

All databases | Change databases

# ProQuest Central

Basic Search Advanced Search Publications Browse About

< Back to results < 2 of 81 >

## Embracing the Children of Katrina

Grace, Cathy  Todd, Laurie; Darling, Lynn  **YC Young Children** 61.6 (Nov 2006): 88-93.

- Full text
- Full text - PDF
- Abstract/Details
- References 2

### Abstract [Translate](#)

[Hide highlighting](#)

Grace et al discuss the need for resource and assistance to help **early childhood** programs in the affected areas of Hurricane Katrina recover and return to operation. The staff of **Early Childhood** Institute at Mississippi placed a few phone calls to the Mississippi State University extension service, United Methodist churches in Tupelo MI and Jackson MI, and the Children's Defense Fund Southern Regional Office in Jackson joined the Institute as initial partners in project EMBRACE **Mississippi's** Children. The project reached out to provide technical support through on-site mentoring of classroom teachers and to conduct workshops on topics specific to the needs of teachers and centers from the devastation caused by Katrina.


### Full text [Translate](#) [Turn on search term navigation](#)

On August 29, 2005, Marie Gandy, director of the Punkin Patch Child Care Center in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and 19 coworkers and friends took refuge in the child care center. She felt it was the safest place to be when Hurricane Katrina made landfall. In horror she watched the water rise in the classrooms until it was three feet deep. In the days after the waters receded, Ms. Gandy realized she was fortunate to have her family safe and her building damaged but intact. However, her anxiety mounted when, several more days after the storm, she learned that her insurance policy covered only a small part of the damage. Without help, she would be forced to close her center of 25 years.

In Escatawpa, Mississippi, days after Katrina hit, Ruby Williams, owner of Teddy Care Child Care Center, was homeless and desperately trying to reach her insurance agent and secure clothing for herself and her husband. Her thoughts were also on the children who had attended her program-where were they now and how would they and their families ever recover?

THE SEVERE SITUATIONS facing these two **early childhood** program directors exemplify the conditions faced by more than two hundred licensed programs immediately after Hurricane Katrina moved through the state of Mississippi in late August 2005. At the **Early Childhood** Institute at Mississippi State University (MSU), staff quickly determined there would be an enormous need for resources and assistance to help **early childhood** programs in the affected areas recover and return to operation. Staff placed a few phone calls to the MSU Extension Service, United Methodist churches in Tupelo and Jackson, and the Children's Defense Fund Southern Regional Office in Jackson.

These organizations joined with the Institute as initial partners in Project EMBRACE **Mississippi's** Children. EMBRACE-an acronym for **Early Childhood** Materials Bringing Rebuilding Assistance to Children's Environments-reached out to provide technical support through onsite mentoring of classroom teachers and to conduct workshops on topics specific to the needs of teachers and centers resulting from the devastation caused by Katrina. These training sessions were also planned around the types of new educational materials

[Download PDF](#)

-  Cite
-  Email
-  Print
-  More

Add to Selected items

Walden University Library

Cited by (1)  
Documents with shared references (375)

#### Related items

#### Search with indexing terms

#### Subject

- Mentoring programs
- Workshops
- Teaching methods
- Early childhood education
- School supplies

#### Location

- Mississippi

#### ebrary e-books

I'm Feeling the Blues Right Now :

that centers would be receiving (in the form of age-appropriate resource replacement kits). The sessions emphasized the use of these materials in supporting children's learning and highlighted supportive teaching strategies for this difficult time. The National Center of Rural **Early Learning** Initiatives, housed at MSU's **Early Childhood** Institute, developed a Web site and created an atlas highlighting affected areas to help focus the eyes of the world on the crisis experienced by **early childhood** programs in the affected areas in Mississippi and across the Gulf region.

A recovery plan that stresses training and resources

On its Web site, EMBRACE posted lists of basic educational resources that interested donors could provide; project staff also disseminated these lists across the state through various agency connections and other Web links. National agencies were eager to help spread the news and directed thousands to the Web site. The EMBRACE call to action communicated two objectives: to replace educational materials and furniture with high-quality, age-appropriate items and to provide teacher training on how to use materials to promote skill development and growth in all areas and within all age groups.

The First United Methodist Church in Tupelo, Mississippi, took on the task of receiving and accounting for the monetary donations and keeping records to acknowledge donors. EMBRACE project staff established an online system for donations as well as a mailing address so donors could contribute in a variety of ways. Recruiting a volunteer to manage the material donations proved to be an extremely important decision. The time spent organizing the process for inventory and dissemination of the donated items turned into a full-time paid position. As the volume of materials received grew so did the job of getting them delivered.

