

GULF COAST LISTENING PROJECT (GCLP)

PART I

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS ON INTERVIEWS

CONDUCTED IN 2006

WITH HURRICANE KATRINA EVACUEES

IN ATLANTA, GA., BIRMINGHAM, AL.,

and COLUMBIA, S.C.

August 2006

IMPORTANT: This report is in two parts. GCLP interviews were guided by 30 pre-determined and open ended questions. Interviewers were trained to ask follow-up questions to help obtain a deeper understanding of the interviewees' thoughts and feelings.

Part 1 presents "Observations" summarizing findings of the interviews in key areas of interest to the public and to our purpose. The full 24 interview questions are also listed here. However, a more detailed accounting of response to these questions follows in Part 2 of the report. Twenty-six interviews, each lasting about 2 hours have thus far been conducted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Hurricane Katrina	2
The Gulf Coast Listening Project (GCLP)	2
Thanks and Pictures	3
Purpose of this report.....	4
Use of this Report.....	4
Contact Information.....	5

INDIVIDUAL STORIES

From Algiers to Angels: Lynette Harris's Story.....	6
The Plight of Pointe A La Hache: Through the Eyes of Cheryl Page.....	10

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	12
---------------------------------	-----------

OBSERVATIONS / SUMMARY ON KEY ELEMENTS OF REPORT

Finding Safety.....	14
Recovery from the Hurricane: Coping With Daily Life As An Evacuee.....	15
Ongoing Needs of Evacuees.....	16
How Aid and Services for Evacuees Worked (Or Didn't).....	17
Social Issues: Race, Poverty and Inequality.....	18
Ideas for Change & HOPE.....	20

DETAILS OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS.....	See Part 2 Report
---	--------------------------

GCLP FOLLOW-UP EDUCATION AND ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GETTING INVOLVED

Opportunities in Atlanta, Columbia and Birmingham.....	23
Opportunities in Your Community.....	24

HURRICANE KATRINA

“Hurricane Katrina resulted in the largest displacement of Americans in 150 years - if not the largest ever. It's as if the entire Dust Bowl migration occurred in 14 days, or the dislocations caused by the Civil War took place on fast-forward.” (CSM; Peter Grier).

.In addition to more than 1,300 fatalities caused by Katrina throughout the Southeast, the hurricane left hundreds of thousands without access to their homes or jobs; separated people from their loved ones; and inflicted both physical and mental distress on those who suffered through the storm and its aftermath. Unlike economic damage, human suffering is extremely difficult to quantify, but it is clear that Hurricane Katrina has caused more immediate anguish than any other natural disaster ever to hit America.

GULF COAST LISTENING PROJECT (GCLP)

Citizen awareness of deep-seated national issues such as poverty and inequality were also raised in the aftermath of Katrina. The front page of the September 19, 2005 issue of *Newsweek* featured an article titled, “Poverty, Race and Katrina: Lessons of a National Shame.” Facts and figures began to surface revealing patterns of poverty and inequality that troubled most Americans.

In October 2005, Rural Southern Voice for Peace, with support from the Martha and Spencer Love Foundation, began to organize the Gulf Coast Listening Project. The Gulf Coast Listening Project is based on three sets of in-depth interviews conducted with Katrina evacuees in Columbia, S.C., Atlanta, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama. Local citizen, religious and civic organizations worked for many months developing their project goals and coalition structure, as well as interview questions and other resources needed to conduct the Listening Project interviews.

In-depth training was provided to volunteers, who have been conducting and recording the interviews at each of our three sites. Twenty-six interviews, each about two hours long, have thus far been completed. GCLP interviewers are skilled at building empathy and trust, so that people can truly express and release their fears, hurts, hopes, needs, ideas and solutions.

GCLP interviews have enabled Katrina survivors to:

- a). Share thoughts and feelings about:
 - i). Their Katrina experience
 - ii) Immediate and unheeded needs of Gulf Coast residents
 - iii) Issues of poverty, inequality and racial discrimination.
- b). Give their ideas and solutions for effective citizen and civic response to the above issues and problems.
- c). Consider involvement in grassroots education and action programs that can address issues and concerns raised by the Listening Project interviews.

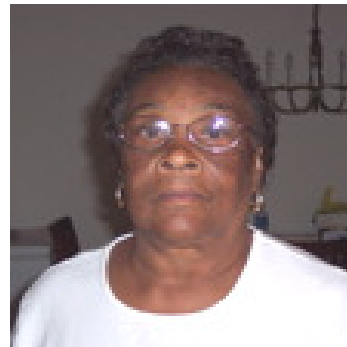
“Listening Projects give people a sense of power by getting them to speak up about what they perceive as problems and then to offer solutions.” NBC Nightly News, 1994

THANKS TO...

The Gulf Coast Listening Project is grateful for the courage, compassion and wisdom that we have found in you --- the Hurricane Katrina evacuees we have interviewed and worked with. We thank you for offering your thoughts, feelings, ideas, concerns and solutions with us in a manner that can help us as a nation see more clearly the blessings and the challenges ahead. You are truly remarkable people. A few are pictured below.

We believe that our nation must renew our commitment to addressing the needs of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. We are also reminded by the voices of the Katrina victims that issues of justice, equality and human needs must be at the top of our political and social agendas.

We also give our heartfelt thanks to the volunteers, the organizations and the faith communities that have made this project possible.



PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

A central purpose of the Gulf Coast Listening Project is to bring forth the voices and the wisdom of the Hurricane Katrina survivors. The experiences, stories, ideas and insights of these citizens are a reminder and a guide to our nation as we continue to address critical social and political issues raised in the aftermath of Katrina.

