

NEWS

VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.

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A consortium of community organizations is banding together to bring relief to residents affected by Hurricane Sandy. Called the Long Term Recovery Committee (LTRC), the group is sponsored by the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, a private nonprofit organization located in Hackensack which, among other programs, coordinates the Bergen County VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster).

Comprised of civic, faith-based, nonprofit and governmental organizations, the VOAD was formed in 1999 after the unprecedented flooding caused by tropical Storm Floyd. Each of the participating organizations has expertise and resources that can potentially help in the recovery effort following a disaster. The group has been meeting regularly since October 29, when Hurricane Sandy roared through the region leaving devastation in its wake.

In the immediate aftermath, numerous VOAD-member organizations stepped up to help with relief efforts, including food, clothing, blankets and cleaning supplies. Others came from near and far to “muck-out” homes and, hopefully, prevent development of toxic mold.

“The recovery process is painfully slow,” says Janet Sharma, executive director of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County and chair of the Long Term Recovery Committee. “Efforts following the 2005 Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Gulf Coast
~~...is there a statement that is missing here?continue to this day.~~ FEMA, private insurance, the national flood insurance program, loans from the Small Business Administration and other resources need to be settled before the Long Term Recovery effort mobilize. Otherwise, benefits to which homeowners could be eligible may be jeopardized.”

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The process is frustrating for those who need help and for those who want to help them, continues Ms. Sharma. “But things are falling into place.”

Among current relief efforts of LTRC member are:

- nj211.org is proving information and referral to resources
- The Compassion Fund of Bergen County’s United Way is offering emergency funds to essentials
- Moonachie-Little Ferry Relief Fund (MLFRF) has received \$100,000 from the Robin Hood Relief Fund to remove old and install new insulation in mobile home communities in Moonachie
- The Volunteer Center is sponsoring two teams of Americorps members who are insulating the bottom of mobile homes flooded during the storm.
- Rebuilding Together is spearheading efforts to fix private homes as well as the Little Ferry volunteer fire houses
- Habitat for Humanity Bergen County will be rebuilding neighborhoods
- Meals for young, eager and hunger teams of Americorps members are being provided by community groups such as congregations from the Bergen County Council of Churches and the Jewish Federation, as well as local girl scout troops.
- Several organizations are helping with assessments of needs: Volunteer Center, Bergen County’s United Way, Jewish Family Services, MLFRF, Council of Churches, Occupy Sandy, N.J. Vineyard Church
- Numerous organizations are drawing on access to resources – money and donated goods – to meet needs
- N.J. Hope and Healing and other organizations are providing greatly needed emotional and spiritual support
- Several organizations are enlisting volunteers to help in the rebuilding effort. Others are developing ways to house and provide meals for volunteers expected to descend in the spring and summer.

In addition, officials and agencies at the municipal, county, state and federal level are fully supportive of the efforts of the LTRC.

“The only thing that’s holding us back at this point is money to do the work,” says Ms. Sharma. “We need funds to coordinate the assessment and to prioritize needs,

especially in Little Ferry and Moonachie. We need funds for reconstruction materials and for contractors to do the work, especially those willing to train and work with the legions of volunteers eager to help.”

The LTRC is seeking grants from the major relief funds that have been established.

For further information, to donate or to volunteer, contact the Volunteer Center at 201-489-9454 or info@bergenvolunteers.org.