

The Use of
Disability Program Navigators
to Provide Disaster Relief

WIN Partners/UCDHSC

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Executive Summary

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Gulf Coast causing more than \$81.2 billion in damage and at least 1,836 deaths (Wikipedia, 2006). Because Hurricane Katrina disproportionately affected individuals with disabilities, the federal government asked the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and the Colorado Office of Workforce Development (COWD) to send their Disability Program Navigators (DPNs) to help provide disaster relief. The DPNs were asked to help provide disaster relief due to their experience working with people who have disabilities, their experience doing outreach in the community and their resourcefulness. Colorado WIN Partners/UCDHSC conducted a series of semi structured interviews with the DPNs who were deployed, the directors of the workforce centers where the DPNs work and key state officials involved in the deployment of the DPNs. These interviews were designed to evaluate the effectiveness of using the DPNs to provide disaster relief.

Because the Colorado DPNs had never been called on to provide disaster relief services before, the DPNs faced numerous barriers to providing services. However, once the DPNs were deployed to Mississippi, they proved themselves to be both resourceful and flexible. A majority of the individuals who were interviewed reported that they were highly satisfied with sending the DPNs to provide disaster relief and 79% of them said that they would send DPNs to provide disaster relief in the future. However, if DPNs are deployed in the future, care should be taken to ensure the DPNs are adequately trained to provide disaster relief.

Introduction



On August 23rd, 2005 the storm that would become Hurricane Katrina formed over the Bahamas. During the next eight days, Hurricane Katrina would move across the Gulf of Mexico causing devastation and fundamentally changing the way the United States views disaster relief. Hurricane Katrina was responsible for more than \$81.2 billion in damage across the region (Wikipedia, 2006). While officials on both the local

and national level made some preparations for the hurricane, the preparations were not adequate to ensure the safe evacuation of everyone living along the coast (Freiden, 2006). As a result, Hurricane Katrina and the flooding it caused were responsible for at least 1,836 deaths (Wikipedia, 2006).

The Impact of Katrina on Individuals with a Disability

While the damage caused by the hurricane impacted individuals from across the socio-economic spectrum, there are some indications that those who lost their lives were disproportionately from the lower end of the economic spectrum and many of those had a disability (Freiden, 2006). “People with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the Hurricanes because their needs were often overlooked or completely disregarded. Their evacuation, shelter, and recovery experiences differed vastly from the experiences of people without disabilities” (Freiden, 2006, p.2). People who had difficulties with communication, due to visual or hearing impairment, were often unable to access information about the hurricane and evacuation procedures. Much of the telephone and electrical system was destroyed by the hurricane. This meant that individuals were unable to use telephone, TTY, or computers to communicate. This left television as the primary source of information for hurricane survivors. Unfortunately, television broadcasts following the hurricane often did not have closed captioning or sign language interpreters and rarely described charts or maps for the visually impaired (Freiden, 2006).

After Hurricane Katrina, the National Council on Disability estimated that there were 155,000 people with disabilities living in Biloxi, Mobile and New Orleans, which was equal to about 25% of the remaining population in these cities (Freiden, 2006). This number was so high, in part, because individuals with disabilities were unable to

evacuate. Often the transportation available was inaccessible to individuals requiring wheelchair lifts or other special mobility needs. Again individuals with hearing or visual impairments may have been prevented from evacuating because they were unable to access necessary information (Freiden, 2006).

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In those cases where individuals with disabilities were able to evacuate to shelters, they found that the shelters were not prepared for them. In some cases, shelters refused to serve individuals with disabilities. In other cases, shelters segregated individuals with disabilities from the rest of the population (Freiden, 2006). Even when shelters were willing to serve individuals with disabilities they often did not have adequate supplies. Bloodworth (2006) reported that while 22,750 people were evacuated from the Superdome, there were only 4 wheelchairs, no catheterization supplies, limited foam padding, no diabetic wound care, and no scheduled medications stocked. This was a serious problem for individuals in the Superdome who had any kind of medical need or disability. Freiden (2006) reports that individuals who were deaf or hard of hearing were unable to access information because only 80% of shelters had access to a TTY, 60% had no televisions with closed captioning, and less than 30% had access to sign language interpreters.