This initial report is being released at the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The question before us as a nation is: What have we learned from our experience with Katrina? Can we go beyond a superficial look at the issues raised by this disaster and extract deeper meaning? Can we become a better people and country by listening more fully to the voices of Katrina survivors – hearing their untold stories, reflections, ideas, insights and wisdom?

We believe the answer to all these questions is YES. Thus we bring you this report on the twenty-four interviews we have thus far completed and processed. We anticipated completing more interviews by this time; however, by the time we were appropriately organized, trained and ready to begin interviewing, evacuees were widely scattered and very difficult to locate. In some cases evacuees dealing with severe life difficulties and fears simply cancelled interview arrangements. This we fully understood for many of the evacuees continually had to deal with post-traumatic stress as a result of their Katrina experience.

Perhaps one of the best reasons for this project and this report was stated to us quite clearly by Mr. Sherman Brown: “We have to tell our story if we want it to be told correctly.” Separation is the cause of many problems in our society. Not really knowing or understanding one another, not seeing our common humanity, leads to indifference and injustice. So perhaps we need to heed the old adage and “Walk a mile in their shoes,” so that we can better understand those whom we judge. Knowing each other’s stories helps ease the separation and allows us to try on the shoes of others who deserve our compassion and our respect. In this light – we share these stories from the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. We expect to complete more interviews in months to come.

USE OF THIS REPORT

We invite you to use this report to help us bring the voice of the Katrina survivors to the American public. Please feel free to copy this report for educational purposes – if not copied in full please credit Rural Southern Voice for Peace and the Gulf Coast Listening Project – providing all our contact information.

GCLP interview scribes wrote down what interviewees said in response to each question. In some cases the scribe wrote down a summary of what a person said so there are no quotation marks with such recordings. Quotes are in quotation marks. Both quotes (with person’s name) and summary statements (with no quotation marks and sometimes no name) are contained herein. Whenever a name and quotations are given, we have a signed permission form from to use the quotes in GCLP media releases and educational work.

For additional ideas and opportunities to engage in education and organizing work on issues of Katrina survivors and the larger issues of race, poverty and inequality – see “Follow-Up” section at the end of this report.

CONTACT INFORMATION

National GCLP Director

Herb Walters, director, Rural Southern Voice for Peace
828-675-4626 ; hwalters@yancey.main.nc.us

National Media Campaign:

Rebecca Bowe, media coordinator
510-457-8799; rbowe22@hotmail.com

Local GCLP Coalitions

Birmingham Project coalition:

National Conference for Community and Justice, Birmingham Friends Meeting
Greater Birmingham Ministries, Jefferson County Health Department,
Beloved Community UCC church.

Peter Furst, coordinator, 205-595-9768; p_furst@yahoo.com

Columbia, S.C. coalition:

Columbia Friends Meeting; Consumer Education Council,
South Carolina Christian Action Council, Carolina Peace Resource Center.

Rebecca and Harry Rogers, coordinators, 803-252-2221,
harryrogers@carolinapeace.org

Atlanta coalition:

Institute for Survival and Beyond, Atlanta ACORN, Our Lady of Lourdes Church
American Friends Service Committee, S.E. Regional Office
Georgia Rural Urban Summit, Atlanta Trinity House, SOS (Save Our Selves),

Joe Seyoum Lewis, coordinator; 404-247-2872 (cell) 404-247-2872 (office)
lewisjoe@bellsouth.net

National and Regional Partners

ACORN, American Friends Service Committee, S.E. Regional Office, U.S.
Fellowship of Reconciliation, SOS (“Save Our Selves” a national organization of
Katrina survivors).

FROM ALGIERS TO AN ANGEL'S SHELTER: LYNETTE HARRIS' STORY

This is the story of Ms. Lynette Harris of Algiers, La, who remained in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit. In the aftermath of the storm, she not only lost her home but suffered a miscarriage and lost the baby she'd been carrying for five months. A combination of her own strength and courage, along with help from strangers, allowed her to survive and carry on.

Ms. Harris said, "I am a worker and I take care of my kids." She worked full time in housekeeping and laundry at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in New Orleans while living in Section 8 housing in Algiers. On August 15, immediately before the storm, Ms. Lynette Harris was placed on bed rest by her physician due to complications with her pregnancy.

As Katrina started moving toward New Orleans, she and her family were completely distracted by the logistical and financial complications of following her physician's orders and were not paying attention to the weather. A relative, aware that the family was living in a potential flood zone, alerted them of the danger. Her car was broken so her father, Mr. Charles Harris, came to get them in his truck. With the rain pouring down and very little passenger space there was room to take only a few of their things. Her father ran out of gas in all the stalled traffic but was eventually assisted by police. Finally, they made it to the 3-story building in the 7th Ward where her father worked. He thought this would be a safe place since that area had never flooded before.

The building was filled with many sick and elderly people whose medical needs were not being met. The little community shared food and water for the next three days with the stronger ones, such as Ms. Harris' children, helping the less able move to higher floors as the water rose.

By Wednesday food and water were running out and by Thursday the situation was desperate. A party set out to try to purchase some drinking water. Robert, Lynette Harris' son, noted that according to televised reports: "Black people were considered looting while White people were 'finding things'. The people in the building were going in the stores for water only."

