How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?

A story of innovation & collaboration that grew from the initial storm and the efforts that continue today.
Imalay Cintron Dones, her husband and daughter knew they were in trouble as Maria approached, as their wooden house was not built to withstand a Category 5 hurricane. Imalay’s 3-year old daughter was dependent on medical equipment to help control her severe asthma. They evacuated to her parents’ sturdy home, in possession of a small generator that could run their daughter’s medical equipment when power went down. A week later, Imalay returned home to see the damage. Open to the elements, windows and doors had been blown out and her family had lost everything, their clothes, furniture, worldly possessions, and the roof over their heads. Imalay, who has a degree in social work, was working as a security guard, but her company became insolvent after Maria and she also found herself without work. Imalay and her family moved into her parents' tiny home, and spent seven months without electricity, using their generator to survive.

Eventually the situation became untenable because of their daughter’s poor health, cramped conditions, unaffordable home repairs, and the need to find employment and put food on the table. The family moved to Philadelphia, where the mother of Imalay’s husband lived, offering them a foothold in the place they hoped to soon call home.

New to Philadelphia, Imalay, who does not speak English, began seeking help for her family and was enrolled in disaster case management services offered by one of the non-profit agencies that are part of the Greater Philadelphia Long-Term Recovery Committee (GPLTRC). By coordinating with other agencies in the GPLTRC consortium, Imalay’s case manager brought her family into a network of non-profits that helped them secure medical insurance, disaster food stamps, winter clothing, a job for her husband, school enrollment for her daughter, and English classes to help Imalay find employment.

Perhaps best of all, the GPLTRC helped Imalay and her family find permanent, affordable housing. They moved into their new apartment on July 2, 2018. Imalay’s case manager was able to get her family enrolled in a GPLTRC program, which helped individuals displaced by a Presidentially-Declared Disaster (PDD) receive priority access to public housing and provided their damage deposit and first month’s rent. Furniture and appliances provided for the family followed: a refrigerator, sofa, loveseat, living room chair, coffee table, dining table / three chairs, full and twin-size beds, two dressers, large mirror, two lamps, rug, bathroom items, and kitchen utensils. Imalay’s family is now applying for an additional 2-3 months of rental assistance through another consortium partner. Imalay describes her disaster case management experience as one characterized by empathy and compassion.
Case Statement

I. Greater Philadelphia Long-Term Recovery Committee Mission

The Mission of the Greater Philadelphia Long-Term Recovery Committee (GPLTRC) is to walk alongside families who fled Puerto Rico following the devastation left by Hurricane Maria and to support them in finding safety and security for their families. We do this by:

- **Coordinating** among those providing volunteer, financial, spiritual, physical and/or psychological support for people whose lives have been impacted by the disaster,
- **Providing leadership** to identify and address long-term needs for recovery and rehabilitation,
- **Advocating** to key policy makers and public service providers for policy changes to meet the needs of the affected people and communities,
- Fostering coordination and **pooling non-profit resources to meet evolving needs**.

II. GPLTRC’s Disaster Assistance Programs

Individual households are provided with different kinds of resources and assistance:

- **Furnishings, Appliances and Immediate Needs** - assistance with appliances & furnishings once evacuees have secured permanent housing, and with winter clothing, school supplies, food, and a wide variety of household goods and personal care items.
- **Mobility** – financial support for public transport or ride services to get to medical appointments, job interviews, or partner agencies.
- **Housing** - Assistance finding and securing affordable housing (including Section 8 Housing vouchers) and making initial security deposits and rental payments. Depending on eligibility between 1-6 months of rent can be provided.
- **Employment** – employment referral and counseling services for evacuees needing jobs and a steady income to support their transition.
- **Education** - ESL courses for evacuees that are not English speakers.
- **Disaster Case Management** – provides early intervention to disaster survivors to address immediate and transitional needs and locate relevant resources.
- **Disaster Legal Services** – evacuees are provided with a variety of legal services (restoring documentation, proof of residency, proof of homeownership, personal identification, FEMA appeals process, etc.) at no charge.
- **Disaster Emotional and Spiritual Care** – trained disaster spiritual and emotional counselors are available to meet with evacuees and can refer evacuees to local mental and behavioral health resources.
III. **GPLTRC Fundraising Goal for 2018-2019:**

While Hurricane Maria unfolded far from the City of Philadelphia, this disaster led to the unexpected arrival of large numbers evacuees from Puerto Rico in the Greater Philadelphia Area. In 2017-2018, the GPLTRC’s member agencies and partners committed more than $509,000 to help stabilize fellow citizens and hurricane evacuees.

