

Appendix G:

Mississippi Department of Human Services

Division of Family and Children's Services

Disaster Preparedness Plan

Disaster Preparedness Plan

The mission of the Mississippi Department of Human Services is to provide services for people in need by optimizing all available resources to sustain the family unit and to encourage traditional family values thereby promoting self-sufficiency and personal responsibility for all Mississippians. The Division of Family and Children's Services is to protect vulnerable children from abuse, neglect and exploitation; to support family preservation and community living and to prevent family violence and disruption.

Disasters can affect the way our agency operates and the services we provide for children and their families. This plan, while specific to Mississippi, may be expanded and impacted by State and Federal mandates during disasters that have wide-reaching implications which may be beyond our standard scope of operations. The purpose for this plan is to establish certain operational procedures and guidelines which will facilitate the execution of the Division of Family and Children's Services staff's mission-essential functions during various emergency situations to include: Natural disasters, accidents, technological emergencies and military or terrorist related incidents.

The State of Mississippi is certainly no stranger to natural disaster, as witnessed by the recent devastation in the wake of Hurricane Katrina but, we must also be mindful of other possibilities when planning a workable response. The most common natural disasters that afflict our state include: Hurricanes, Tropical Storms, Severe Electrical Storms, Tornadoes, High Winds, Flash Flooding, and Winter Storms. Other disasters are man made, such as: Hazardous Material incidents (chemical, biological, radiological), Technological (electrical power blackouts, computer system and network disruptions, electronic equipment breakdown) and Terrorist Attacks.

In the event of a disaster, the Division Director is in charge of the execution of the Disaster Plan. Alternates include, Deputy Director, Director of Field Operations, and Unit Directors as designated by the Division Director.

Disaster Impact

In this plan, we will examine three (3) levels of disaster and subsequent plans for each. In every instance, proper Chain-Of-Command will be followed at all times, e.g. reporting to the Regional Director who will in turn report to the Division Director or his/her designee.

Minor Disaster, Level 1

A minor disaster can be defined as a disaster that can be handled locally on a County level and carries no need for a formal disaster declaration. This type of incident has a very limited "strike zone" with a limited number of victims who can be cared for by nearby medical facilities.

The responsibilities of the county level leads and supervisor for minor disasters include the following:

- Activate the plan for county immediately.
- Assess the need to alter any non essential job functions to accommodate the essential functions of intake, investigations, and family preservation services and foster care.
- Maintain ongoing communication with regional and state office leadership as necessary.

Major Disaster, Level 2

A major disaster can be defined as a disaster that has a broader “strike zone”, a moderate number of victims, but still within a well-defined geographical area. This type disaster will require State and Federal assistance.

Catastrophic Disaster, Level 3

A catastrophic disaster can be defined as a disaster that has wide-spread catastrophic damage with a large number of victims from all economic strata. Normally, a Presidential disaster Declaration often accompanies this type of disaster. Catastrophic disasters will require massive State and Federal assistance. Major and Catastrophic Disasters will be activated by DFCS Division Director or his/her designee at the earliest possible time before and after the disaster event

In the event of a Level 2 and Level 3 disaster, the responsibilities of the Division Director or his/her designee in a disaster include the following:

- To notify the affected counties as quickly as possible prior to the disaster or as soon as possible thereafter to initiate the plan. This will be accomplished through the agency website, the telephone tree (each Direct Service Worker, ASWS and RD has been provided with an agency cell phone), and the public media.
- Assess any special needs not anticipated in the plan and take action to address them.
- Assess any additional staff needs.
- Assign any special staff that might be required to help during the disaster period and adjust their regular workload as needed.
- If shelters will be needed ensure staff are aware of their locations.

For all levels of disasters the Division of Family and Children's Services Staff is expected to follow the guidelines as outlined below.

DFCS Staff Personal Responsibilities

Prior Preparation

Develop a family emergency plan.

In case family members are separated from one another during a disaster (parents at work, children in school or day care), have a plan for getting back together.

Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "Family Contact". After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance than it is locally. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address and telephone number of the contact person.

- Maintain a supply of water and non-perishable food (can opener if canned items are taken).
- Keep handy a change of clothes, battery operated radio, flashlights, extra batteries, and First Aid Kit.
- Fill your vehicle with a full tank of gas.
- Maintain an adequate supply of medication.

When forewarning is available, staff should follow the directives of local public safety authorities concerning evacuation.

Notify your supervisor if leaving the area and furnish contact information, along with anticipated return date.

In the event that your own supervisor is unreachable, the statewide Adoption line 1-800-821-9157 will serve as a centralized telephone number for staff to report activities and receive information from the Division.

Following a disaster

Staff should follow the directives of local public safety authorities regarding a return to the affected area.

Notify your supervisor if away from work for more than two (2) working days.

If your supervisor is unreachable, contact the statewide Adoption line at 1-800-821-9157 to report your current circumstances and anticipated return to work.