Eventually everyone had to evacuate to the roof of the building. Five or six boats arrived and transported them to Interstate 10. From there the family began walking toward the Superdome. The family included young children as well as Lynette Harris' oldest daughter, who at that time was seven months pregnant herself. After walking eight to ten blocks, in 110-degree heat with no food or water, encountering a number of dead bodies along the way, Lynette Harris began having contractions and internal bleeding. Her father left them to look for police to help her. Others in her party laid her down and tried to keep her hydrated. Her children frantically tried to wave down vehicles to transport their mother.

Lynette Harris remembers: "The first 'angel' came and prayed over me, asking GOD to not let me have the baby on the Interstate. It seemed to slow down the contractions. I did not know who the woman was and did not see her again." Soon after, two men in a car stopped to help. These men tried to call a helicopter but were unsuccessful. The men were willing to transport Lynette Harris to the hospital but felt it imperative that she lay down in the car. That meant there would not be room in the car to transport all her children. Ms. Harris flatly refused stating: "No, I cannot leave my children."

The two men took Ms. Harris, her two daughters, her son and granddaughter to St. Elizabeth Hospital in Gonzalez, Louisiana. While at the hospital, the staff wanted to send her

kids to a shelter. She objected again saying that they needed to patch her up and let her go because she was not going to let her kids become separated from her.

At this time Lynette Harris remembers: "Another 'angel', named Cathy Coberly, came to my rescue." Cathy, a white woman, was delivering food to the hospital and overheard the conversation. She quickly volunteered to take all of the kids to her own home with her and promised that they would not have to go to a shelter. Relieved, Lynette Harris agreed to stay and receive the medical treatment she needed. At Saint Elizabeth Hospital, the contractions stopped. Cathy brought the kids back to see her the next morning, just as Ms. Harris was being discharged. She and the children spent the weekend in Cathy's home. Lynette could feel the baby moving within her. But by the time she was seen at Women's Hospital in Baton Rouge on Monday, a week after the hurricane, an ultra-sound showed that her baby had no heart beat.

Lynette Harris miscarried on September 5, 2005. Ms. Harris' oldest daughter had a chance to hold the stillborn baby. The baby was named Angel. She was mourned and later cremated. Lynette Harris would not see or hold Angel. In her grief she blamed herself for the miscarriage.

The Harris family stayed for three weeks in Gonzales, Louisiana with the Coberly family. During this time, while watching television, they saw footage of Mr. Charles Harris, Lynette's father being rescued off the bridge in New Orleans, where he had been pushing a wheelchair-bound person. He was evacuated to Arkansas where he received a voucher and used it to buy a car. Mr. Harris briefly joined Lynette and the family in Gonzales.

Ms. Harris returned to New Orleans to the house she had rented for two years. "Most of our things were ruined because of the flooding (about a foot or more inside the house) but we were able to get the television and other things that were up high off the floor. Our clothes, furniture, bedding, toys and food were lost, most everything we owned."

The family needed to find a place to relocate. They did not want to go to Texas after hearing about all the problems evacuees were having there. Cathy's church in Gonzales contacted their sister church in Roswell, Georgia on behalf of the Harris family. Mary Hall Freedom House had apartments available for evacuees. Ms. Harris had a cousin in Georgia who looked into the school system and housing and said this was a good place to live. Ms. Harris was the first to get an apartment here in Atlanta. But home was still in New Orleans and the family hoped to return.

By October, they were being evicted from that home. The owners of the house wanted to fix it up to rent to others since housing was so scarce in the New Orleans area.

Lynette Harris says her family members have been scattered since the storm. Her grandmother went to Texas, then to relatives in Alabama and finally returned to New Orleans area. Mr. Charles Harris went to Massachusetts and has also returned to New Orleans. Ms. Harris's oldest daughter successfully gave birth to her child in October and is now living in Marrero, Louisiana.

Lynette Harris remembers: "At Christmas time, the Red Cross paid for us to fly home, but not to return," she says. "There was no home to return to. While in New Orleans, we stayed with Grandmother and my great-grandmother. It was a great Christmas. Family and friends gave money to send us back to Atlanta by January 2, 2006. We took the train back and were able to get another apartment in Roswell. It took from September to March to get a housing voucher."

At the time of this interview Ms. Harris is living in the Atlanta area and sharing the apartment with her son and daughter. Mary Hall Freedom House covers parts of the family's expenses until June 2006. They are hoping for more FEMA money, a car and more furniture to enable them to get back on their feet and hopefully return to New Orleans. "We really miss being

home in New Orleans. It is like being from Mars and living in Venus.” The children have attended in six different schools since leaving New Orleans.

When asked how she’d been treated in Atlanta, Ms. Harris responded, “It depends on specific persons. Employees at a Target store were not pleasant, food stamp people were not pleasant. Basically only a few people have been nasty.” She also recalls an evident racial bias when trying to rent a car.

On a really positive note, she says the Mary Hall Freedom House is very good place and well known in the community.

To make ends meet, she gets assistance through food stamps, a Housing Voucher for Section 8, and the Mary Hall Freedom House. “I had to become accustomed to being helped. You don’t have to go anywhere, she (Ms. Lucy of Mary Hall Freedom House) would take care of it.” At the time of the interview, she was about to start her job at Wal-Mart. “I would like to have a car.”

Her faith has developed a lot since it all began. She said she is Catholic, but had never asked God for help. She said she still does not know what her purpose is. “I am learning to depend on the Lord now. I have always depended on myself, only.”