The GPLTRC is initiating a fundraising appeal, with the goal of raising $300,000 to continue its work. This campaign will allow the GPLTRC to provide targeted assistance to evacuees who are still arriving in need of assistance and case management services, and to pay the salaries of case managers under contract with the consortium.

Local non-profits are now facing great difficulties financing continued operations in support of evacuees, who are still trying to overcome serious barriers to recovery as Maria fades from public memory and new hurricanes begin to affect other states and territories. Furthermore, evacuees continue to arrive amidst lengthy recovery delays and complications in Puerto Rico.

**Statement of Unmet Needs**

Tremendous needs remain as vulnerable families attempt to make the difficult transition from temporary housing units into permanent, sustainable solutions. In a 2017 report to Congress, HUD found that 42.4 percent of the Philadelphia metro’s very low-income renters can be referred to as facing worst case housing needs (HUD, 2017). In 2016, a Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia study found that the city had lost 20 percent of its low-cost rental units between 2000 and 2014, increasing problems surrounding a lack of affordable housing. In Philadelphia, rent for a two-bedroom apartment in August 2018 was reported to cost an average of $1,994, according to Rent Jungle. These rates are unaffordable for evacuee households, most of whom are finding blue collar jobs.

Due to this very real shortage of affordable rental housing, living in the City of Philadelphia is out of reach for many middle-class families, much less for Puerto Rican evacuee households who have fallen through the government safety net. Gaps include basic needs such as security deposits, utility deposits, move-in expenses, furnishings, appliances, and assistance accessing government benefits that are available for those unfamiliar with the language and local government system. As the GPLTRC struggles to meet these additional needs, the risk to households in transition grows.

The ongoing human service needs that storm survivors face cannot be easily measured, but GPLTRC case managers are currently seeing between 2-5 households in crisis per week as temporary housing situations with friends and relatives become untenable and families face homelessness (eviction), or as new arrivals show up from Puerto Rico. Recent shifts in the landscape include households that evacuated to Philadelphia and then returned to Puerto Rico and were not able to survive on the island, either due to lack of employment, housing, medical care, or a mixture of problems.

---

There are at least 80 displaced households in the Greater Philadelphia Area that have not received any form of assistance or case management, but the capacity to do long-term case management with all of these families is limited and funding to provide material resources is needed. There is also a dire need for long term case management for the most difficult cases, for example, families who are having trouble keeping employment, or who are facing emotional and other health problems because of the turmoil of the past year or for other reasons.

Critical support cannot be provided to these households without new funding sources to meet these needs, as most of the coalition’s joint resources have now been exhausted. The health and welfare of populations in need of longer-term case management (such as people with disabilities, seniors and children) will surely be jeopardized by the termination of the important services provided by the GPLTRC.

I. History of the GPLTRC

The Impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on Puerto Rico and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Within the span of two short weeks, Hurricane Irma (September 5, 2017) and then Hurricane Maria (September 20, 2017) devastated Puerto Rico, causing a staggering $90 billion in damages and displacing hundreds of thousands of households. To date, 1,122,490 Puerto Rican households have applied for assistance through FEMA’s Individual Assistance Program for Hurricane Maria and another 16,794 have applied for assistance for Irma.4

When flights to the mainland U.S. resumed weeks after Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rican evacuees began arriving in Pennsylvania. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 14.4% of Philadelphia’s population was Latino in 2016, and approximately 80% of this group is composed of Puerto Ricans5. Being a natural draw, many residents of the island came to stay with friends and family in Philadelphia, as post-Maria conditions on the island presented serious health risks, made it difficult for people to resume their livelihoods, and left many without shelter and exposed to the elements. The number of Puerto Rican households registered with FEMA in Pennsylvania was 1,464 on July 10, 2018, but there are many households that never registered with the agency and most estimates assume between 2,000 and 3,000 households have come to Pennsylvania as a result of the disaster. On 6/8/2018, the Pennsylvania Department of Education reported that 3,483 displaced schoolchildren from Puerto Rico were attending schools across the state, a number which exceeds FEMA’s total projection of Puerto Rican evacuees and is a more reliable predictor. Hunter College’s Center for Puerto Rican Studies projects that Hurricane Maria will bring between 6,542 and 27,051 Puerto Rican residents to Pennsylvania based on migration patterns from the prior three years (Centro, 2017). Real numbers are impossible to calculate, but it is certain that climate migration from Puerto Rico to Pennsylvania has been significant.

