A further paper makes a similar point:

*"community leaders remained in New Orleans during the storm and subsequent flood, tending to community members in need. As soon as they were able, community leaders drove around the region with digital cameras and laptop computers, taking pictures of community members and showing them to separated loved ones, assuring them that they were safe".*<sup>81</sup>

56 Related to these observations on community cohesion after Katrina, local community ties and the accompanying narratives of recovery strongly predicted levels of community recovery.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Community and Regional Resilience Initiative (2008) *Community resilience: lessons from New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina*, available at:

[http://www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/docs/CR\\_Lessons\\_Hurricane\\_Katrina.pdf](http://www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/docs/CR_Lessons_Hurricane_Katrina.pdf).

<sup>77</sup> Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship (19 June 2012) *Research after natural disasters: recommendations and lessons learned*, available at: <http://jces.ua.edu/research-after-natural-disasters-recommendations-and-lessons-learned/>.

<sup>78</sup> Weil F (2011) Rise of community organizations, citizen engagement, and new institutions, in *Resilience and opportunity: lessons from the US Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, Liu A, Anglin R, Mizelle R, and Plyer A (Editors) (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press), at page 210.

<sup>79</sup> McKinsey & Co (2015) *Improving disaster recovery: lessons learned in the United States*, available at: [https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/risk/our%20insights/improving%20disaster%20recovery/improving\\_disaster\\_recovery\\_280615\\_final.ashx](https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/risk/our%20insights/improving%20disaster%20recovery/improving_disaster_recovery_280615_final.ashx), at page 20.

<sup>80</sup> Michna C (2013) Performance and cross-racial storytelling in post-Katrina New Orleans: interviews with John O'Neal, Carol Bebelle, and Nicholas Slie *TDR/The Drama Review* **57(1)**: 48-69.

<sup>81</sup> Patterson O, Weil F, and Patel K (2010) The role of community in disaster response: conceptual models *Population Research and Policy Review* **29(2)**: 127-41.

<sup>82</sup> Chamlee-Wright E (2010) *The cultural and political economy of recovery: social learning in a post-disaster environment* (New York: Routledge).

## **Contributions to community agency**

- 57 Contributing to communities' sense of agency after the disaster has been highlighted several times as a key positive outcome to engagement efforts.
- 58 Harvard's collaboration with Broadmoor (see paragraph [34](#)) ended in 2011, but Harvard's Belfer Center notes that the scheme "provided an opportunity for New Orleans' neighbourhood leaders to build on their leadership skills through intensive Kennedy School courses."<sup>83</sup> Belfer's work in Broadmoor also contributed to the development of a best practice model in disaster recovery that was subsequently used in assisting the recovery of three Chilean communities nearly destroyed by an earthquake and tsunami in 2010.<sup>84</sup>
- 59 Agency was also demonstrated in the face of failures by authorities to engage. For example, the Broadmoor district of the city developed recovery plans that were "widely acknowledged to have been well constructed with widespread citizen participation", but which nevertheless city hall indicated it was unlikely to accept. In response, Broadmoor's community leaders organised a demonstration. An analysis of this demonstration suggests that "their protest as not intended to demand benefits but rather to assert the community's autonomy, keep Broadmoor's citizens engaged, and insist that government partner with the community rather than command it."<sup>85</sup>
- 60 A similar account of community activism comes from the actions of the members of New Orleans' Vietnamese community.

*"As soon as the water had been drained from their neighborhood, the Vietnamese community returned and began rebuilding. They warehoused building materials in the church, worked together to repair damaged houses, one by one, starting from the roofs down, and cooked and ate as a community. At first, the city and utility companies declined to reconnect water and electric service, but Church leaders collected hundreds of signatures to prove that community members were back in residence, and successfully pressed for re-establishment of services. Within about a half-year, the community had repaired and re-occupied much of its damaged housing, and resumed long-term planning, which was already underway prior to the storm, for a retirement center, a community garden and a farmers' market, pausing along the way to successfully block a landfill uncomfortably near their neighborhood."<sup>86</sup>*

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<sup>83</sup> Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (2016) *Broadmoor Project, New Orleans: looking back and ahead*, available at: <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/broadmoor-project-new-orleans-looking-back-and-ahead>.