Ms. Harris stresses, “I am not a victim, I am a survivor. I am tired of being labeled.” When asked about racism and poverty as it relates to Katrina, Ms. Harris said, “The first problem was the label of ‘refugees.’ The pictures of Black people sitting on the bridge and interstate, at the Superdome and Convention Center, was just too much.. Just don’t label us. I was one of them and nobody knows anything about what we had to do to make it. Here they talk about the gangs -- we didn’t have that at home. All we had was a few ‘wannabe drug dealers’ trying to act bad, maybe selling a little dope but no real gangs like the Crips and the Bloods. We did not have that problem in New Orleans. I hate the labeling. I am not here to hurt you. I am just trying to help myself and my kids.”

When asked what is needed for people to rise out of poverty or to better their lives economically, she said, “Better jobs and better paying jobs. They are not paying enough money to cover the amount of hours here. I was surviving at home with one paycheck and even though I was living from paycheck to paycheck, I had everything I needed. I did not come here for a handout; I only need a little help to get started. At home, people are already raising rents so to discourage you from coming back.”

What keeps people poor? Ms. Harris offered some insight from her own experience. “Speaking for myself, I was getting Food Stamps but I paid my taxes. I worked everyday but I guess you could consider us to be at that poverty level. My take-home pay was \$600.00 a month so I qualified for Food Stamps, but when my daughter was hired at the hotel (same job) that was another \$600.00 a month coming into the household. They cut the food stamps off but the month before, I filled up the refrigerator, because I knew they would do that.”

However the social services never took into consideration the light bill and other utility bills and no personal needs you may have, she said. “A telephone is a luxury. My monthly cost for rent went up. It took my check and some of hers [her daughter] to cover the housing. She lost her job and I immediately went back and reapplied for food stamps. I did not want her to lose her job, but the little aid I received did help us more.”

Had she experienced racism prior to Katrina? “I cannot say that I have ever experienced race problems. Where I work, we are like one family, Blacks and Whites. Our manager had a room for me at the hotel, I just didn’t know in time, but some of my family members went there and we taken care of.”

When asked what could be done to eliminate poverty, she stated simply, “They can rebuild New Orleans and can afford to pay decent wages.” Bring back New Orleans downtown shopping, she said, instead of building new hotels, casinos and other tourism-based facilities.

To improve race relations in this country, her son Robert offered this advice: “Stop labeling people.” Ms. Harris echoed, “Stop looking at the color of the skin. In Louisiana, skin colors are so diverse in all races especially with African Americans. Stop looking at the color of my skin. I am as good inside as I look on the outside. Take time to get to know me. In New Orleans, sometimes you don’t know whether the person is Black or White and at work we were just like a family.”

Ms. Harris’s son, Robert spoke about an experience from when they were staying at Ms. Cathy’s house. The two younger boys were so concerned when mama (Ms. Harris) came home from the hospital. They wanted to know why she stayed in the room and cried all the time in the beginning. Robert said he did not know how to tell them that his mom had lost the baby and she was grieving, so instead he ignored the 3-and-5-year-old boys’ questions. They got angry with him and because they were guests in these boys’ home, Robert did not know what to do. Robert talked with the oldest boy, who was closer in age to himself (one year younger,) and the two together came up with a way to tell the younger boys so that they could understand what his mom was going through. The older boy also shared with Robert that he was just recovering from cancer, so his family too knew something about death and dying. When his mom did come out of the room, Ms. Cathy’s husband made a big deal of it, and it really helped both families to feel even more comfortable with each other. They stayed with the family for 2 weeks longer and are eternally grateful for that Angel “Ms. Cathy” to have taken them in when they were most vulnerable.

She stated her feelings on taxes with the following: “People need education, they need job training. I don’t mind paying more taxes if it went for specific programs to help people, especially if it went for those things and for programs for children and housing also.”

She doesn’t believe recovery is happening, as it should in New Orleans. “The money is being used for the wrong things. They are only worrying about Canal Street and Bourbon Street. That’s where their money is (the City’s Money).” When asked what lessons could be learned from Katrina, Ms. Harris said, “The biggest thing was that when they said for everyone to evacuate, everyone did not have transportation. They should have had things in place to evacuate those people without cars. They should have a little compassion for everyone. I think they should have a better chain of command. The guy over FEMA was not talking to the people he needed to be talking to, he was too busy making jokes. Maybe the Army should be ready to take over.” (She mentioned the National Guard and how they came in and took charge and got people out of the city.) “Maybe they should have been there in the beginning and maybe we would not have had the catastrophe that happened. Maybe all of those people would not have died. ”

She hopes to return to New Orleans eventually. As for what the future holds for her children, she said, “I see my Chef and my Artist.” Ms. Harris says.

Her son Robert chimed in, “There are three main things I like to do, I like to draw, cook, and I want to be an architect, so that is like seeing myself drawing, cooking and building things,” said Robert. “And I have my Raven (Raven Simone),” Ms. Harris concludes. Her daughter wants to be an actress.

When asked what she hopes will come out of this project, she said, “I hope you are able to reach people with a better perspective than what is happening on television.”

THE PLIGHT OF POINTE A LA HACHE: THROUGH THE EYES OF CHERYL PAGE

At the time that Hurricane Katrina hit, Cheryl Page, 56, was living in Atlanta, Ga. She suffered no direct impact from the storm, but her family suffered tremendous losses. As the storm was approaching, many of her relatives evacuated, traveling to Atlanta to stay with her while they waited out the storm. When they returned, they found that everything—including the house where Cheryl grew up, which belonged to her mother—had been destroyed. Cheryl is currently working as an interview coordinator for the Gulf Coast Listening Project.