Even for those individuals lucky enough not to be evacuated to a shelter, the economic impact of Hurricane Katrina was devastating. Many individuals became instantly unemployed when their place of employment was destroyed. Between August 2005 and September 2005 new unemployment claims more than tripled, reaching a historically high level of 66,000 new claims (Brown, Mason & Tiller, 2006). “In addition to those who lost their jobs because the hurricanes destroyed their places of employment or forced them to move, many people with disabilities were in the process of trying to obtain employment when the hurricanes hit. Employment agencies lost contact with their clients with disabilities, and it took some time to resume their activities” (Freiden, 2006, p 9).

The Federal Government’s Response

On September 30, 2005 President Bush signed the *Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Act of 2005*. This allocated more than \$6 million dollars to Mississippi for vocational rehabilitation services through the United States Department of Education (United States Department of Education, 2005).

On the same day, the United States Department of Labor announced its “Pathways to Employment” initiative. This initiative provided experienced reintegration counselors to areas with large numbers of evacuees to help them find employment and supportive services. In addition, this program provided Disability Program Navigators (DPNs) to hurricane-

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affected states in order to help meet the needs of individuals with disabilities (United States Department of Labor, 2005). While the “Pathways to Employment” initiative was officially announced on September 30, 2005, a request that the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and the Colorado Office of Workforce Development (COWD) send DPNs to provide disaster relief was received in early September. CDLE and COWD responded by sending several waves of DPNs to the Gulfport Mississippi region.

DPNs were asked to help provide disaster relief due to their experience working with people who have disabilities, their experience doing outreach in the community and their resourcefulness. The DPN is a position that was first piloted in Colorado in 1999. DPNs are trained individuals experienced in working with people with disabilities. DPNs help individuals with disabilities make employment connections and connect them to needed benefits or services through government or community organizations. Over the last seven years DPNs have increased the self-sufficiency of people with disabilities through the One-Stop Career Centers. DPNs work to develop seamless, comprehensive, and integrated access to services for people with disabilities by creating systemic change, and expanding the workforce systems’ capacity (Social Security Administration, 2005).

Eight DPNs were deployed from Colorado to provide disaster relief in two waves. The first group of DPNs (5) was deployed on September 17, 2005 and returned on September 30th. A second group of DPNs (2) left Colorado on September 30th, 2005 and returned October 15th. While in Gulfport, the DPNs were to primarily focus on providing services to individuals with disabilities, but they also provided services to other individuals in need. Following the deployment of the Colorado DPNs, the Colorado Office of Workforce Development contracted with Colorado WIN Partners to evaluate the effectiveness of the DPNs efforts. A full timeline of the events associated with this evaluation is included in Appendix A.



Research Methodology

Population

In order to understand the full impact of the deployment of the Colorado DPNs, Colorado WIN Partners/UCDHSC identified three groups of individuals to participate in the study. The first group included all of the DPNs that were deployed. This group provided information about their experiences related to the deployment. The second group included the directors of the workforce centers that the DPNs represented. This group provided information on the impact on the workforce centers of the DPNs being deployed. The final group included key state officials that were involved with the DPN deployment. They provided information on the process of the deployment and costs incurred by the state. Researchers from Colorado WIN Partners interviewed all of the individuals identified, with the exception of one DPN who had moved out of state and could not be contacted. Table 1 lists the number of individuals interviewed from each group.

Table 1. Number of Individuals Interviewed

State Officials	8
Workforce Center Directors	5
DPNs*	7

* One Disability Program Navigator could not be contacted

Method

The evaluation of the deployment of the Colorado DPNs began in October, 2005. Colorado WIN Partners developed semi-structured interviews specific to each of the three groups: DPNs, Workforce Center Directors and key state officials. Researchers designed the interviews to address specific questions about the deployment of the DPNs. The questions focused on the decision to send the DPNs, the process of deploying DPNs, the cost of sending the DPNs, and whether DPNs should be deployed in the future.

In order to measure the effectiveness of the services provided by the DPNs, the researchers reviewed a number of instruments. However, the long-term effectiveness of community based interventions can be difficult to assess. This is particularly true of the evaluation of disaster relief services. Following a disaster, individuals may be highly mobile and difficult to locate for future assessments. Because of this mobility and the limited resources available for this evaluation study, many of the traditional ways of measuring change over time could not be used. Therefore, satisfaction with the deployment of the DPNs was selected as a proxy measure of effectiveness. Researchers believe that individuals who do not feel that the services were effective would not be satisfied with the decision to deploy the DPNs. Measures of

Researchers designed the interviews to address several specific questions about the deployment of the DPNs:

- The decision to send the DPNs;
- The process of deploying DPNs;
- The cost of sending the DPNs; and,
- Whether DPNs should be deployed in the future.



satisfaction are also relatively easy and inexpensive to collect. The Retrospective Interview Technique was selected to measure satisfaction, because it provides a structured technique that helps interviewees recall distant events in great detail.

The Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT) is a way of gathering information that tries to maximize

recollection of an event by asking the interviewees to recall events in a systematic way that creates a timeline (Fitzgerald & Surra, 1981). Like Baxter and Bullis (1986), Colorado WIN Partners used the RIT to collect only significant events. Specifically, researchers used a calendar to go day by day and ask the interviewees to recall any event that they felt was key in the deployment of the DPNs. The researchers asked each interviewee to start at the time that they initially heard about Colorado's response and end with the last event the interviewee could recall that was related to the deployment. After the interviewee listed all the key events, researchers went back over the list and asked the interviewees to rate their satisfaction (with the deployment of the DPNs) following each event. All interviewees were asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 100.

For this study, as with Baxter and Bullis (1986), the responses were analyzed by focusing on categorizing the key events. After all the events were coded into categories, the categories were then analyzed to see if the events were associated with an increase or decrease in satisfaction. Using the same method, a qualitative analysis was conducted for the remainder of the interview to identify other key themes.

All interviews were completed between January and April 2006. This time frame is significantly later than the research team would have liked and may have led to problems with recall by respondents. However, this delay was the result of a clerical error on the part of the Institutional Review Board that led to a delay in approval of the study.

Additionally, a request was made for copies of the service logs kept by the Colorado DPNs while they were deployed to determine the type and number of services provided. These logs could also be used to verify some of the information provided through the RIT. However, these logs were not available.

Results

How the Deployment was Handled

Nearly every respondent identified the problems associated with the deployment as a major issue. Every state official indicated that there were a number of problems arranging for the DPNs to leave for Mississippi. One state official reported that the DPNs were ready to go within 72 hours. However, due to problems in Washington, flight arrangements were made and canceled several times. In fact, as many as 8 days elapsed between the time the DPNs were ready to leave and the time when they were finally able to be deployed. However, the deployment problems did not end once the DPNs reached Mississippi.

"Well, the major thing that I remember was I was really annoyed with the lack of clarity on what we were to do, how we were to do it."- DPN

Every DPN and nearly every Workforce Center Director reported that due to confusion and problems with the leadership, they often encountered roadblocks that kept them from being as effective as they could be. DPNs reported a number of problems including inconsistent job requirements, lack of resources, and a lack of supportive supervision.

"It was interesting to me because on Saturday I went out in the van as a new person to get oriented to the area and on Monday I took out five new arrivals and I provided the orientation"- DPN

Several interviewees talked about the disorganization of the deployment and the need for more adequate preparation next time. Several interviewees indicated that the lack of communication and training caused many of the problems that the DPNs encountered.

Satisfaction with the Deployment

The number of events that determined the satisfaction with the deployment varied widely among individuals. Table 2 lists the minimum and maximum number of events identified by individuals in each group. The state officials had the largest variation in the number of events of any of the groups. This appears to be a result of the heterogeneity of the state official group, which includes individuals that have direct supervisory roles over DPNs as well as individuals with more administrative roles. This diversity is also reflected in their satisfaction scores (See Table 3). Table 3 lists the range of all satisfaction rankings. While some of the state officials reported high levels of current satisfaction (100), some state officials reported very low levels of satisfaction (50). Those individuals reported

"I think my satisfaction was more based on you know the way they (DPNs) were treated, not the decision to send them" - State official

knowing more about the problems with the deployment and spontaneously reported these problems as the reason for their low levels of satisfaction.

Table 2. Number of Key Events Identified by Group

	Number of Events Identified	
	Minimum	Maximum
State Officials	3	77
Workforce Center Directors	5	24
DPN	38	108

As expected, the DPNs reported many more events that contributed to their satisfaction (see Table 2). The DPNs also showed a similar pattern of variability in their scores. Some times DPNs reported mean satisfaction score across all events of 58 while others reported a mean satisfaction score of 96. A closer analysis of the pattern of events that led to changes in satisfaction showed that of the 86 events associated with a drop in satisfaction of 10 or more points, 81 of those incidents involved something related to problems with the deployment (logistics, leadership, relationships between team members, etc). However, these negative experiences appear to be off set by the positive feelings aroused by the number of people they were able to help during the deployment. Nearly every event that related to providing services to evacuees was rated at the maximum level (100) and all of the DPNs report helping evacuees as their principle source of satisfaction. When DPNs discussed their current level of satisfaction, they would often report that the help they were able to provide more than offset their frustration with the problems they encountered.

