WELCOMING CITY: CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE

REFUGEES, IMMIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS, AND

DISASTER SURVIVORS

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Advice

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SUMMARY: LESSONS

1. Public, private, NGO, and faith-based: All sectors are needed and each must do what they do best. Leaders from each sector must be identified and brought together to work in a coordinated fashion. The Mayor sets the table for cooperation. Sector leaders work together to identify capacity within housing, employment, health, etc. (Positive approach: Do what you can with what you have.)

2. There are two broad phases of community response. The first is handled by military, law enforcement, and emergency management. Command and control = hierarchical. They perform well in the first 60-120 days. There will be a critical handoff needed between emergency responders and organizations responsible for long term recovery (second phase). This handoff—from hierarchical control to collaboration—needs to be explicit. ***Long-term recovery/integration requires collaboration.***

3. The recovery journey is map-able and price-able. Allows for planning and resource allocation. Assess, triage, map and price. Extremely helpful in keeping people and organizations at the table. Not a bottomless pit of need and problems.

4. Strength based assessments for individuals and families are crucial. They form a foundation for recovery plans (see above) – individual and community – and allow the larger community to view newly arrived as assets. Publish in the aggregate.

5. City leaders set the tone and determine how the larger community responds to the newly arrived. Leaders define the degree of "welcome" and draw community emotional response. Constant messaging and reassurance are necessary to combat relentless negative media. Humanize refugees and celebrate "welcomes."

6. Fear-fueled rumors *infect* newly arrived communities, destabilizing fragile social structures. Immediately define and establish a reliable official channel of communication/information for newly arrived. *Choose a channel and post to channel constantly*. Make it accessible to everyone.

7. Harness and channel the early outpouring of support and compassionate response in the service of longer term needs. Must seek to capture volunteer commitment from the larger community early on before "compassion fatigue" sets in. Appoint an organization to do this.

8. Identify natural leaders and helpers within the arriving community. Engage as many newly-arrived residents as possible for every recovery position and task so that they are helping their own community. Support and resource "authentic" leaders whenever possible. Especially support women.

9. Prioritize getting children into schools. Enrolling children in schools sets off an immediate, positive, stabilizing chain reaction. This provides structure to the day, hope for the future, and welcome respite for parents so they may make plans and seek solutions.

SECTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Public, private, nonprofit: Three sectors must respond to newly arrived residents and each has a critical role to play. In Houston, after Hurricane Katrina (2005) and Hurricane Ike (2008), powerful leaders from each sector were drafted by the Mayor; in turn, they called upon other leaders like themselves within their sectors to organize and provide resources and manpower. Currently and for the past several years, these three sectors are working together to create a constructive path for integrating newly arrived immigrants.

This is a rough outline of roles carried out by each sector:

1. **Public sector** – disaster management, law enforcement and security, emergency and medical response. Identity, safety, security. Provides for shelter and establishes sense of safety. Locating loved ones. Status updates from home country. Establishing communication channels. (Must avoid the creation of "prison" atmosphere or conditions)

2. **Corporate and business sector** – highest and best use of business leadership: Assessing professional credentials and evaluating experience for employment. Examine new neighbors as assets to economy. Other responses included donating or collecting and warehousing donated resources.

3. **Nonprofit social sector:** (social, education, faith-based and voluntary community) – conduct evaluative conversations and chronicle basic family conditions. Case management and service navigation. Meeting basic human needs for belonging and connection. Social and emotional support. Harnessing volunteers. Distributing donated resources.

MAPPING THE RECOVERY JOURNEY

There are discernible stages of rebuilding a life after disasters of all kinds. These recognizable milestones on the journey of recovery have specific kinds of assistance relating to each. The recovery journey is "map-able" at the individual and community levels. Therefore, it is also possible to define the resources required for the project of resettling individuals and families. There are two levels of the journey. The first is the stages of response from the larger community – a series of efforts required by the receiving or recovering community – to welcome and integrate people whose lives have been catastrophically disrupted. The second level is a "micro" level of discernable stages that individuals experience when they find that they must completely rebuild their lives. Each stage is distinguished by the type of response and help needed, the resources required and the goals to be achieved.

THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE:

1. **SAFETY AND SANCTUARY**
Most countries and cities are prepared (to a degree) to respond to immediate crisis, and are resourced to handle the survival stages of help and response. This first stage is generally 90-120 days. Food, clothing, shelter, and basic infrastructure to ensure safety. This stage is best handled by military and emergency service systems – and by other hierarchical structures able to guarantee safety and able to create sanctuary for survivors.

   Special note: "Reconnection" services are a significant priority at this stage.
   People cannot move forward in their thinking, cannot engage in their own recovery, if they have a lost family member or loved one. Reconnection or information about lost loved ones comes first after safety. A social media resource or other electronic reconnection service is critical; providing access to communication devices for those who do not have them should be an immediate priority.

2. **STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT AND TRIAGE**
A crucial step is to identify the strengths and assets of arriving individuals and families – a clear assessment/inventory of educational and personal assets that can serve as a starting place for rebuilding lives. It is critical to begin an assessment of strengths and assets as quickly as possible. This "triage" effort provides a foundation to estimate time and resources needed for full recovery. Assessments help families begin the recovery journey and in the aggregate they help communities form a plan to respond.

   People/families must be sorted into broad categories based upon the effort required to help them resettle... more educated with financial assets and family support, versus less educated, with little social support and/or barriers (consider language, medical, trauma, etc.). We grouped families into tiers based upon the strengths and resources possessed and the length of time likely to be required for full independence from formal social support systems. After dozens of interviews and assessments, we were able to make reasonable estimates of the number of case managers and services connectors we would need and estimate the months or years of regular connections/interactions we would conduct.

   Effective triage allows the community to assess current capacity against needs of newly arrived. Service organizations can begin to plan the resources required to engage and connect new neighbors to the broader community. Defining educational needs of children and working to establish school integration programs stabilizes communities of newly arrived, and accelerates adult engagement in recovery work.

3. **INTEGRATION: ESTABLISHING LONG-TERM RECOVERY COLLABORATIVE**
Long-term recovery begins after emergency services are depleted or no longer needed. After newly arrived residents are safe, (temporarily) sheltered, fed, and treated for emergency medical needs, the longer term response must kick in. The social, faith-based,

and private business sector organizations are best suited for this role. They are accustomed to working collaboratively and are better positioned for the flexible and more finely tuned responses needed for individuals and families.

Long-term recovery/integration resources are housing, employment, education, health, and financial services. Resources required to assist people in the longer term response will be disjointed. Displaced persons will need assistance with navigating disjointed systems. Few cities "pre-position" case managers or service navigators (social workers, employment counselors, housing advisors, etc.) with the requisite training or in the numbers required to respond to a disaster or major refugee crisis.

Cities do not routinely store clothing and furniture for donation at levels required for the scale of current disruptions. In most communities, these services and supports must be drawn from the existing human service sector (philanthropic, charitable, and voluntary service organizations) by building a collaborative entity. Each crucial service organization commits to the collaborative entity and chooses a representative. The "Long Term Recovery Committee" (Houston name) was charged with the responsibility to deliver all long-term recovery services, including permanent housing, employment, school enrollment, etc., for as long as it took to permanently settle every evacuee.

Faith-based organizations play a critical role in long-term recovery and resettlement. A leader or lead organization, with the ability to work across faith organizations, should be appointed to lead the faith-based effort.

Churches, temples, and synagogues can provide vetted volunteers. The role of volunteers is to provide the flexible and sensitive assistance needed for long-term recovery. They can act outside of formal command and control structures and service bureaucracies, and may be called upon to assist with complex family cases. There is a need for one organization willing to maintain a roster of volunteers and tasks suitable for volunteers, and willing to host the social media communication (social media essentially serve as platforms) to match volunteers and bring them out for specific tasks.