Cheryl describes her childhood household as the “center of the community.” Her mother, Alli Thomas, had been the eldest daughter in a family of eleven children. She was nineteen when she gave birth to Cheryl, who was the first of her nine children. They lived in Pointe A La Hache along a river that divided the rural Plaquemines Parish, located south of New Orleans and bordered by the Gulf.

“Even though my mom had nine children of her own, she always had two of somebody else’s children,” Cheryl recalls. Her mother, a trusted member of the community, acted as a counselor for troubled youth, and her home functioned more or less as a community center.

But Cheryl says it took decades for the parish to establish a real community center there that black people could have access to. “As a child, we did have community centers there -- but it was understood that black people weren’t welcome,” she says. In 1982, that resource was finally built. Weddings, family reunions, and other celebrations were held there. It featured basketball courts, a baseball field, a playground, a lake, a tennis court and an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

The building, which held so much history for the black community, was destroyed during the hurricane. But to Cheryl’s dismay, the parish made no move to recover the space as a community center once Katrina had passed. “They have since put almost a thousand of these mini traveler-trailers on the property – most of which are not being used,” she says. “And they closed in the swimming pool with dirt. It’s as if they’re saying ‘now that it’s destroyed, let’s keep it that way.’” That was the single resource for youth that existed in the community, she points out. “And they could have put this anywhere else but there. It means that all of our work in all these years has just gone down the tubes.”

In an overview of life before Katrina, Cheryl says, “Life was hard, and black people were always pretty much out of work.” The main industries that employed black people were the fishing industry, and the coal plant, but she says that without sufficient employment opportunities for the upcoming generation, the community was “beginning to die.”

Her mother, aunt, four sisters, cousins, children and grandchildren left on the Saturday before the storm hit and headed for Cheryl’s three-bedroom house in Atlanta, where she lives with her husband and two daughters. The night before the hurricane, 34 people were crammed into her house, and 23 stayed the entire month. “My neighbors saw the cars on my lawn with Louisiana license plates and came by with food, and clothes, and money, anything and everything.” Neighbors even volunteered to drive family members to pick up medications and get the assistance they needed.

In addition to hosting everyone, Cheryl had to deal with a brief hospitalization, leaving her with an \$8,000 bill since she was uninsured. One of her uncles, meanwhile, had stayed in New Orleans and was missing after the storm. He’d gone to the Superdome for five days, and after they finally tracked him down he got on a bus to Atlanta.

While her family was treated very well by Cheryl's church and surrounding community, they experienced problems when dealing with any governmental or social aid agencies. The Red Cross, the food stamps agency, and others were swarmed with hurricane evacuees, so there were long lines to contend with that could sometimes last entire days.

After their month-long stay through the aftermath of the storm, many of her family members returned to Louisiana. Some family members are residing in traveler trailers on the property in Pointe A La Hache, one sister had a trailer provided for her because she works as a police officer, and her mother is in an apartment in Baton Rouge. Building codes and how they tie in with insurance rates still haven't been set in the area, which is even further below sea level than New Orleans, resulting in a freeze on any new construction there.

Her family members needs have been met for the most part, but there are a few unresolved issues that have led Cheryl to travel back and forth to Louisiana to offer her assistance. "Let me just tell you how things work for poor people," Cheryl says. Her 75-year-old mother, for instance, has a monthly income of around \$500 and multiple health issues. Her food stamps were cut off for a month due to confusion about her permanent address entry on the paperwork, and no one from the agency communicated what the problem was. She recently had a problem paying her phone bill, because the Baton Rouge mail system failed to deliver her payment to the phone company, Wal-Mart was unsuccessful in tracking the money order she used to pay the bill, and the phone company sent a letter saying they would sue for the amount she owed. "I told her not to worry about it," Cheryl said. "What else can they get? She doesn't have a house to live in, she doesn't own anything anymore. What else can they get?"

It's her family's belief in God and the Catholic faith that has carried them through this, Cheryl said. "We all prayed many times during that whole process and we still continue to pray."

The main thing that makes it difficult for people to rise out of poverty, Cheryl says, is a "denial of access" to things like higher education and well-paying jobs. "A lot of people are poor because of low wages, high living costs, poor education, lack of health care, lack of affordable housing, and expensive childcare.

"If you have an income that's \$601, you are just past the poverty line. That one dollar over can mean you'd be denied food stamps, health care for your children, and a whole host of things. How do you pay rent, and pay utilities, and bring your kids to the doctor? It all goes back to not having access to the things you need."

In Pointe A La Hache, Cheryl says, the recovery effort is far from being done. People are still waiting to settle insurance issues, and anyone who lost a home, whether they were middle-class or low-income, was reduced to the same level after losing everything. "They were basically left holding the bag."

When asked what lessons the country could learn from the experiences of her community, Cheryl responded: "We need to realize that the U.S. is one of the most unique places on earth, with a variety of all kinds of people, and just because some one has a black face doesn't mean they're poor. The people you saw on television with the bundles under their arms and everything, not all of those people were poor."

When asked about improving race relations, she said, "I'd like to see people treated according to humanity, to treat people in need without looking at the color of their skin."

What could be done to improve disaster response? "The leaders need to come together, and stop passing the buck," Cheryl said, quoting one of the people interviewed during the GCLP. She hopes that this project will provide a "voice for the people."