4 FEMA - IA Summary Data – Hurricanes Irma and Maria - 9/12/2018.
A State of Emergency in Philadelphia

Efforts to assist Puerto Rican evacuees began very quickly. On October 8, 2017, calls were pouring into the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the Red Cross, Southeastern Pennsylvania Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (SEPA VOAD), and different city officials about evacuees from Puerto Rico arriving in Philadelphia without any support network or resources. OEM opened a Disaster Assistance Service Center (DASC) with non-profit community support on October 11, 2017, in order to receive those arriving from the island in search of assistance, temporary shelter, employment, winter clothing, and other resources. Partners to this effort included government agencies, non-profits and traditional disaster relief organizations (often referred to as voluntary organizations). During the 11 weeks the DASC was open, 2,003 evacuees (897 families) registered for assistance, 353 medical referrals were made, 808 gift cards were distributed, and 94 Uber rides to and from medical appointments were arranged. Winter clothing, coats, and care packages were distributed, and case managers began providing referrals to agencies that could assist with immediate needs. Although the DASC was closed on December 22, 2017, the influx of evacuees did not cease, leaving a gap for new arrivals with nowhere to go and no idea where to seek help. The Hispanic non-profit community and Southeastern Pennsylvania VOAD stepped up to fill this void.

The Formation of a Greater Philadelphia Disaster Recovery Partnership

Non-profit organizations quickly rallied with the intention of continuing to provide services for evacuees and designed a structured approach to humanitarian assistance. Top executives from non-profit organizations in Philadelphia took part in meetings in January and February 2018 to consider the resources needed to meet ongoing evacuee needs. As a result of these efforts, the Greater Philadelphia Long-Term Recovery Committee (GPLTRC) was formed on March 16, 2018 to address the needs of survivors settling in the City of Philadelphia and the four surrounding counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery.

Long-Term Recovery Committees (LTRCs) support the recovery process of disaster survivors by bringing together contributions from many different non-profit organizations (donations, volunteers, case management, funding, etc.) in their communities. The goal is to marshal the collective resources of member agencies to address the unmet needs of clients. Services are geared towards economically and socially vulnerable populations that would be unable to recover from the effects of this disaster without assistance.

What makes the GPLTRC unique is that it is a disaster recovery coalition that was created “outside” of the disaster impact area. Traditionally, recovery committees are formed and operated by agencies and residents located in affected communities. However, the Philadelphia region was faced with the challenges of meeting basic needs of people who were unfamiliar with the area and were seeking to make Philadelphia their new home.

---

6 Philadelphia OEM, Pennsylvania Dept. of Human Services, Philadelphia Dept. of Health Medical Reserve Corps, Dept. of Behavioral Health & Intellectual Disability Services, FEMA, PEMA, Philadelphia School District, Salvation Army, Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha (APM), and members of the Hispanic non-profit consortium supporting the rebuilding and recovery of Puerto Rico called UNIDOS PA for PR.
II. **Official Points of Contact:**

The fiscal agent for the GPLTRC is the Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha (APM), which will be accepting donations on behalf of the entire consortium.

Please Contact:

- Carmen Febo-San Miguel, MD, GPLTRC Secretary, office: 215-426-3311 ext. 1002, cell: 267 259-1624, cfebo@tallerpr.org
- Will Gonzalez, Esq, GPLTRC Vice Secretary, office: 215-634-7245, cell: (215) 262-0894 will.gonzalez@ceibaphiladelphia.org
Appendix A: Disaster Assistance Outcomes and Proof of Impact

Our 17 non-profit member agencies and nearly as many non-member, GPLTRC-supporting partners have closely collaborated to create a welcoming and responsive environment for Hurricane Maria evacuees relocating to Philadelphia. Urgent needs related to food, clothing, shelter, transportation, information & referral, homelessness prevention, permanent affordable housing, employment, and education have been addressed. Multiple strategies have been utilized to leverage and pool resources.

The following provides an overview of accomplishments in key program areas:

Furnishings, Appliances and Immediate Needs:

The GPLTRC Unmet Needs Program has invested a total of $158,109 to support families arriving and in need of clothing, winter coats, school supplies, personal care items, and a variety of household goods (cleaning supplies, baby care items and clothing, diapers, care packages, Christmas presents and toys, etc.). Evacuee households placed in permanent affordable housing received furniture, mattresses, appliances, kitchen utensils, pots & pans, and household items as they settled into their new lives.

