

Lee County Recovery Task Force Community Resilience Workshop

Session 3 – Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM – 4:30 PM | JUNE 8, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | HEALTHCARE

Call to Order

On June 8, 2023, the Workshop facilitators, Tessa LeSage and Lee Mayfield, convened the Community Resilience Workshop: Healthcare at 2:34 PM with the following panelists present:

- Roger Mercado
- Sharmine Lopez
- Linda Hafner
- Julie Ferguson
- Arielle Ghanem
- Dr. Shadreka McIntosh
- Celeste Fournier
- Paul DiCicco
- Dawn Belamarich
- Stacey Cook
- Dr. Tom Felke
- Sharmaine Lopez

The following Branch members were present:

- Chris Simoneau
- Angela Katz
- Janel Trull
- Lee Ford
- Dan O'Berski
- Maria Espinoza
- Marco Villalobos
- Jenn Hagen

- Troy Churchill
- Therese Everly

Workshop Topic Discussion

Mr. Mayfield asked what a blank slate would look like to better support vulnerable populations. The panelists stated the following:

- Increased funding;
- De-stigmatization of/with vulnerable populations;
- Normalizing disorders to increase resources and opportunities;
- Creating normalcy and understanding to open the door for resources;
- Having trusted connections and friendships in the community to partner with and offer services;
- Gathering a better understanding of the capacity available;
- Piloting small things that can be assessed pre- and post-storms; and
- Asset mapping.

Mr. O'Berski asked how to overcome stigma. Ms. Cook stated that it would include providing as much education as possible. This could also be done by taking advantage of the media (i.e., television, magazine, newspaper, etc.). Additionally, by involving people in the community who might be in leadership positions that can begin to participate in the narrative. Ms. Cook suggested looking into the business environment to see who can help educate and tell the story behind it. This includes helping others understand how this impacts not just the homeless, but the community, business, family, and healthcare communities. She urged leaders to step up and fan the message out.

Mr. Mayfield asked how to better support the elderly populations during disasters and on regular days.

Ms. Everly stated that this could include bringing care to where people live. Ms. McIntosh stated that people go to areas they feel trusted, especially in vulnerable communities. She stated the importance of making sure resources are available for practitioners.

Branch members and facilitators asked what the gaps and challenges were. The answers were as followed:

- Not knowing the needs. Having a needs assessment would help determine what needs are being missed;

- Having a policy that advocates for the right types of programs for elderly adults throughout the year, not just after a disaster; and
- Not having a coordinated list of resources.

Ms. LeSage suggested access mapping where anyone can access the resources that are available.

Ms. Hafner said there is currently a database, but there is an effort in gathering and maintaining the list. She said that community houses have been trusted in the community and have multiple resource providers.

Ms. Lopez stated that there is a partnership between Humana Health Horizons in Florida and the Alzheimer's Association statewide that holds community forums with seniors, caregivers, and community partners, to discuss ways to better serve seniors through awareness, diagnosis, and to identify better ways to serve those with dementia and Alzheimer's. She stated that her organization is working with Area on Aging and the United Way to actively look at policies and community needs assessments as they are coming up. She highlighted the importance of being a part of discussions to find out how to fulfill the needs in Southwest Florida.

Ms. Roberts stated that vulnerable populations are less likely to evacuate or mobilize during an emergency. There is a planning need for transportation hubs that address public transportation during emergencies. She stated that some are already in place but need to be expanded to incorporate mobility issues. For instance, vulnerable populations that evacuate to shelters often might have a higher need for animal/pet support, so the planning of future shelters needs to incorporate those considerations during the infrastructure planning. Additionally, environmental infrastructure will benefit the vulnerable populations; planting more trees in areas will provide shade and relief during power outages that will leave those populations more vulnerable, same for access to potable water.

Mr. Mayfield asked for best practices to outreach for those who may not have a seat at the table.

Mr. Ford stated people on the ground who participate with communities to break the ice is a good solution. This would include getting the state government involved in the ask for resources and other needs.

The facilitators asked for best practices around sheltering vulnerable populations and how to better support them. The answers were as followed:

- Keeping residents local;
- Relying less on schools and hospitals;
- Ensuring facilities are built or hardened to accommodate the needs;
- Finding partnerships to provide healthcare needs to the shelters;
- Having a list of facilities that are good alternatives for local people to evacuate to; and
- Limiting evacuations just to people who need to leave.

Ms. LeSage asked if there was an initiative or policy change that could be made. The participants responded as follows:

- Survey the needs of those that are forced to evacuate;
- Build resources to the need;
- Special needs transportation to a shelter;
- Looking at building codes to identify a facility as a shelter;
- Identifying special needs shelter qualifications;
- Pairing people that are already serving vulnerable populations with shelters;
- Utilizing people that already work boots on the ground;
- Partnering with nonprofits and identifying where the populations [at risk] should go;
- Revisiting the vernacular of what the term special needs includes;
- Looking at lessons learned for agencies;
- Evacuating elderly [vulnerable populations] sooner;
- Evaluating evacuation plans prior to a hurricane; and
- Educating the public about their options prior to a hurricane.

Ms. Wardein asked if there was an effort to best manage evacuation for vulnerable populations. She asked what solutions exist from the Department of Health or emergency management for capturing that and creating a more intentional plan and better support each other.

Mr. Mayfield cautioned against limiting definitions to statute, rather, revisit terms and make recommendations.

Mr. Ford stated that policy should be made so new infrastructure could be built to code to make buildings hurricane relief or shelter. Additionally, a way to incentivize people or businesses to adhere to the suggested policy.

Mr. Cambareri stated that building code improvements for hurricane-proofing buildings that house the elderly and vulnerable could be a solution. This could include public-private partnerships for the storage of needs. For example, an airport hangar.

Mr. Churchill asked what the actual needs around behavioral and mental health were, and what are some solutions. The suggestions were as followed:

- Inventorying the available resources;
- Educating the community and other stakeholders on what mental and behavioral health means;
- Addressing affordability and access;
- Embedding more people with mental health training;
- Have access to assistance during “blue-sky days” to decrease stress;
- Identify, evaluate, and treat patients as soon as possible;
- Consider funding upstream to prevent issues;
- Outreach for the vulnerable populations;
- Having a one-stop-shop that is hardened and has resources;
- Taking services to where people are (i.e., mobile services), and collaborating with providers;
- Bring existing resources and subject matter experts to socialize and break stigmas; and
- Having routine conversations to talk about changes and needs.

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

Yamilet Santana Reyes, a representative from the Red Cross, stated that there is a lot of work to do, but there are people to do it. She stated that there is a need for more boots-on-the-ground before a disaster, and a need to identify who the vulnerable populations are.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage and Mr. Mayfield thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 4:27 PM on June 8, 2023.