<sup>84</sup> Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (2013) *Genesis of recupera Chile*, available at: <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/genesis-recupera-chile>.

<sup>85</sup> Weil F (2011) Rise of community organizations, citizen engagement, and new institutions, in *Resilience and opportunity: lessons from the US Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, Liu A, Anglin R, Mizelle R, and Plyer A (Editors) (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press), at page 214.

<sup>86</sup> Patterson O, Weil F, and Patel K (2010) The role of community in disaster response: conceptual models *Population Research and Policy Review* **29(2)**: 127-41.

61 Engaging communities in accessible ways has also been highlighted as a key contributor to their agency: for example, the Ohio State project in Mississippi (see paragraph 34) avoided using planning terms and expressions and instead used community members' own words in order to build trust.<sup>87</sup>

### ***Contributions to young people's agency***

62 Themes around heightened agency were also observed as an outcome for initiatives that engaged CYP after Katrina. One of the facilitators of the Renaissance Village art project (see paragraph 41) notes, for example, that CYP who took part are "now able to just move on in life and some say even doing better than they would have done if the experiences of Katrina had not come their way".<sup>88</sup> College students who volunteered for Gulfsouth Youth Action camps (see paragraph 46), "like the youth [they worked with, they]... felt a greater sense of self-confidence at the end of the program. They became more self-assured as they worked effectively with youth and peers. Also their impact on the youth and the program gave them a strong sense of responsibility; they saw themselves as actual agents of change for the young people and the community."<sup>89</sup> Further, "Given that this program operated in such a devastated environment, corps members reported that they had developed a greater ability to 'roll with the punches, and deal with crises'."<sup>90</sup>

63 Another CYP-focused initiative based at the Louisiana Children's Museum – Play Power – was started "as a place for kids to heal" after Katrina. The museum's engagement manager observes that the scheme "got started in 2006 and it's still going [in 2014] because it provides a safe place for kids to learn about their feelings and about their community and their environment".<sup>91</sup>

### ***Capacity-building***

64 There are several examples of how capacity in communities was built as a result of CE-based initiatives. For example, in exit interviews with college students who volunteered at camps set up for CYP affected by Katrina, the students were asked how they would bring the scheme – Gulfsouth Youth Action Corps – 'back' to their communities. They responded positively, "expressing a commitment to tell friends and family about life in post-Katrina New Orleans and to lead awareness campaigns back on their campuses." In addition, "college student counselors also developed personally and professionally. Some indicated that they had developed a greater

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<sup>87</sup> Evans-Cowley J, and Zimmerman Gough M (2009) Citizen engagement in post-Hurricane Katrina planning in Harrison County, Mississippi *Cityscape* **10(3)**.

<sup>88</sup> WAFB (27 August 2015) *Katrina victims remember 'Renaissance Village' 10 years later*, available at: <https://www.wafb.com/story/29895832/katrina-victims-remember-renaissance-village-10-years-later/>.

<sup>89</sup> Webster K, and Simons-Jones D (2009) The Gulfsouth Youth Action Corps, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press), at page 128.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, at page 125.

<sup>91</sup> Greater New Orleans Foundation, (2014) *Louisiana Children's Museum helps kids develop emotional literacy through 'play power' program*, available at: <http://www.gnof.org/louisiana-childrens-museum-helps-kids-develop-emotional-literacy-through-play-power-program/>.

understanding of youth, the challenges they face, and the ways in which they deal with those challenges.”<sup>92</sup>

65 The Council which oversaw REACH NOLA Mental Health Infrastructure and Training (MHIT) Project – “a peer-reviewed account of disaster recovery model specifically focused on developing mental health services and building capacity for agencies and providers within a disparities-focused, community-academic participatory partnership framework”<sup>93</sup> ensured that specific arrangements were in place to support community and academic partners equally with regards to funding and decision-making. It has been noted that “this helped to build capacity as did the experience gained by community and academic partners from contributing to all program phases from inception, relating to funders, implementation, assessment and dissemination of products or results.”<sup>94</sup>