**Early** in the process, EMBRACE leaders determined that the church fellowship hall could not hold all of the boxes of books, puzzles, crayons, stuffed animals, learning games, blankets, and other items that were arriving from across the country. A furniture warehouse in Tupelo donated space just as truckloads of materials began to arrive. Two other Methodist churches in Jackson, two hundred miles closer to the coast than Tupelo, also volunteered to receive materials. Within six weeks of implementing EMBRACE **Mississippi's** Children, thousands of books and other materials sat on pallets being inventoried while EMBRACE project staff finalized plans to disseminate the first round of teacher resources and educational materials through a series of workshops for **early childhood** programs in the affected counties.

On October 22, 2005, more than two hundred **early childhood** teachers and program directors met in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 90 miles north of the Gulf Coast. The training, hosted by the Hattiesburg Chapter of the Mississippi **Early Childhood** Association, the Children's Defense Fund, and the EMBRACE team, brought individuals together for the first of several recovery information and workshop sessions to reconnect with colleagues displaced by the storm and to receive donated materials from contributing organizations and companies (Reading Is Fundamental, WGBH, Sesame Workshop, Teaching Strategies, First Book, Gryphon House, Kaplan **Early Learning** Company, and Simsbury United Methodist Church in Connecticut) and the EMBRACE warehouse.



MSU **Early Childhood** Institute staff had conducted on-site assessments of centers immediately following Katrina to determine property damage and program needs; these assessments helped to define the training content. Representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state child care licensing body shared information on the health and safety of the children attending programs in Katrina-affected areas. The workshop ended with a session on activities to promote the use of replacement materials on language and literacy development that were provided at the training. Since the first session, five more workshops have been held and more are being planned.

In addition to group training, MSU **Early Childhood** Institute staff continue to give programs on-site technical assistance, using the environment rating scales developed by Harms, Clifford, and Cryer (2005; 2006) to monitor classroom setup and teaching strategies. Also, the



Blues  
Tourism in  
the  
Mississippi  
Delta



2. Political  
Culture of  
Secession  
Mississippi :  
Masculinity,  
Honor, and  
the...



3. Mississippi  
in the Civil War :  
The Home  
Front

Mississippi Department of Human Services, Office for Children and Youth, has awarded \$8 million in federal funds to the Institute for distribution to child care programs to restore playground equipment, ground coverings, awnings, and fencing.

#### The Importance off teamwork

As with anyone implementing a new strategy, those working on these relief efforts had to trust one another, assess their strengths and weaknesses, reset their positions as jobs changed, and keep focused on the overall objectives. The key EMBRACE team members had worked together in the past and mobilized others within a matter of hours to take on assignments. MSU Extension Service, with agents in all counties across the state, joined with Child Care Resource and Referral Agency staff from northeast Mississippi to organize and provide group training. Staff at the MSU **Early Childhood** Institute coordinated the warehouse operations, initiated fund-raising, secured national partners, and developed and implemented ongoing public awareness strategies. The involvement of the faith-based groups was in part due to an EMBRACE staff member's affiliation with the United Methodist denomination. The United Methodist church is a connectional church; congregations often help Methodist churches in other parts of a state or in the country. This connection allowed others not necessarily involved in **early childhood** education to express support and to act on behalf of the young children affected by the storm.

Moving hundreds of boxes of donated materials from the EMBRACE warehouse to training sites required dozens of volunteers, including individuals in training to be truck drivers. Storage space in the Gulf Coast area is limited due to damage to many buildings; **early childhood** educators or other volunteers had to be prepared to unload materials from trucks at training sites and then find places to store the materials. Because many coastal residents lost their own vehicles to flood waters, staff from different **early childhood** programs often teamed up to receive and transport the materials. The spirit of community among child care program directors has never been as strong as it is now.

#### Corporate champions

As Marie Gandy and Ruby Williams struggled with insurance adjusters and unpaid bills, Steve Renfroe, Manager of Policy, Government and Public Affairs for Chevron in Mississippi was formulating a plan. Pascagoula is home to Chevron's largest U.S. oil refinery. Consequently, the corporation issued a mandate to assist the recovery effort in any way feasible. Using corporate resources and manpower, Chevron supported the full restoration and basic refurbishing of 39 **early childhood** programs in Pascagoula and Jackson County. Within three months of Katrina's landfall, both Ms. Gandy and Mrs. Williams reopened their centers. With help from Chevron and other sources, they are debt free. Chevron recently announced that it will donate \$2 million to continue the rebuilding of child care centers in **Mississippi's** coastal areas.