Table 3. Summary of Satisfaction Scores by Group

	Range of all Satisfaction Ratings*		Individual's Mean Satisfaction Rating**		Rating of Current Satisfaction***	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
	State Officials	0	100	53	100	50
Workforce Center Directors	60	100	71	96	90	100
DPN	0	100	58	96	85	100

*Lists the highest and lowest satisfaction rating given by any member of the group.

**Lists the average of all satisfaction ratings given by each individual, the highest and lowest averages are listed for each group.

***Each individual was asked to give their current level of satisfaction at the time of the interview, the highest and lowest level of satisfaction are listed for each group.

Workforce Center Directors as a group had the reported fewest number of events with a mean of 10 events. As a group the Workforce Center Directors appear to have higher satisfaction with the deployment than the other groups. The higher satisfaction appears to be due to the Workforce Center Directors knowing less about the problems associated with the deployment and perceiving that these problems were less severe than the other two groups.

Decision to Send DPNs

Researchers asked all interviewees whether they were involved in the decision to deploy the DPNs (See Table 4). All of the DPNs reported that they had been part of the decision to be deployed. This was due to the fact that CDLE and COWD sent all DPNs an email asking for volunteers who would be willing to provide disaster relief. The DPNs all reported that they were excited about the opportunity to provide disaster relief, but at the same time they were concerned about whether they could arrange to be gone for several weeks. The DPNs most often cited providing for pets and family obligations as concerns that had to be addressed before they left. All of the DPNs reported that they felt their decision to be deployed was supported by their supervisors.

One of the Workforce Center Directors said that they had a say in the decision to deploy the DPNs, but most did not. In fact, three of the Workforce Center Directors reported they first heard about the deployment from their DPN. Despite this, the Workforce Center Directors reported that they were very supportive of the DPNs going. Several of the Workforce Center Directors said that they understood the urgent nature of the deployment and how that caused an information gap, they reported that they would have liked more information earlier. One Workforce Center Director said that she felt so many of the DPNs were willing to be deployed because the program was voluntary.

Table 4. Decision to Deploy

	Involved	Not Involved
State Officials	2	6
Workforce Center Directors	1	4
DPN	6	0

Most of the state officials (6) reported that they did not have a role in deciding whether the DPNs would be deployed. This appears to be an accurate perception, in that the two state officials who reported making the decision were in supervisory positions while the others were not. Fiscal concerns and concerns for the safety of the DPNs appear to have been the primary factors in the decision to deploy the DPNs. In particular, concern was expressed about whether the State of Colorado would be reimbursed for the cost of the services provided in Mississippi. While Colorado had a verbal guarantee that they would be reimbursed, it took several more days for written confirmation to be sent. State officials reported that they were unwilling to spend money to help the people of Mississippi; until they were sure it would not keep the people of Colorado from receiving the services they needed.

Future Deployment

Fifteen of the eighteen interviewees (79%) reported that they would send the DPNs to provide disaster relief in the future (see Table 5). Most of the interviewees who expressed a willingness to send DPNs in the future said that this decision was in spite of all of the problems that the DPNs encountered. Most interviewees said that the good that the DPNs did far outweighed the problems.

Table 5. Future Deployment

	Yes	No	Yes with conditions
State Officials	5	1	1
Workforce Center Directors	6	0	0
DPN	4	0	2

Only individuals (3) that said they would not send DPNs in the future or said they would only go if certain conditions were met. They most often cited the need for training in disaster relief, the need for clear directives and the need for clear lines of leadership as the reason they would not send DPNs in the future. Without these, they did not feel that the DPNs could be effective.

Selected Quotes from the DPNs

A formal qualitative analysis of the data was not performed. However, the DPNs spoke quite eloquently about their experiences. In order to describe some of these experiences, selected quotes from the DPNs have been included below. While these stories are anecdotal, they provide a description of needs of individuals following the Hurricane and the types of services provided by the DPNs. Some of the quotes below have been edited for readability, but great care was taken to ensure that the editing did not alter the meaning of the quotes.

In discussing the need, the DPNs said “the type of need was stunning” and “nothing on TV ever prepared you for standing there.” One DPN referred to it as “360 devastation” and talked about how the “houses are just toothpicks.”

When talking about the need to help individuals with a disability a DPN said “Disability seems to be the forgotten population... because they’re poor, they’re handicapped, they don’t have transportation. That could have been completely avoided with some pre-disaster relief.”