- 1,000 families received $100 gift cards to Target upon arrival from Puerto Rico
- More than 250 households received Christmas care packages and toys
- 277 care packages were provided to families arriving from Puerto Rico
- 15 refrigerators purchased for families moving into new homes or apartments
- 24 Resource Fairs were held in Philadelphia, offering evacuees the chance to access a wide-range of services in a one-stop shop, to pick-up food, clothing, and household goods, as well as to register for FEMA assistance and receive legal, employment and housing advice.

Mobility:

- The coalition invested $5,500 in SEPTA tokens and ride services for families needing transportation for medical purposes, job interviews or employment counseling, or to visit agencies offering assistance or housing

Housing:

To date, the GPLTRC has secured permanent, subsidized, affordable housing and provided rental assistance for 50 evacuee households7 displaced by Hurricane Maria through a program by our case management and housing committees. Eligibility is dependent upon a family’s income and factors such as medical needs, young children, disability status, etc. Many families that had to move out of hotel rooms paid for by FEMA when their Transitional Sheltering Assistance program ended on September 14, 2018 were eased from one solution to the other, preventing homelessness. Support, funding and material resources for this program come from a wide variety of non-profit and government8 partners. The GPLTRC Housing

---

7 46 evacuee families are in new homes / apartments or soon to be in their new home and a total of 50 will be eligible for subsidized public housing, including Section-8 housing vouchers, allowing them to sustain their family’s residency in Philadelphia.

8 FEMA, HUD, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services (OHS), Philadelphia OEM, and the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA).
Program has invested a total of $345,520 in a variety of housing options for clients, including rental assistance, public housing assistance, emergency housing and housing counseling.

- Rental payments and damage deposits from $310,000 in grant funding have been used to support affordable housing and provide damage deposits and rental assistance
- Another non-profit has provided an average of $1,848.53 in rental assistance to 15 evacuee families ($27,728 total)
- More than 140 evacuee households\(^9\) have received housing counseling from non-profits
- 13 families were provided with 64 nights in hotels (emergency housing to prevent homelessness) and one family was provided with 2 months of emergency housing ($7,792 total)

**Employment:**
- Provided information and assistance applying for Disaster Unemployment Assistance
- A member agency has hired 11 evacuees to work for their non-profit agency
- Consortium members hosted two job fairs, provided career counseling, and helped with job placement services

**Education:**
- One volunteer interpreter assisted families that could not speak English at the DASC
- ESL classes are provided by a number of member agencies and local churches
- GPLTRC and the School District of Philadelphia share resources to meet needs, including a summer camp opportunity for displaced students

**Disaster Legal Services for Evacuee Families:**
- Provided 300 evacuee households with disaster legal services
- Organized a Continuing Legal Education Program on Disaster Relief with the Philadelphia Bar Association and the Hispanic Bar Association of Pennsylvania
- Organized five Legal Clinics with the Hispanic Bar Association of PA and the Toll Public Interest Center of the University of Pennsylvania Law School

**Disaster Case Management:**
- Three full-time and one part-time case managers have been hired to provide disaster case management services for evacuees
- More than 250 households have been provided with disaster case management services

\(^9\) APM, Esperanza, Norris Square Community Alliance, and New Kensington Community Housing Agency collaborated to provide housing counseling in the non-profit sector and made connections with landlords on behalf of evacuees.
Appendix B: List of Non-Profit Members of the GPLTRC

17 Organizations are official voting members

- Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Coalition
- Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha (APM)
- Taller Puertorriqueño
- CEIBA
- PA Southeastern Conference, United Church of Christ
- Beit-El Comunidad del Reino de Dios
- Lutheran Congregational Services
- The Salvation Army
- Congreso
- Concilio
- HACE
- America Red Cross
- ACLAMO
- Casa del Carmen
- Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church
- Esperanza
- Norris Square Community Alliance

11 Participant/stakeholders non-voting organizations

- FEMA
- Mujeres en la Mo Vida
- Southeastern Pennsylvania Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (SEPA VOAD)
- Free Library of Philadelphia - Lehigh Ave. Branch
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED)
- Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services (OHS)
- Office of State Representative Emilio Vazquez
- Office of State Representative Angel Cruz
- Office of Councilwoman Maria Quiñonez Sanchez

4 Supporting Agencies (unofficial affiliation)

- Tzu Chi
- New Kensington Community Development Center
- Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency
- City of Philadelphia’s Managing Director’s Office