Many **early childhood** corporations have been generous in giving **early** learning materials to recovering programs. For example, Kaplan **Early** Learning Company donated hundreds of thousands of dollars of materials to EMBRACE and worked diligently with Chevron to equip the programs in Jackson County. Other companies offered discounts and free shipping.

#### Foundation funding provides support for all coastal counties

Foundations have been generous to the **early childhood** programs in **Mississippi's** coastal counties. Several anonymous foundations are funding the refurbishing of **early childhood** programs and greatly enhancing the donations of educational materials made to EMBRACE by individuals and groups. The Hurricane Andrew **Early Childhood** Relief Fund, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Greater Jackson Foundation, Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi, and Save the Children also gave support. Their willingness to support EMBRACE is due, in part, to its clearly outlined plan and process for assisting the coastal **early childhood** programs not only in recovering from Katrina's landfall but also in becoming even better programs. Communicating EMBRACE's goals and objectives and how funds would be allocated and accounted for has been a successful strategy in working with foundation directors.

#### Lessons learned: Planning for disasters

The magnitude of the devastation left by Katrina has called for extraordinary recovery measures and stressed all national and local systems normally used to address emergencies. One of the most important lessons we are learning is that reliable information is critical to any recovery effort.

Centers need to routinely update classroom inventories and child and family information and store this data at multiple sites. This can result in a faster response and recovery plan. Having documented the type and quantity of items room-by-room makes it much easier to file an insurance report or complete a request from an interested funder. After Katrina, children and families were displaced for weeks and their situation unknown. Having on file the name and contact information for a friend or relative in another city or state for each family can help programs connect with child care families when communications systems are restored.



If a program leases space, up-front discussions with the property owner can save time and reduce problems in the event of a disaster. Issues include designating responsibility for insuring the contents versus the building itself and establishing a process by which an owner informs the center director of any rent increase in a timely fashion. An owner might seek a higher rent after a disaster, whether the building is damaged or not. In hard-hit communities, where many buildings are damaged, a building in good condition can be a more valuable property than it was before the storm.

Owners of buildings that house **early childhood** programs have many more things to consider when conducting an emergency recovery assessment and implementing the recovery process. Building owners or those leasing space can use the "Child Care Center Checklist to Guide Emergency Response and Recovery Efforts" to prepare for potential disasters. Some facilities are located in areas where disasters are more likely to happen, but fires can occur in any location and without as much warning as was afforded the victims of Katrina. Everyone needs to be prepared.

The main lesson learned by EMBRACE project staff is the importance of developing and implementing a recovery plan. The need to prepare before a crisis is now evident for many **early childhood** program directors. Every day is a new challenge with a new group of people to contact for answers. Making up the plan as recovery takes place may be necessary in this instance but should be avoided in the future. Keeping lists of all emergency resource agencies, training staff on how to interact with children following a tragedy such as Katrina, and keeping current with all emergency preparedness and recovery information from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Red Cross, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will greatly speed the recovery process.

## Conclusion

The lessons of human kindness and resiliency are what fuel a project's efforts. Days after Katrina struck, families were digging out and making room for others whose homes had even greater damage. Life continues, but at times it is difficult to get past the moment.

The outpouring of support for the young children in Mississippi has never been more evident than in the notes and pictures sent by children who participated in the book and learning material drives across the country. Wishes for happy days and sunny skies were conveyed in many of the hand-painted and drawn illustrations accompanying boxes of books and stuffed animals. Classroom teachers from colleges across the country, preschools as far away as Canada, and small rural schools donated time and resources to make sure **Mississippi's** children of Katrina are being embraced through one resource after another.

## Sidebar

Recruiting a volunteer to manage the material donations proved to be an extremely important decision.

## Sidebar

EMBRACE communicated two objectives: to replace educational materials and furniture with high-quality, age-appropriate items and to provide teacher training.

**Sidebar**

On-site assessments of centers immediately following Katrina . . . helped to define the training content.

Resources on Disaster Preparedness and Recovery

Web site

Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)-[www.eden.lsu.edu/About.aspx](http://www.eden.lsu.edu/About.aspx).

Articles and reports

Heroman, C., & J. Bilmes. 2005. Helping children rebound from Katrina and Rita: Teaching strategies for preschool teachers. Online: [www.TeachingStrategies.com/content/pageDocs/Katrina\\_1005\\_final\\_Web.pdf](http://www.TeachingStrategies.com/content/pageDocs/Katrina_1005_final_Web.pdf).