The devastation that the DPNs witnessed was often punctuated by stories of horrible loss. As the DPNs worked with survivors of the hurricane, they often hurricane survivors tell heart rending and tragic stories. One DPN talked about a woman he had met who had been trapped on a rooftop as the water rose “there’s her and her brother and some grand children on the roof...her brother gets swept away and right before her and her brother...died as a result.”

Another DPN told the story of a family trapped in their one floor home when the flood waters came. The family had four children, two of which were young boys in wheelchairs. The DPN said “all they could do was try to raise the wheelchairs, you know raise them up higher and higher...this mother and father their complete focus was raising the wheelchairs, raising the wheelchairs of these two young boys and the mother and the

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father and the two boys drowned.” The DPN reported that this story really hit home when they drove by the house and saw the marks spray painted on the side indicating that people had died in the house. Right next to these marks “a member of the family had spray painted on the outside, ‘the girls are OK’.” Hearing these kinds of stories led one DPN to report “you are a seasoned veteran very quickly”.

The DPNs also talked about some of the services they provided. The services included things such as locating medical equipment and assistive technology like wheelchairs, so that people could be discharged from the hospital. They also discussed building a number of ramps on the homes of individuals in wheelchairs. The DPNs reported that they often saw a disconnection between available resources and the people who needed these resources. Because of their mobility, the DPNs were able to help connect people to these resources. One DPN put it this way: “most of the other services we encountered there were static, by that I mean that folks had to find their way to them. Whereas, the navigators, we got out there.” Another DPN said that because of their mobility and flexibility, “people weren’t angry at us like they were with other federal agencies.”

Several DPNs talked about the overwhelming need for services by everyone, not just those with a disability. One DPN said “often times there was no avoiding the fact that you couldn’t just simply serve folks with disabilities. Everybody was coming out of the woodwork, but we were able to give advice and directions and show people where the water was and oh, there’s ice over on Pine Street.” In another instance a DPN went to provide services to an individual with severe visual impairment. When they arrived, they found “there were about 12 people living in his house, because it was one of the only houses that was habitable in the area.” The DPN reported that they wound up spending 5-6 hours just at this one house because the neighbors and even people driving by began to ask for help. The DPN reported they served “anywhere from 30 to 50 folks there at that one stop, people just kept coming and coming and coming to the point where...I ran out of paper and I was doubling up on forms (you know putting two people on one) and getting some cardboard ...scrounging around for anything, napkins whatever we could come up with, giving people whatever referrals we had.”

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The DPNs also talked about how the hurricane had changed the dynamic of employment for people with disabilities. One DPN reported that because there were so few people

available after the hurricane, “employers...were willing to drop any preconceived notions that people with a disability can’t be a productive employee.” This meant that the DPNs were able “to take people with disabilities to job fairs and know they were going to get



hired.” Another DPN reported that because of the need for employees, the employers’ perception of individuals with a disability was “cracked wide open”.

It appears that the DPNs highly valued the personal connection they developed with the hurricane survivors. One DPN talked about trying to locate an individual with a visual impairment. After

several hours, they were finally able to locate his house. When they got to the house they found it filled with mud and they could smell rotting flesh. The DPN decided to enter the house to determine whether the individual they were looking for was dead. The DPN described his experience like this:

“I start going in and I’m about shouting his name at this point. I open the door and I take a step in and the first thing that comes to my mind is ‘looters will be shot on sight’. I’m going ‘Oh man, what are you doing?’ ‘What are you doing?’...This booming voice from behind this goes, ‘May I help you sir?’ I turned around...bug eyed... frozen. I walked up to him and said ‘Sir are you so and so?’ ‘I’m...a Disability Program Navigator and we’re just looking for you, we wanted to know if you were ok.’ His wife had accompanied him and they were just checking on their place, you know because there had been looters.”- DPN

The DPN reported that this individual turned out to be a disc jockey for a national radio program and had not received vocational rehabilitation service for years, but had never been taken off their roster. The individual “was so touched that we were out looking for him” that he gave the DPN “the most warm heart felt hugs I’ve ever had.” The DPN said “that made it worth it. That experience alone, going from sheer terror and concern to this wonderful warm embrace, you know, I’d do it again just for that.”