Staff will be approved for use of Administrative Leave as determined by the Executive Director depending on the magnitude of the disaster. Extended Leave with pay or without pay will be granted on a case-by-case basis depending on the extent of the damage to the general area, individual circumstances and directives from the local authorities. Decisions regarding extended leave will be made by the Division Director or his/her designee.

DFCS Staff Professional Responsibilities

Prior Preparation

- Maintain an out-of-state emergency contact for each resource family. This should be updated annually.
- Maintain up-to-date files on all clients through MACWIS.
- Regional Directors and Area Social Work Supervisors will be responsible for maintaining a current list of resource families with current placements along with the names of children placed in those homes. The list should be kept with the Regional Director and Area Social Work Supervisors and updated quarterly. State office will also maintain a list of resource families and current placements.
- Each county will develop a disaster team and plan. Each county will train county staff on the disaster plan and participate in drills. This plan will be updated annually.
- State office and each county office will prepare a disaster supply kit that could include:
 - Laptop computer with extra batteries (if available)
 - Phone lists, address book, with employees and management contact information.
 - Employee lists
 - Cell phones
 - Radios with extra batteries
 - Disaster plan
 - Maps, driving directions to alternate facilities
 - Flashlights, lanterns, with extra batteries
 - First aid kit
 - Car chargers for laptop and cell phone
 - Resource Home Contacts
 - Information for each foster child to include: Full name, Social security number, Medicaid number, medical information, names and doses of medication, child's parent's names, addresses, and phone numbers and caseworker's name and phone number.
- Electronic equipment located on the floor needs to be placed on desks to avoid water damage. Unplug all electronic devices and network cables from wall outlets and place on top of desks to prevent shortages.

MDHS performs a daily backup of MACWIS onto multiple tape media. The data tapes are used for restore purposes. Data stored on tape media are retained for over four months. MACWIS users in the remote counties are connected back to the state office via frame relay. In the event one of the county offices goes down, users in the local office can immediately relocate to a nearby county. MACWIS may also be accessed remotely via any web-enabled device, providing access to the user from any remote location with Internet access including wireless data cards.

All copiers in State and county offices are under a lease agreement. Currently, as the leases expire, the copiers are being replaced with copiers with scanning capability; thus, enabling vital records to be scanned and stored in MACWIS. This will allow universal access of these records in the event of a disaster.

When forewarning is available

- Regional Directors and Area Social Work Supervisors should maintain a list of resource families currently with placements along with the names of children placed in those homes. The list should be kept with the Regional Director and Area Social Work Supervisors and updated quarterly. The Placement Unit in State Office will also maintain a current list of resource families and placements.
- Encourage all resource families to follow directives of local public safety authorities regarding evacuation. Foster children may accompany the resource family out of county or out of state based on the directives and the family's emergency plan.
- Assure that all resource families have the 800 number which will be available for staying in contact (1-800-222-8000) and a copy of the "Disaster Preparedness Plan for Resource Families".

Following a disaster

Following a disaster, the Regional Director will communicate with the Division Director regarding plans for emergency operations within the area, including: closing offices, ensuring the Regional Director has the telephone numbers for staff and plans to cover shelters.

Communication

1-800-821-9157 will serve as the primary contact for basic communication among staff members of the Division immediately prior to and following a disaster. This number normally serves as the statewide Adoption line. This line will be staffed during normal business hours (hours may be extended based on the severity of the disaster) and will be available for staff to report to and receive information from the central office.

Staff should as soon as possible report to supervisor, or the 1-800-821-9157 if unable to reach their county supervisor, their current whereabouts, contact information and estimated plan for being able to report to work. The supervisor will advise staff of current expectations.

A second 1-800 number (1-800-222-8000) will be available 24/7 for resource families to report their whereabouts. At this number, a master list of families who have called will be maintained so that both resource families and the children for whom they're responsible can be located.

Resource families and birth families may call (1-800-222-8000) to learn the status of family members or other families who have called in.

If necessary, laptop computers will temporarily be made available from the State Office so that the staff can access the MACWIS system. Some paper records may be available through the state office. Staff should contact the Placement Unit to determine what information is on hand.

All direct service workers have cell phones. In the phone directory, there is a list of all state employees and their cell numbers.

The Division Director or his/her designee will be the liaison with other state agencies e.g. health department, food stamps, Medicaid, emergency management, etc.

Emergency Shelters

DFCS employees remain responsible for staffing emergency shelters. If the need for shelters exceeds three (3) working days, the Regional Director will work with the Division Director to assess the need for temporarily assigning staff from other parts of the state, not affected by the disaster, to assist.

Staff should keep their supervisor informed of the status of their regularly scheduled duties.

Staff reporting for work should check with ASWS regarding temporary reassignment of duties.

Child Abuse and Neglect Reports

New reports of child abuse and neglect will take precedence over working in a shelter. The Regional Director will make arrangements to relieve investigators of shelter duties so that investigations can be completed.

The Regional Director will consult with the Division Director (or designee) with regard to the need for additional staff on a temporary basis.