Lazarus, P.J., S.R. Jimerson, & S.E. Brock. 2003. Helping children after a natural disaster: Information for parents and teachers. Online: [www.nasponline.org/NEAT/natural\\_disaster\\_ho.html](http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/natural_disaster_ho.html).

Mercuri, A., & H.L. Angelique. 2004. Children's responses to natural, technological, & na-tech disasters. *Community Mental Health Journal* 40 (2): 167-75.

Mississippi State University **Early Childhood** Institute. 2006. After Katrina: Rebuilding **Mississippi's early childhood infrastructure**: The first six months. Mississippi State University **Early Childhood** Report No. 1. Mississippi State, MS: Author. Online: <http://earlychildhood.msstate.edu/katrinareport/index.htm>.

NAEYC. 2005. Helping young children after a disaster. Online: [www.naeyc.org/families/disaster.asp](http://www.naeyc.org/families/disaster.asp).

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. 2006. Is child care ready? A disaster planning guide for child care resource and referral agencies. Online: [www.naccrra.org/disaster/docs/Disaster\\_Guide\\_MECH.pdf](http://www.naccrra.org/disaster/docs/Disaster_Guide_MECH.pdf).

National Child Care Information Center. Hurricane recovery, disaster relief, and emergency preparedness. Online: [www.nccic.org/emergency/index.cfm](http://www.nccic.org/emergency/index.cfm). And Emergency preparedness for child care programs. Online: [www.nccic.org/poptopics/disasterprep.pdf](http://www.nccic.org/poptopics/disasterprep.pdf).

Save the Children. Expecting the unexpected: Building partnerships and plans to help children cope with crises. Online: [www.savethechildren.org/technical/us/STC\\_Crisis\\_Final2.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org/technical/us/STC_Crisis_Final2.pdf).

Shelby, J.S., & M.G. Tredinnick. 1995. Crisis intervention with survivors of natural disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Andrew. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 73: 491-505.

Swenson, C.C., C.F. Saylor, M.P. Powell, S.J. Stokes, K.Y. Foster, & R.W. Belter. 1996. Impact of a natural disaster on preschool children: Adjustment 14 months after a hurricane. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 66: 122-30.

**Sidebar**

Centers need to routinely update classroom inventories and child and family information and store this data at multiple sites.

**Sidebar**

Having the contact information of friends or relatives in other cities or states for each family can help when communications systems are restored.

**Sidebar**

Child Care Center Checklist to Guide Emergency Response and Recovery Efforts

\* Paint the street number on the curb to assist insurance adjusters and emergency personnel in finding the property.

\* Post the phone numbers of insurance agencies in several locations in the center and at another accessible location.

\* Store multiple copies of the following items in fireproof boxes and/or a safety deposit box in different locations:

\_\_\_ the deed to the property and copies of insurance policies on the property and the center's contents

\_\_\_ state child care license and any other program certificates

\_\_\_ contact information on program staff and children's records

\_\_\_ material and furniture inventories organized by room

\_\_\_ the family handbook and all other program policies

\_\_\_ registration, titles, and insurance policies on cars and/or vans owned by the center

\_\_\_ warranties or other papers pertaining to equipment owned by the center

## References

### References

Harms, T., R.M. Clifford, & D. Cryer. 2005. **Early Childhood** Environment Rating Scale. Rev. ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harms, T., D. Cryer, & R.M. Clifford. 2006. Infant/toddler Environment Rating Scale. Rev. ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

## AuthorAffiliation

Cathy Grace, EdD, is professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the College of Education and director of the **Early Childhood** Institute at Mississippi State University (MSU). She also serves as the director of the National Center for Rural **Early Childhood** Learning Initiatives. Grace spearheaded a post-Katrina multimillion-dollar effort to rebuild **early childhood** programs in Mississippi.

Laurie Todd, MEd, serves as the director of state initiatives for the **Early Childhood** Institute at MSU. She is responsible for administering several grant-funded research projects including hurricane restoration and recovery work to assist **early childhood** programs.

Lynn Darling, PhD, serves as coordinator of Project EMBRACE. She has been instrumental in organizing materials and resource kits to be distributed to hurricane-affected child care centers.

Photos courtesy of the authors.

Copyright National Association for the Education of Young Children Nov 2006

Walden University Library

[Contact Us](#) [Terms and Conditions](#) [Accessibility](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Cookie Policy](#)

Copyright © 2016 ProQuest LLC.