Another story that was shared by the DPNs happened after helping an elderly woman in her late seventies:

“she’s just the sweetest thing. She puts her hand on my arm because I was sitting on her porch...and she just sits next to me and she brings this little hostess cupcake, you know the chocolate ones with the white squiggle on the top? It’s in a plastic wrapper and she has it on a plate. She sets it on my lap and she goes ‘honey, you just sit down and have this.’ I said, ‘oh, I can’t take your food... you need it more than I do.’ She goes, ‘Baby, in Mississippi you don’t ever refuse...we just want to thank you so much.’ I said ‘back where I come from we want to share...so I’ll split it with you.’ And we sat there and we split this little hostess cupcake, you know it was just the neatest moment of bonding between strangers... to sit down with this wonderful little lady and you know for her to give out of her need...really put things in perspective.”-DPN

All of the DPNs reported feeling that the services they provided were both important and effective. One DPN said “I know we did positives for people down there, I know that we made a huge difference.” Another said “we accomplished great things and it was so important, the most important thing I’ve ever done in my life.” Still another DPN said “I think from a PR standpoint we did a magnificent job.”

Discussion

This study was designed to answer three core questions

- Can DPNs be effective in providing relief services after a natural disaster?
- Should DPNs be deployed to provide disaster relief in the future?
- If DPNs are deployed in the future, is there anything that can be done to improve future deployments?

Clearly these interviews indicate that overall interviewees were satisfied with sending the DPNs to provide disaster relief. Interviewees reported that they felt the services provided by the DPNs were effective and necessary. Most respondents also report that, because of this success DPNs could be deployed to provide disaster relief in the future, particularly if the disaster relief involves providing services to individuals with disabilities.

Despite the positive feelings expressed about the success of the services provided, there appear to be several areas in which the deployment could be improved. It appears that due to the immediate need for assistance in the Gulf Coast Region, the DPNs were rushed into deployment on the federal level before adequate planning could be done. Since no one had ever considered using DPNs to provide disaster relief, the kind preparation and training that is often done with disaster relief workers was not done with the DPNs. This appears to have led to a number of problems. Several interviewees indicated that the goals and objectives were not clearly spelled out, which led to confusion once the DPNs were deployed. Also, the DPNs were deployed without adequate training in disaster relief situations. Because disaster relief can be so traumatic, disaster relief workers are at high risk for psychiatric symptoms (Chia-Ming C. et al., 2003). Even short of experiencing psychiatric symptoms, the stress of providing relief following a disaster can cause individuals to act in ways that are inconsistent with their usual personality and can lead to interpersonal conflict. The situations encountered by the DPNs in Mississippi are consistent with the literature around the effects of stress on disaster relief workers. It appears that these were further exacerbated by lack of communication with leaders. This stress appears to have led to the creation of interpersonal conflict. This conflict was often cited as the primary reason that the DPNs experienced dissatisfaction while deployed. By providing training in disaster relief, these kinds of interpersonal conflicts could be avoided in future deployments.

Now that we've been through it, I think that it would be much easier to prepare to deploy people because we've been through a couple of rounds of it now and just have a better sense through trial and error of what kinds of things they need—
State official

Future Directions

Clearly the DPN position was never designed to provide disaster relief, and so no disaster relief planning has been done with the DPNs. However, if the Colorado DPNs are going

to be sent to provide disaster relief in the future, a system of preparing the DPNs for disaster relief should be developed and should include at the very least:

- Ongoing training in the mechanics of providing disaster relief services.
- Development of policies and procedures for streamlining the deployment of DPNs to disaster areas.
- Development of systems to evaluate deployments so that effective strategies can be identified and ineffective strategies can be improved.
- Systems to improve communication during and after deployments so that DPNs can get their needs met on a timely basis.

Conclusion

The skills and flexibility of the DPNs appear to have served them well when they were put into an unfamiliar setting. They were able to provide much needed services despite numerous obstacles. Everyone involved in the deployment of the DPNs should be congratulated for their efforts. As one state official said “it showed that despite snafus and despite mistakes the government can respond in an effective manner.” However, if DPNs are to be used to provide disaster relief in the future, efforts should be made to give them the skills and resources necessary to be successful.



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Appendix A

Project Timeline

- Hurricane Katrina makes landfall on the Gulf Coast- 8/29/05
- COWD and CDLE sent out an email requesting help from the DPNs- 9/5/05
- First deployment of Colorado DPNs was sent to Mississippi 9/17/05 through 9/30/05
- Discussions of evaluating the effectiveness of the program began in late September 2005
- The second deployment of Colorado DPNs was sent to Mississippi 09/30/05 through 10/15/05
- Research protocol was submitted to the Institutional Review Board- 11/3/05
- Notice received from the Institutional Review Board that protocol had been approved- 12/30/05
- Interviews completed- 1/30/06 through 4/11/06