GCLP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell us about your life before Katrina.
2. Please tell us the story of leaving your home.
3. Where are your family members and how are they doing? (All here / Scattered)
4. Have you been able to return to your home?
5. What is your current living situation?
6. What is it like for you and your family ending up so far away from home?
7. How have you been treated here in our city?
8. How have you managed to take care of yourself (and family) here?
9. What needs do you have now that are not being met?
10. What personal, religious or spiritual beliefs have helped you during these difficult times?
11. Hurricane Katrina brought to our nations attention the great number of poor people in our cities. It also brought up many feelings about race and prejudice. How do you feel the issues of poverty, race and class affected you and other hurricane survivors?
12. What do you think makes it difficult for people to rise out of poverty or to better their lives economically?
13. Because of Katrina many Americans have been talking about poverty in our nation. Some people say people are poor because of low wages, high living costs, poor education, lack of health care, lack of affordable housing, and expensive child care. Others say people are poor because they lack motivation, they are lazy, and they like living off of the government. What do you think?
14. How did issues of race, class, prejudice or inequality affect your everyday life before Hurricane Katrina?
15. What do you think can be done to help reduce or eliminate poverty?
16. What do you think can be done to improve race relations in our country?
17. Many people believe federal tax policy has a big effect on the economy and poverty. Which of the following positions might represent your feelings about taxes? I'll read the choices once. Then I'll read them a second time and you can choose those positions that you agree with. You can choose more than one position that you might support.
 - Continue tax cuts including tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans to stimulate economic growth.
 - Continue tax cuts to help growth but only for low income or middle class Americans.
 - No more tax cuts so we can begin to balance the federal budget and improve programs for health, education, job training housing and other social programs.
 - In addition to no more tax cuts, put back some of the taxes back on the wealthiest Americans.

18. Is recovery happening like you think it should in your home community?
19. What do you think our country could learn from your experiences?
20. Do you have any ideas or opinions on ways our nation could improve its response to such disasters in the future?
21. What are your future living plans?
22. Given all that we've discussed, what future do you see for your children?
23. What do you hope will come out of this project?
24. Is there anything else you'd like to say today?
25. Thank you for your time, thoughts and ideas. We will compile a report after we've listened to other evacuees here. Would you like to receive a copy of our report to learn what everyone has said?
26. Would you be interested in talking with others, for the purpose of helping people think about and possibly act on the issues we have discussed here?
27. We hope that some citizens will be inspired by what we learn from these interviews to work in some way for social justice in their community. Would you be interested in doing this?
28. We'd like to share with citizens throughout the country what we learn from you and other Katrina survivors. We want to do this so we can inform people about what really happened, and what the current situation is with Katrina survivors. We also hope to inspire people, churches and citizen groups to take some action for social justice. Can we have permission use your quotes in materials we use for this purpose?
29. We'd also like to take a picture of each Katrina survivor that we interview. These may be provided to the media and used in educational materials produced by the Gulf Coast Listening Project. Would you sign a permission slip that will enable us to do this?
30. *If they have a teenage child you'd like to interview, ask their permission to interview her or him and get them to sign permission forms on teen question forms. If they have a younger child ask if they would be willing to let their child draw a picture of their Katrina experience and ask them to sign permission slip for use of picture(s).*

CONTINUE ON TO NEXT PAGES TO COMPLETE INTERVIEW AND PERMISSION FORMS.

OBSERVATIONS / SUMMARY ON KEY ELEMENTS OF GCLP INTERIM REPORT

FINDING SAFETY

Finding a place of safety, for many trying to escape Hurricane Katrina, was a long, arduous and traumatic task. Below are notes taken from interviews with several evacuees. All quotations include quotation marks.

The building we were in was a one-story building so we couldn't get out of the water. We stood in water up to our chests for three days. We ate potato chips and some food we found in the lockers. I made a flag from a rod and the kitchen curtain to get the attention of the helicopters. A guy came by in a boat en route to get others and said he would return the next day. The rescuer put us on top of an overpass where we spent the night. I was having real trouble with my arthritis and my son who has diabetes was without medication for three days. (Elizabeth and her son were eventually put on a bus and then a United Way plane.) (Elizabeth Coleman)

We didn't have a reliable vehicle so we couldn't get out of the city also we didn't have enough money to buy gas. So we drove to the Superdome the day before the storm. I had no money and no transportation. We stayed at the Superdome from Sunday to the following Saturday in horrendous conditions although we were reassured at first by the presence of guards and the police chief. It was night when Katrina came and the whole building was shaking; pieces of the roof blew off and rain poured in. Sanitary conditions were awful: the plumbing didn't work, raw sewage backed up in the hallway; the power went out on the second night; it was hot and smelly. The National Guard came with ready-to-eat meals but threw them at the evacuees. We resented being called "refugees." On the third day, we were allowed to go outside for some fresh air and ended up sleeping outside on a walkway. Some incidents of violence occurred. Trust in the mayor, governor, and police chief eroded as the evacuees were told different stories about how they were going to get out of the Superdome. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. "It was all about survival." My mother is a diabetic and was becoming increasingly ill. When we were told to board a bus for Huntsville, TX, there was only one door to go through. "I've never seen so many people dropping dead in front of me." We stayed in a shelter for two weeks in Texas (they were told they could stay there for 16 weeks but were "kicked out" after two weeks) and then came to Birmingham. FEMA paid for us to stay in a hotel until March 29 at which point we moved into their current house. My husband had a job until we were 'rear-ended' by a tractor trailer. He still needs medical attention. The children had problems at school so I took them out; they will start at a new school for this coming year. Although they like the neighborhood they are in now, they have been told they will have to move in February or find the money to buy the house. (Aisha Coleman)

"It was like going to sleep and when you awoke, your life had been turned upside down."
(Mr. Percy Griffin, Jr.)