66 Capacity building was also observed as part of an assessment of community resilience where 90 first responders were invited to discuss how their teams engaged in resilience activities in affected communities. Results of the assessment indicated that “providing valuable environmental clean-up skills represents a sustainable approach to helping those in underserved and disadvantaged communities.”<sup>95</sup> It has also been noted that another scheme – the Louisiana Speaks and the United New Orleans Plan – “surfaced hundreds of community-driven concepts about flood resilience and economic recovery, a richness and abundance of ideas that could never have been generated by a central government source.”<sup>96</sup>

### What problems arose in post-Katrina community engagement efforts?

67 This section summarises the kinds of problems that arose as a result of post-Katrina engagement efforts, alongside some of the ways that they were tackled.

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<sup>92</sup> Webster K, and Simons-Jones D (2009) The Gulfsouth Youth Action Corps, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press), at page 125.

<sup>93</sup> Springgate BF, Wennerstrom A, Meyers D *et al.* (2011) Building community resilience through mental health infrastructure and training in post-Katrina New Orleans *Ethnicity & Disease* **21 (3 Supplement 1)**: S1-29.

<sup>94</sup> Wells KB, Springgate BF, Lizaola E *et al.* (2013) Community engagement in disaster preparedness and recovery: a tale of two cities--Los Angeles and New Orleans *The Psychiatric clinics of North America* **36(3)**: 451-66.

<sup>95</sup> Wyche K, Pfefferbaum R, Pfefferbaum B *et al.* (2011) Exploring community resilience in workforce communities of first responders serving Katrina survivors *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* **81(1)**: 18-30.

<sup>96</sup> McKinsey & Co (2015) *Improving disaster recovery: lessons learned in the United States*, available at: [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/risk/our%20insights/improving%20disaster%20recovery/improving\\_disaster\\_recovery\\_280615\\_final.ashx](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/risk/our%20insights/improving%20disaster%20recovery/improving_disaster_recovery_280615_final.ashx), at page 20.

## **Miscommunications and misunderstandings**

68 Some assessments of CE initiatives and programmes report miscommunications and misunderstandings between parties. One instance of this issue is noted in a summary of how planning proceeded to 'rebuild' New Orleans:

*"Although decisions were being made, residents were unclear about who the decisionmakers were. In addition, with the absence of adequate communication, many residents were unconvinced that the decisionmakers' priorities supported their own [...] at times, engaged residents felt as if they were working against the city."*<sup>97</sup>

69 The consequences of a misunderstanding that "developed among the communities of New Orleans that if they came up with a unified plan, the federal government would make available whatever amount of recovery funds the plan called for" have also been highlighted. The resulting plan – the Unified New Orleans Plan – gathered community support for around \$14bn of recovery and infrastructure projects but were only met with an offer \$117m from federal funds and the State of Louisiana. It has been noted that "the resulting outrage further alienated the New Orleans public from both the State of Louisiana and the federal government."<sup>98</sup>

## **Logistical problems**

70 Other challenges facing those seeking to engage communities included logistical problems. For example, the team running the Ohio State project (see paragraph [34](#)) was faced with a challenge of contacting community members who had been displaced by Katrina, but found that "the Post Office was not delivering mail to individual addresses. Instead, recipients had to go to a central post office outside of their community to get their mail. Those living outside the community were often moving from place to place, and they were not necessarily having their mail forwarded. Phones were of limited use because some people were still living in tents." The project team used various outreach methods, including contacting local churches and businesses, and using word of mouth.<sup>99</sup>

## **Heightened emotion and mental distress**

71 The community forum described at paragraph 13 led to residents reporting that they struggled "to set priorities and follow through with tasks necessary for rebuilding, and they frequently had outbursts of anger and crying." This led to leaders of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association realising that residents "could not reconstruct the

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<sup>97</sup> Nelson M, Ehrenfeucht R, and Laska S (2007) Planning, plans, and people: professional expertise, local knowledge, and governmental action in post-hurricane Katrina New Orleans *Cityscape* **9(3)**: 23-52, at page 41.