In Houston, the Mayor was one leader who brought every service sector leader to the table. These assembled leaders were responsible in two directions. They provided constant updates to City leaders, tracking the movement of newly arrived into housing, jobs, schools; identifying problems and barriers as they arose; and monitoring capacity in these systems. They also fed information about resources and system supports to the service providers. In Houston, this team met weekly for months to examine bottlenecks and report on progress. One meeting examined the overall response and a second meeting related to specific groups of families or individuals who were

It would be hard to exaggerate the need for a collaborative style of leadership for this phase. While command and control must drive the early phase of response, the hand-off for longer term assistance only works with collaboration and coalition building. Every city must have a leader to shepherd this collaboration—someone with sufficient energy and power to call together housing, health, job-seeking, and education organizations into a collaborative structure.

Social sector leaders must commit to the long-term process. Current disruptions are causing the numbers of displaced persons and the time for recovery to be much greater than in the past, and the time to integration is longer as well. From the first – to the last resettled person after *Katrina* – took about five years.

Stages of response and goals of each:			
Stage	**Goals**	**Activities and Services**	**Organizations**
Immediate response	Sanctuary. Safety. Security.	Goals of safety and security, meeting basic needs, establishing identity, reconnecting families. Health and medical assessment.	Hierarchical, command and control. Government, emergency aid and military organizations.
Intermediate response	Strength Assessment. Triage. Projections.	Gathering information to price and predict arc of recovery journey – for time and resources required. Strengths and assets assessments. Connect to basic language classes. Set up schools for children. Establish clear communication channels. Resolve regulatory issues.	Aid organizations, educational institutions, private sector and human capital experts.
Long-term response	Permanent integration	Organize volunteer and donated resources. Work to find permanent homes, jobs, and schools. Continue language classes. Establish access to financial service and capital. Provide civic education and social integration opportunities. Learn, earn, belong, and be well. Small flexible financial assistance. Utilize private contributions and volunteer assistance.	Multisector – public, private, nonprofit collaboration. Service connectors/ case managers. Flexible support assessments. Large group events for common elements of assistance (job fairs, immigration reviews, housing selection, school enrollment, etc.)

STABILIZING COMMUNITIES OF DISPLACED PEOPLE

Stabilizing communities of newly arrived (after immediate needs for safety are met) turns on four critical elements, and the sooner these key elements are in motion the more stable the new community will be.

1. Create an official established means of communicating with all new residents. A newspaper, web or Facebook page, electronic message board. But whatever is selected, *stick with it and post religiously*. We found huge disruptions and disturbances would occur through rumors and misinformation – casting already traumatized people into fear and suspicion. Without discipline around communication, all helpers will be consumed with putting out fires started by rumors.

2. Move children into schools as quickly as possible. This provides structure to the day for students and parents and keeps families focused on the future. It also helps children deal with trauma and provides parents with time to take on other resettlement tasks. Enrolling children in a school or setting up a temporary school is a top priority.

3. Identify and empower leaders within the community of newly arrived. Employ them to engage others. We employed as many service navigators as possible from the new neighbor population. Allow these leaders to support and engage newer residents. Encourage weekly meetings at established times and support residents in holding these meetings. Their topics. Their agenda.

4. Find or create employment for as many adults as possible. The critical thing is to restore dignity to adults. Everything from organizing projects that adults may voluntarily carry out for the benefit of the community to finding permanent employment in established businesses.

INDIVIDUAL RECOVERY JOURNEY

Over the span of time in which we sought to permanently resettle people displaced by *Katrina*, we began to observe discernable stages of the individual and family journeys. We gathered groups of our new neighbors to interview them about their thoughts and experiences, and what they learned about themselves as they moved through the process of rebuilding their lives. Of great interest to us was understanding what kind of support was most beneficial at each stage. We sought to better understand the behaviors of people who had undergone the trauma of losing their homes, their livelihoods, their way of life, and even their family members. More commonly understood stages of grief were insufficient to either explain the emotions or illuminate the way forward.