If local communications are disrupted 1-800-222-8000 will be available to take reports and pass that information back to a worker at the local level or to law enforcement. This process will continue until local communications are reliable again. The public will be informed of the number to contact to report abuse and/or neglect by local law enforcement and local county offices. The agency will provide this information to all local agencies and law enforcement.

Relocation of Foster Children To Other States

ASWS will coordinate with the Division Director or his/her designee, Director of Placement and ICPC Coordinator to ensure ongoing services for Mississippi foster children relocated out of state due to a disaster and to assess the needs of both the foster children and the resource families. All necessary information should be provided to the state where the child and family have relocated (medical, behavioral, and educational history, reasons the child came into care, family history, case plans, and any other pertinent information) to ensure ongoing services for the foster children and resources families.

Relocation of Foster Children from Other States

In the event foster children from other states relocate to Mississippi following a disaster, the ASWS will coordinate with the Division Director or his/her designee and ICPC Coordinator to immediately contact ICPC Administrator or other identified liaison from the sending state. The necessary information (medical, behavioral and educational history, reasons the child came into care, family history, case plans, and any other pertinent information) should be gathered to ensure ongoing services for the foster children and resource families.

Media

The Executive Director in conjunction with the Office of Communications will be responsible for handling the media to ensure consistent messages.

In the event following a disaster, the agency should follow policy regarding Native American Children. If a Native American child is displaced, the agency is to immediately contact that child's tribal counsel. All Regional Directors and Area Social Work Supervisors will maintain a listing of Tribal Counsels.

DFCS Resource Families

For all Levels of disaster, the Division of Family and Children's Services Resource Families are expected to follow the guidelines as outlined below.

DFCS Resource Families Personal Responsibilities

Prior Preparation

Develop a family emergency plan.

In case family members are separated from one another during a disaster (parents at work, children in school or day care), have a plan for getting back together.

Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "Family Contact". After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance than it is locally. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address and telephone number of the contact person.

- Maintain a supply of water and non-perishable food (can opener if canned items are taken).
- Keep handy a change of clothes, battery operated radio, flashlights, extra batteries, and First Aid Kit.
- Be sure DFCS has updated information for an emergency contact located out-of-state who will most likely know the whereabouts of your family.
- Maintain written information for each foster child including:

Full name

Social Security Number

Medicaid Number

Medical Information (include physician name and address, major medical problems- especially those requiring medication, allergies, any medical equipment required, behavioral health issues, etc.)

Names and Doses of Prescriptions

Caseworker's Name and phone numbers

When forewarning is available

Resource families should follow the directives of local public safety authorities concerning evacuation and may take foster children out of county or out of state based on the directives and the family's emergency plan.

***** Important *****

Immediately notify the Case Worker if leaving the area and furnish contact information, along with anticipated return date. If the worker is unreachable, contact 1-800-222-8000.

Assure that an ample supply of medications (7 to 10 day supply) is included in preparations along with the written information outlined above.

Communicating the Plan

This plan will be forwarded to each unit in the State Office and to the Regional Directors by the Executive Director and/or his/her designee. The Regional Director will forward the plan to the Area Social Worker Supervisor who will forward the plan to all county staff.

The county level plan will be developed by each county and will be shared with all new and existing employees at the county level. County level plans will be maintained by the Area Social Worker Supervisor.

All new resource homes and adoptive homes will be provided and trained on the preparedness disaster plan in the pre-service training. Existing resource and adoption homes will be trained and provided with the plan in their in-service training. Resource home and adoption home emergency preparedness plans will need to be updated annually by the Resource worker and/or their designee.

All contract providers will provide the agency with a disaster plan. This stipulation will become a part of the contract between the providers and the Mississippi Department of Human Services. All new employees will be given the disaster preparedness plan at the new employee orientation.

Following a disaster

Resource and adoptive families should follow the directives of local public safety authorities regarding a return to the affected area.

If location or contact information changes, families should report changes to their county worker or call 1-800-222-8000. If relocating within Mississippi, they may contact the local office from the list provided. Board payments will temporarily be mailed to the address most recently provided by the Resource Family.

Resource families may learn the current status of other resource families and birth families by calling 1-800-222-8000.

Resource families may contact their worker through the 1-800-222-8000 provided. The person accepting the call will forward the concern, question or information to the child's worker or other identified staff who will return the resource family's call.

If medical attention is needed for a foster child while in another state, resource families are to call 1-800-222-8000 for assistance in using Mississippi Medicaid. Resource families will continue to receive reimbursement providing an address if provided.

Resource families should contact their worker or 1-800-222-8000 if they have been displaced due to a disaster to provide locating information as soon as they have the

communication tools to make contact. The situations will be handled on a case by case basis to ensure payment is received accordingly.

Updating the Plan

The disaster plan will be evaluated annually at a minimum and immediately following any level of disaster. Reviews will include both input from internal and external stakeholders at the local and state level. Any changes to the plan will be made and all agency staff will be sent the most updated plan whenever changes are made.