"They took us out at gunpoint." (Mr. Michael Mack)

RECOVERY FROM THE HURRICANE: COPING WITH DAILY LIFE AS AN EVACUEE

“Katrina’s not over.” (Ms. Sable Gaspard)

A year after the Katrina disaster, recovery for evacuees is still in process.

Extraordinary patience was needed by the evacuees. Already dealing with unimaginable losses, both human and material, they were -- and still are -- subjected to extreme stress. This is brought on by difficulties in communication, waiting in line (often at several locations), filling out forms which required information (like birth certificates and Social Security cards that they did not have with them), calling agencies and then having to be available for return phone calls, applying for jobs but not having transportation, enduring delays in news about their family members, not being in the right "phase" for services -- all these required superhuman patience and stamina. Many evacuees expressed understandable frustration about the red tape involved in getting help.

When asked what got sustained them through their ordeals, most evacuees cited faith and religious beliefs.

“My belief in God and justice.” (Ms.Sable Gaspard).

“Talking to God lifts you up.” (Mr. John Stephenson)

“My faith keeps me constantly telling myself to count my blessings.” (Robin Lewis)

For Evelyn Kostellic and others, the love and generosity of the individuals and families that helped them, kept them going. As one evacuee put it: “My faith in humanity is restored. They have opened their hearts up and poured their heart out.”

Evacuees who had family help or who had good financial resources fared better of course than those without one or the other.

Lucy Latshaw’s family were able to sell their house in Metarie for a profit and buy a house in Alabama. Still however, she wakes up and doesn’t quite know where she is.

Some of those with fewer resources have also been able to begin rebuilding their lives.

Sadie Williamson says she likes it in Birmingham area, noting that she lives in project housing but it doesn’t seem like a project.

Ms. Dianne Weinmann told use she had just moved into a HUD house, 1 year rent free with the option to buy.

“It’s been good. I’m liking it here. The schools are alright, I’m making alright grades. I like my teachers, they listen to me... I lost all my baby pictures—they’re in the trees and water. It’s pretty sad.” (Mitchell Joseph Yeager)

“My sons have simplified needs and wants. Both have open, honest relationship with God now. 12 year old has profound sense of family and home, school behavior better than it was during our temporary stay in Arizona.” (Ms. Evelyn Kostellic)

“It’s kind of better here.”

For many more, however, adjusting to life as an evacuee has been extremely difficult.

“The hardest part is my father and grandfather have been gone since Feb 28th. It’s different, we’ve had so many changes, everything is dysfunctional, hardest on four year old who can’t understand why his dad is away most of the time. Early on, when we (evacuees at Oak Mt) talked about it, we couldn’t talk without crying.” (Ms. Kristy Cook)

“We miss New Orleans. There we were part of a community; here we just live in a house. Home is more than the house you live in.” (Ms. Janice Currie)

“We had been self-reliant all our lives. To have to rely on complete strangers for your next bite of food is hard.”

“When it rains especially at night, I have problems sleeping. If it is lightening and thundering (electrical storm) and raining, I see bodies floating by. I see the water rising. I am not suicidal or anything. I am not loosing it, but it is something that I have to deal with that maybe can be cured over time. Maybe when I go back to New Orleans and see everything again, maybe just getting back to everyday living. A lot of negatives things have been happening, but I am trying to stay positive.” (Mr. George Lewis)

Most evacuees have not achieved self-sufficiency thus far. For others, the obstacles to some semblance of normalcy are huge. Trauma looms large for many, including symptoms like depression, “bad nerves”, increased temper. One interviewee, who said he had overcome alcoholism in New Orleans, was hospitalized for three months when he started drinking again. Another interviewee was hospitalized three weeks for a mental breakdown.

Several interviewees noted that children were affected the worst. One said her 16 year old really wants to go back home and tried to commit suicide.

ONGOING NEEDS OF EVACUEES

Employment and transportation to get to employment have been primary obstacles to recovery for some. Birmingham GCLP leaders who had concerns about poor public transportation in their city, heard the same from evacuees who were used to a better public transportation system in New Orleans.

Many evacuees feel like they are in a state of limbo with no clear understanding of how or when they can return to the Gulf Coast. The plan for rebuilding seems either non-existent or is unclear and confusing.

As time goes on, services for evacuees begin to lessen and issues like affordable health care loom large once again. Many responded that they had unmet medical needs, including counseling and dental care. They were not yet able to get Medicaid or any other medical assistance. A male evacuee has been diagnosed with collapsed lung and pneumonia, maybe from cleaning out the refrigerator when they went back to their wrecked home.

Many evacuees stated that they needed continued help with rent and utilities. Food security is an ongoing concern for some.

.Janice Currie reported difficulty in keeping utilities paid and the need to reapply every three months for assistance.

HOW AID AND SERVICES FOR EVACUEES WORKED

One interviewee reported:

Regular campers were very helpful. The overall community was helpful—
“A Godsend”. Doctors, dentists, lifeguards, churches brought meals and took people to church. Salvation Army gave gas vouchers. Others gave dishes, clothes, shampoo, shoes, etc. Family in Birmingham wired some money.

What follows is a summary of evacuee feelings about various aid and service providers:

- **Local community including citizen volunteers, churches and schools, on the whole, were the greatest sources of help for evacuees in all three of our sites.**
- **The Salvation Army and the Red Cross received mixed reviews.**
- **The federal government and the Federal Emergency Management Agency were primarily seen as incompetent, insensitive and largely ineffective.** Evacuees are grateful for FEMA trailers, however in one case, hundreds of trailers were placed in a location near New Orleans where there had previously been an invaluable community center for youth in an African American community. The center’s pool, built with sweat equity and long-term investment from the community was simply filled in with dirt for trailer placement.
- **The insurance companies were mistrusted and generally seen as unhelpful.** Most evacuees who had insurance are receiving nowhere near what they thought they should receive and many feel they were misled by insurance companies.