Through a series of interviews with evacuees (using observations and information collected from our case management systems), we identified the following "stages of recovery." These stages

are loose descriptions based upon our experiences and accounts of displaced persons. They are not linear steps to recovery. How people move through these "states of mind" and with what speed depends upon the level of assistance, their assets, skills and resources, as well as the degree of welcome they encounter in the receiving community. No issue is more significant than the perception of their ability to return to their country or community of origin. People who believe, rightly or wrongly, that their situation is temporary, and that they may be able to return to their homes, are unable to effectively engage in resettlement efforts. Every effort should be made to provide accurate information and clear indications regarding permanence or "new normal" for displaced families. These stages pertain to those who cannot return within any foreseeable future.

STAGES: From Disaster to New Beginning…			
	Emotions / Questions	Work	Help
Survival: Staying alive.	Intense fear. Narrow field of vision – intense focus on reasons for living. Desperate. Shattered. *Will I survive? Are my loved ones okay?*	Survive – find a way to stay in one piece. Save everything possible. Hold on for transport and rescue. Protect more vulnerable.	
Sanctuary: Safety.	Relief and gratitude. Sense of unreality. Unable to process information. Sense of dread about the future. *"What is going to happen to me and my family? What's next?"*	Establish identity and status. Basic tasks only. Basic needs. Safety. Physical reassurance. Medical attention. Immediate simple directions.	
Limbo: Waiting.	Trauma creates numbness and overwhelming sense of loss and grief. Extreme fatigue sets in. Hope that someone stronger and better will arrive to explain, guide and fix the situation. Appears lethargic – *"I felt like I was in a stupor. The simplest things felt impossibly difficult."*	At this stage people are unable to participate/engage.	
Upheaval: Waking up.	Reality of situation sets in. Begins as initial sanctuary/temporary accommodations end. Increased frustration as moves are necessary. Displays high emotion. *"I got so sick of being shuffled around. I couldn't think. It was like being a helpless child."*	Begin documenting strengths, skills assets. Focus on what's possible. Reconcile official status. More permanent housing. Stabilizing children's educational activities.	
Resignation / Acceptance:	Grief and acceptance with help. Owning the work of rebuilding and	Key stage. Determines way forward.	

Choosing.	resettlement. Coming to terms with "no return." Not going back to "normal" ever. *"My child kept asking, 'when are we going home?' Finally, I shouted, 'home is gone.' And then it hit me – we were never going back."* Resignation asks: *"Why me? Why did this have to happen to us?"*	1. Acceptance / realization of changed circumstances of life. Believes there is meaning, purpose to be found in their struggle. 2. Resignation/despair and resentment - if abandoned. Progress stops here in isolation.
Taking Stock: Inventory.	Examining skills in light of new environment. Establishing/ constructive use of social contacts. *"There were things that no storm could take from me. My education. My determination. My faith. I know how to work hard. I did it once. I can do it again."*	Document skills and strengths. Inventory resources and assets. Credentialing and certifications. Begin recovery plan. Information regarding options for language, education, long- term employment and housing, and financial support.
Beginning Again: Looking ahead.	Once again able to contemplate future. Has a grasp of what's possible. Able to act upon steps to integrate socially, emotionally, economically. *"I see the possibilities here, opportunities I didn't have back home."*	Investing in social structures and new relationships. New emotional ties. Draws on support of those in similar circumstances. Able to help others. Group work. Forms new aspirations. Begins to drive own recovery.
New Journey: Integration	New identity and idea of "home." Able to look forward to the future. Sees oneself as a part of a new community. Belongs and identifies with new community/country. *"Now, I am an American."* *"I never wanted to live in Houston, but now it's my home?*	Has a story of self and family that includes/integrates the refugee experience. Renewed sense of purpose. Making meaning from experience.

We compare these stages as experienced by those impacted by disasters with the experiences of immigrants seeking resettlement and integration within our region.