<sup>98</sup> McKinsey & Co (2015) *Improving disaster recovery: lessons learned in the United States*, available at: [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/risk/our%20insights/improving%20disaster%20recovery/improving\\_disaster\\_recovery\\_280615\\_final.ashx](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/risk/our%20insights/improving%20disaster%20recovery/improving_disaster_recovery_280615_final.ashx), at page 19.

<sup>99</sup> Evans-Cowley J, and Zimmerman Gough M (2009) Citizen engagement in post-Hurricane Katrina planning in Harrison County, Mississippi *Cityscape* **10(3)**.

community without first addressing their primary recovery concern – mental health.”<sup>100</sup> The convenor of the neighbourhood association subsequently worked on Resilience and Recovery in New Orleans (REACH NOLA) “to engage in collective action to address unmet community health needs, particularly in the area of emotional recovery.”<sup>101</sup>

- 72 Related to emotional reactions to Katrina, two developers of theatrical productions (see paragraph [33](#)) encountered very different responses to their requests to talk to people about the disaster in order to inform their plays.

*“When we first arrived at the hotel in the heart of the French Quarter, the woman at the front desk shunned our overtures: “No one here wants to talk about it,” she told us, “We are tired of talking about Katrina. We just want to move on.” Thus, on our first day in New Orleans we were already asking ourselves if we had made a mistake and whether or not it was right to ask people to recount the tragic events of August 2005. “Are you kidding? I felt like screaming it from the rooftops!” a woman we met later that night exclaimed.”<sup>102</sup>*

- 73 The tension between those who wanted to tell their stories of Katrina, and those who did not, led to the title of the play that emerged from the producers’ work: *Katrina: The K Word*. This, the producers suggest, indicates something taboo; “something one can’t easily discuss in public discourse. And yet, why? Because Americans had grown tired of it? Because it was too painful, too raw for New Orleanians to discuss? Because Katrina exposed the abandonment of a city in which 28 percent of the population lived below the poverty line – of whom 77 percent were African Americans?”<sup>103</sup>

- 74 Sensitivities that arose when undertaking CE have also been noted in an account of how CYP were engaged in a dialogue at camps set up after Katrina:

*“Almost half complained that there was too much talk about Katrina and it was an uncomfortable subject for them. Some said it upset them. One young man said it was “too sad to talk about it” because his grandmother and cousin had died. He added, “I don’t want to talk about it. I want to move on.”<sup>104</sup>*

- 75 A more general comment on antipathy towards research post-disaster is also pertinent to the issues around distress after disasters occur:

*“disaster research, relatively few people living in disaster impacted communities want to spend time being counted so that lessons can be learned and applied to*

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<sup>100</sup> Meyers D, Allien CE, Dunn D *et al.* (2011) Community perspectives on post-Katrina mental health recovery in New Orleans *Ethnicity & Disease* **21 (3, supplement 1)**: S1-57.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Brenner L (2010) Storming the nation: post-Katrina New Orleans, documentary theatre, and civic responsibility *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* **20(2)**: 15-38, at page 18.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Webster K, and Simons-Jones D (2009) The Gulfsouth Youth Action Corps, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press), at page 123.



*inform future circumstances. There are substantial efforts to engage post-disaster communities in research, but not all have been successful in recruiting participants. Additionally, different communities will prioritize hazards differently and agencies must be responsive to this dynamic. We have learned in the CPIC study and in MHIT that partnered approaches can help overcome these issues, but in the context of programs that built real-time capacity for addressing needs through trainings at scale and with substantial investment of resources in community partners through a co-led enterprise; this requires additional effort and expertise that are uncommon to date.”<sup>105</sup>*

### **Time limitations, and the temporariness of engagement programmes**

76 Instances of the temporariness of engagement programmes have also been flagged as an issue in the literature. For example, America Speaks was given a grant of \$500,000 to hold three large public input sessions so that community members could contribute to an initiative that planned recovery work on affected areas. The initiative included well-known planning firms from across the US, as well as local planners. However, after the plan was completed, the majority of these planning groups left New Orleans to ‘move onto new endeavours’.<sup>106</sup> Addressing how communities might respond to issues of temporariness, another author notes: “communities must find ways to extend participation beyond the euphoric early period of recovery into the period in which more mundane, less popular, and often technical tasks must be accomplished if progress is to continue.”<sup>107</sup>

