

Testimony of
Diana Rothe-Smith
Executive Director
National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
Hearing: Disaster Case Management: Developing a Comprehensive National Program Focused
on Outcomes
December 2, 2009 2:30 PM
Room 342 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Disaster Case Management and the role of voluntary agencies.

My name is Diana Rothe-Smith and I am the executive director with National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. National VOAD, as we are more commonly known, is made up of the 49 largest disaster focused nonprofit organizations in the country. From the American Red Cross to Catholic Charities and United Jewish Communities—from the Salvation Army to Feeding America and Habitat for Humanity—our member organizations are the driving force behind disaster response, relief and recovery in this country. There are 49 national nonprofit members, 55 State and Territory VOADs and hundreds of local and community VOADs throughout the United States.

Historically, voluntary agencies have partnered with survivors through their recovery, and have done so successfully without standardization. In recent years, however, catastrophic disasters, funding for case management, and emerging organizations providing long term recovery services have necessitated us to look anew at how we define and implement disaster case management. Recognizing that Disaster Case Management is most effective when implemented by local partners as part of a coordinated effort for community recovery, the Disaster Case Management Committee offers these Standards as guidance to support Disaster Case Management delivery systems locally. These Draft Standards, as they are submitted into the record, are not intended to replace organizational policies, but may be useful in policy development.

I want to tell you today about disaster case managers. Disaster case managers are the reason why recovery happens in this country. If my family and I have been through a natural disaster, I sit down with a case manager and she becomes my companion on the road to recovery. You see, before we even meet, my case manager spends her time learning the ins and outs of every resource available to people in my area. And because they are normally hired from within the community itself, disaster case managers can do so by drawing on their own existing networks and contacts. This way, when I sit down and tell my case manager about what it will take for our family to be recovered, the wheels start turning about what resources and systems I might be eligible to receive. Those resources may include support for immediate basic needs as well as construction materials. But more importantly, the case manager can link me with community

services and volunteer labor, and can help me navigate through the maze of governmental programs. Even in the midst of my confusion and hardship, trying to put my life back together, my case manager is my resource maven, helping me to plan for filling in the missing pieces of my recovery. **The disaster case manager is the most important resource for many survivors!**

When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita happened, several members of National VOAD participated in a first-of-its-kind case management program. Katrina Aid Today put case managers in jobs not only along the Gulf Coast but around the country, in all of the places where evacuees had been re-settled. This program was initially funded by international donations through FEMA which were then matched with additional nonprofit contributions. Katrina Aid Today was the most comprehensive, collaborative national disaster case management program in the history of the United States. Because of its long history providing disaster case management, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) was chosen as the lead agency for nine partnering faith-based and voluntary organizations. Katrina Aid Today disaster case managers were hired by voluntary organizations not only along the Gulf Coast but around the country - in nearly all of the places where evacuees had been dispersed.

Let me tell you about one partner in particular. Lutheran Disaster Response was given \$7 million as one of the consortium members, and per the various agreements, it matched that with \$7 million of their own donor contributions. Then, the case managers hired with those dollars found over \$29 million worth of resources for their clients. You see, Lutheran Disaster Response could have said, "Ok, we have \$14 million and 11,000 clients... let's divide it up evenly and cut everyone a check." Instead, they found valuable ways to help their clients recover, and more than doubled their resources in the process. That's what I call a return on investment, and that's the miracle of disaster case management. It is important to highlight that the only tax dollars used were for linking survivors and families to FEMA grants, but the real value added is almost immeasurable. As part of this testimony, I submit the Katrina Aid Today Final Report.

Unfortunately, in the time since Katrina, our country has entered into a new reality. Non-profit groups are hurting as a down economy means a dip in contributions. An increase in recent disasters also means fewer resources to go around. 2008 was one of the most active disaster years on record. This means that the resources that were once available for clients have decreased, or even dried up all together. And because we know that disasters disproportionately impact communities that were already hurting, we are working in communities that were not well-resourced to begin with. For this reason, survivors of Hurricane Ike, or the vast flooding in the Midwest this past year, did not see the type of return on investment that was seen from Katrina Aid Today. These communities and the nonprofit partners that comprised the local long term recovery groups are making incredible strides to meet the needs of their clients, despite these increasing hurdles. However many of them lack the public/private partnership that made Katrina Aid Today such an overwhelming success.

Let me give you an example: In a recent meeting of the National VOAD Board of Directors, FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate talked about putting blue tarps on the roofs of homes impacted by hurricanes in Florida. When there were several thousand homes to be tarped, it made the most sense to work through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who can leverage dollars for major contracts and do the work professionally and efficiently. However, when there

were several hundred homes, Administrator Fugate said that he relied then on the voluntary agencies, whose volunteers could tarp all of the roofs in the time it would take the Army Corps to put out a call for contract bids, with the same professionalism and dedication—and all for only the cost of the tarps themselves.

And this is part of the issue. While case managers are the backbone of recovery, case management only works if there are supplies and resources to fulfill the needs of the clients. And there is only so much government systems can do to fill these resources. Much of the work is filled by the voluntary agencies and the volunteer labor and donated dollars they bring with them. Again we find the public/ private partnership invaluable.

This past spring, the Yukon River flooded in Alaska. A combination of freezing flood waters and huge ice boulders wiped out several dozen villages along its banks. The conditions for recovery were extreme—with barge or plane the only mode of transport for all but one of the communities, and a window of 10 weeks for all repairs and rebuilds to be completed before the winter settled in. Through an extremely unique and collaborative partnership between local community members, Alaska based long term recovery groups and faith based organizations, national voluntary agencies, the State of Alaska and FEMA, the survivors were able to be in their new or repaired homes by the middle of September. The financial picture is clear—with FEMA providing travel for the volunteers and transport for the supplies as well as many of the supplies themselves, and the national voluntary agencies providing labor, housing, and additional financial resources. Even more, these families were able to stay in their local communities. They did not need to be housed hundreds of miles away in Fairbanks for several months. They could continue to maintain their local customs and economy.

My point is this -- the instinct to create further levels of bureaucracy is rarely appropriate given the power of voluntary agencies to complete the work faster, cheaper, and with a keener sense of the community's underlying needs. The more resources that find their way to these organizations, and without having to pass several layers of red tape, the more real work can happen for the people who need it.

If there are no questions, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for your time today.

Key Points:

Voluntary organizations have provided disaster case management in declared and undeclared disaster for years.

Voluntary organizations pool their services as well as their financial, material, and human resources to synergize the recovery of the individuals and families within a community.

These resources include **volunteers** who provide labor for construction, case management, volunteer coordination, and others.

Katrina Aid Today demonstrated the capacity of voluntary organizations to work collaboratively in a public/private partnership to implement a model national disaster case management program following a catastrophic disaster.

Social services, mental health, public health, children's services, employment and re-training programs, financial planning services – all of these on-going services or other community-specific resources could be resourced by federal funding following catastrophic disasters.

These services are different than DCM. Disaster Case Management is distinct from social services.

- DCM utilizes referrals to these community services so focus can continually be on the unique disaster recovery needs of survivors.
- DCM is not an entitlement program. Survivors may or may not choose to participate.
- DCM is holistic in nature
- DCM is time-limited
- DCM is client focused (not program-focused). A Disaster Case Manager is a person-to-person helper and advocate