

Joplin, Missouri: Tornado

Background

“On May 22, 2011, a supercell thunderstorm spawned a tornado just east of the Missouri–Kansas state line that rapidly intensified to produce EF-5 damage as it tore a half-mile to three-quarter-mile-wide path of near total destruction across Joplin, Missouri. The death toll in Joplin stands at 161, making this tornado the deadliest in the United States since 1947...The tornado damaged or destroyed an estimated 7,500 homes and more than 500 businesses, with property damage estimated to be \$3 billion, the highest ever for a U.S. tornado.”ⁱ

Long-Term Recovery Committee

In the aftermath of the tornado, a Long-Term Recovery Committee (LTRC) was stood up in Joplin to help identify unmet needs and organize relief in recovering from the disaster. The LTRC was established on June 22nd by the Jasper County Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD). Many of the groups involved were already COAD members and had worked together on recovery efforts during previous disasters; these preexisting relationships and structures greatly aided in the ability of the LTRC to quickly organize and set up operations.ⁱⁱ One of the local ministries initially acted as the fiscal agent for the LTRC; however, as bookkeeping and auditing demands increased, the COAD took over, applying for its own 501(c)(3) status, which the LTRC was covered under. The LTRC's governance structure included a Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as the heads of the various Sub-Committees, such as Construction, Volunteers, Emotional-Spiritual, Media, and Fund-Raising. Collectively, this group comprised the Executive Committee, which approved all requests for funding and provided direction for overall LTRC activities. Three main areas that the LTRC focused on were Unmet Needs, Emotional/Spiritual Support, and Volunteer Coordination.

Unmet Needs

One of the primary activities of the LTRC was administering funds/resources to support the needs of individuals and families impacted by the disaster:

- ◆ Unmet needs were identified through the Missouri Disaster Case Management Program (Mo-DCMP), a FEMA-grant funded program established following several weather-related disasters in the spring of 2011. While Disaster Case Management in Missouri has historically been a voluntary effort, “the scope of damage and the extent of disaster-related unmet needs that resulted from the severe weather events in early 2011 simply overwhelmed the voluntary program that was in place.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- ◆ As administrator of the grant, the State selected Lutheran Family and Children Services to be the managing agency for Mo-DCMP, and the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri, and the Salvation Army were chosen as the service providers in Joplin. Teams of Disaster Case Managers (DCMs) from these organizations provided case

management services to affected individuals; cases with significant needs that could not be met through other resources were submitted to the LTRC Unmet Needs Committee by the DCMs. These cases were evaluated by the LTRC and assistance was provided in accordance with established eligibility criteria and guidelines (see Unmet Needs Assistance Guidelines).

- ◆ Members of the LTRC also received weekly “Hot Topic” email alerts from the Multi-Agency Warehouse (MAW). These email alerts included unmet needs vetted by LTRC partner organizations. Hot Topics could include anything from a family needing a mattress to a church donating tools. The benefit of this resource was that all information was verified by the partner agency prior to distributing.
- ◆ One best practice that the LTRC developed during the recovery from the tornado was hosting Community Resource Coffees twice a month where several organizations, agencies, and/or service providers presented on various recovery topics. The meetings were focused on providing DCMs information on available resources and how to access them, and facilitating communication and networking throughout the recovery community.

Emotional/Spiritual Support^{iv}

The LTRC also sought to facilitate and provide emotional and spiritual support to the community during recovery:

- ◆ Within the first 90 days after the tornado, the LTRC Emotional/Spiritual Support Subcommittee created a listing of community resources for emotional and spiritual support. All listings were put in a binder and given to school personnel, faith leaders, and disaster case managers. This binder served as a basis for disaster workers to link people in need with the appropriate resources for their emotional and spiritual health. The binder included specific resources (as well as practitioners) for children, adults, seniors, and English as a Second Language populations.
- ◆ The Joplin Family Y partnered with FEMA and other LTRC members to develop and manage the Human Services Campus at the large community of FEMA Temporary Housing Units. The Human Services Campus provided a “one-stop-shop” location for survivors to get resources, support, and much more. At the campus, emotional and spiritual support materials were available and counseling visits often occurred.
- ◆ The “Don’t Let One Disaster Lead to Another” prevention campaign developed by the Community Partnership became a best practice during the Joplin tornado recovery. This campaign provided resources and tools for families to manage stress, reduce substance abuse, and avoid domestic violence (see Responding to a Disaster: A Prevention Toolkit).
- ◆ Support for caregivers, volunteers, and those providing emergency services was another important component of the recovery effort that the LTRC sought to facilitate. Compassion Fatigue Workshops were offered by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and the LTRC created a short Volunteer Debriefing guide as a conversation tool to help volunteer groups process their experiences together.

Joplin LTRC Fast Facts

- ◆ *Mission Statement.* The Long-Term Recovery Committee is a group of agencies, organizations and faith-based entities working to find and assist tornado survivors with unmet disaster related needs in SW Missouri.
- ◆ *Partners.* Over 120 organizations, including disaster relief agencies, churches, social service agencies, and governmental entities.
- ◆ *Active:* June 22, 2011 - October 16, 2014.

Volunteer Coordination and Management

Another major component of the LTRC was the Volunteer Committee, which worked with AmeriCorps St. Louis, Rebuild Joplin, and the City of Joplin to develop effective tools for coordinating and connecting the thousands of volunteers that came to take part in recovery efforts:

- ◆ The LTRC and Rebuild Joplin, a nonprofit founded in the wake of the tornado to help provide affordable and safe housing by coordinating volunteers and construction experts, partnered with the Volunteer Housing Network (VHN) to facilitate a community-wide collaboration in housing volunteers.
- ◆ Incoming volunteers were provided with a packet of housing opportunities available through the VHN. As part of the partnership, the LTRC and Rebuild Joplin provided volunteer housing training and shelter management support to members of the VHN (see Volunteer Hosting Guidance), and—if necessary—funding to ensure housing facilities were in compliance with the fire code.

◆ The LTRC also provided coordination and placement of volunteers in work assignments. To help ascertain the effectiveness of the volunteer program, the LTRC developed a survey to be completed by its members, as well as documentation to help track and manage volunteers (see Community Asset Survey, Volunteer Intake Form, and Liability Waiver).

Highlights^v

- ◆ Secured \$1.5 million dollars for benevolence home repairs and construction
- ◆ Completed 1,312 home repairs/rebuilds with over 1 million hours of volunteer labor
- ◆ Handled over 1,500 cases of unmet, disaster-related needs
- ◆ Served 4,459 displaced tornado families through the Human Services Campus
- ◆ Facilitated several “Home of Your Own” Workshops to equip new homeowners with skills to ensure successful homeownership for the future.

ⁱ Daniel J. Smith and Daniel Sutter, “Response and Recovery after the Joplin Tornado: Lessons Applied and Lessons Learned,” *The Independent Review* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 165-166.

ⁱⁱ Rachel Delcau, “Mo-DCMP Evaluation Report: Learning from the Missouri Disaster Case Management Program,” Rachel Delcau Consulting, LLC (October 2013): 57.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 10.

^{iv} Jasper County COAD, Inc., “Emotional Support,” <http://www.jaspercountycoad.org/emotional-support>

^v Lynn Iliff Onstot, “Fact Sheet – City of Joplin May 22, 2011 EF-5 Tornado,” Public Information Office, Joplin, Missouri (November 2015).