77 Temporary programmes may be particularly susceptible to time constraints. It has been noted, for example, that neighbourhood planning after Katrina – and the breadth of work that needed to be undertaken to rebuild affected areas – meant that “time-intensive, small-scale community engagement proved impossible for a project with significant time constraints and tremendous scope.” However, despite this, “citizens continued to participate in unprecedented numbers. This participation was rooted in the ideas of neighbourhood power that formed in the months immediately following Katrina.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Wells KB, Springgate BF, Lizaola E *et al.* (2013) Community engagement in disaster preparedness and recovery: a tale of two cities--Los Angeles and New Orleans *The Psychiatric clinics of North America* **36(3)**: 451-66.

<sup>106</sup> Evans P, and Lewis S (2009) A reciprocity of tears: community engagement after a disaster, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press).

<sup>107</sup> Weil F (2011) Rise of community organizations, citizen engagement, and new institutions, in *Resilience and opportunity: lessons from the US Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita*, Liu A, Anglin R, Mizelle R, and Plyer A (Editors) (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press), at page 215.

<sup>108</sup> Evans P, and Lewis S (2009) A reciprocity of tears: community engagement after a disaster, in *Civic engagement in the wake of Katrina*, Koritz A, and Sanchez G (Editors) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press).

## **Trust issues**

78 One paper highlights that trust between people affected by Katrina and those from 'the north' was an issue that had to be overcome in engaging communities effectively:

*"One of the first priorities during the engagement process was to gain the community's trust. As planners from out of state and 'up north,' we had the responsibility to overcome this barrier as early as possible to establish a credible citizen engagement process... At the Saucier [Town Hall meeting], the first citizen who arrived immediately got on his cell phone and started calling everyone he knew, telling them to get down here because there were folks from up north here and that could only be bad news."*<sup>109</sup>

79 A different approach to trust is highlighted by another article, however:

*"To the extent that engagement can be participatory, it should be, but engagement itself cannot replace the fulfillment of substantive objectives, and decisionmaking must continue in the face of opposition. Trust among people and entities is one of the most important factors in communities' resiliency. If a government is to gain and maintain its citizens' trust, it also must act effectively and, in the process, sometimes make difficult and unpopular decisions."*<sup>110</sup>

## **Lack of meaningful engagement**

80 The lack of *meaningful* engagement – or even consulting or asking community members what they want or need – is observed in several papers. For example, one paper highlights a high-budget theatrical production that took place in New Orleans after Katrina by companies and producers from outside the area who "came in and then left... acting like [this production] is the best thing for the community ever, you're really giving lip service to community engagement because there's two things that you never did: you never asked the question, what do you guys – the people who live down here – want to do?"<sup>111</sup>

81 Addressing commission members who were leading on decision-making for what would befall certain areas of the city, and the houses that remained, one community member asked: "How many people from my back yard are up there?"<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Evans-Cowley J, and Zimmerman Gough M (2009) Citizen engagement in post-Hurricane Katrina planning in Harrison County, Mississippi *Cityscape* **10(3)**.

<sup>110</sup> Nelson M, Ehrenfeucht R, and Laska S (2007) Planning, plans, and people: professional expertise, local knowledge, and governmental action in post-hurricane Katrina New Orleans *Cityscape* **9(3)**: 23-52, at page 47.

<sup>111</sup> Michna C (2013) Performance and cross-racial storytelling in post-Katrina New Orleans: interviews with John O'Neal, Carol Bebelle, and Nicholas Slie *TDR/The Drama Review* **57(1)**: 48-69, at page 63.

<sup>112</sup> World Socialist Web (14 January 2006) *City residents denounce 'Bring New Orleans Back' rebuilding plan*, available at: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2006/01/newo-j14.html>.

## **Concluding remarks**

82 This review will contribute to the Nuffield Council's report on research in global health emergencies, and particularly the report's sections on community agency and community experience following natural disasters. The report will be published in early 2020.