Quotations from evacuees:

“We didn’t see the government. The Red Cross came and left.”

“It doesn’t make sense that FEMA doesn’t work with each other across state lines.” (Ms.Kristy Cook)

“FEMA hired contractors from out of town (rebuilding New Orleans), didn’t give it to people who lived there. People haven’t gotten back yet because businesses aren’t open, and vice versa.” Government agencies are unbelievable, the bureaucracy. It is like you are doomed before you being.” (Ms.Sable Gaspard).

FEMA made my father-in-law, who was totally dependent on them, leave Oak Mountain where the rest of the family was staying with the child being in school. FEMA told my husband, “I guess you will have to decide who is more important, your father or your son.” (Ms. Dianne Weinmann)

“I believe in my country but am disappointed in my leaders.” We need better government – we need a new President!” (Sadie Williamson).

Other interviewees’ reports included:

- ❖ FEMA said they wouldn’t pay rent. Got Medicaid in October but cut off in November
- ❖ Things were fine, “except for FEMA.”
- ❖ From FEMA to Salvation Army, we were treated as if we were applying for welfare or we were beggars.
- ❖ Initially thought it was heaven but as time has gone on some people say, “Why don’t you go home?” (Ms. Janice Currie)
- ❖ “Help is dying down now.” (AC)

SOCIAL ISSUES: RACE, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Katrina evacuees, the majority of whom were African Americans, were faced with a complete breakdown of services and resources needed for survival, health and safety.

“It was like a third world country. The National Guard was out with guns. I thought, ‘The Taliban must be very happy because they wouldn’t have done the damage the storms did.’” (Ms. Sable Gaspard)

Along with the physical debris that rose to the surface of the flood waters, there also arose a sudden public awareness of the ongoing plight of many African Americans living in deep pockets of poverty and inequality. A cover title on the Sept. 19 issue of *Newsweek* magazine read: “Poverty, Race and Katrina: Lessons of a National Shame.”

Initial care and concern for this “national shame” was strong, but waned as reports and rumors (many unsubstantiated) of looting and violence by “roving gangs of black residents” led to the false perception that large numbers of African Americans were taking criminal advantage of the situation. This gave rise to fear and renewed racial stereotyping and prejudice. This phenomena was addressed by several interviewees:

“Here they talk about gangs, we didn’t have that at home. All we had was a few ‘Wannabe drug dealers’ trying to act bad maybe selling a little dope but no real gangs like the Crips and the Bloods. We did not have that problem in New Orleans. I hate the labeling. I am not here to hurt you. I am just trying to help myself and my kids.”

(Ms. Lynette Harris).

“Our community was all about family and love. At the time of the Hurricane, I was working at Nunez Community College as a Program Director. The program that I directed involved a government grant which provided vocational training for black and low income youth. Our community was 99% black. We owned our home, and it sat on 6 acres of land. I could go fishing or hunting whenever I wanted to, and had fresh food anytime I chose to. I was in control of my life and people looked to me for direction because of my expertise in many different areas and my long-standing involvement in the community.”
(Mr. Percy Griffin, Jr.)

One interviewee noted that the story of young men going house to house to rescue people has not been fully told. For example, one African American survivor recalls:

“We took everyone who wanted to go over to the school. Bodies of people and dead animals floated in the water past us. Throughout the night, we went back and forth rescuing about SIXTY people. Sometimes, they had to get out of the boat, walking in the water to get to the front door. Many of the mothers were trying to give us their children, begging us to at least help their kids survive. We tried to assure them that we would come back for them but many still wanted us to take the kids and leave them (the adults) behind. We always made sure that we went back for them.”(Mr. George Lewis)

We asked several questions about the importance of poverty, race and inequality, as factors in daily life in our country, and as they may have affected the events of Katrina.

Opinions varied regarding racial issues. White evacuees tended to minimize the existence of racism and to sometimes see fault within the black community; while African Americans and other white citizens saw racism as an important or serious issue requiring our nation’s attention and action.

On issues of poverty and inequality, there was stronger unity of opinion between both black and white interviewees. Many were aware of the negative effects of poverty and class on the events of Katrina, on the everyday life of many U.S. citizens and on the health and well-being of our nation.

“I don’t think color has anything to do with it – I think it is how you act.”
(Ms. Kristy Cook)

“Terrible things happen when you’re discriminated against all your life.”
(Ms. Janice Currie)

Elizabeth Coleman noted that about twenty percent of the people on the overpass were white and they got more attention than the African Americans.

“280,000 blacks are scattered and they are trying to make New Orleans white.”
(Mr. Everett Simpson).

“If it were not all poor people, it would have been handled differently. If we would have had a few people with money, middle class, upper middle class, white folks; the food problems, busing problems would have been handled differently.” (George Lewis)

“Help people get back on their feet instead of throwing them out like trash.”
(Mr. Jumart Jerome Williamson)

“We can take care of millions and millions of people in other countries and even bring them here and set them up, but poor people from this country, we can’t. Why can’t we bring people from this country, from one city, back home and help them get set-up? If they were more upper and middle class or whites we would help.”
(Mr. George Lewis)

IDEAS FOR CHANGE – LISTENING TO THE EXPERIENCES AND THE WISDOM OF THE KATRINA SURVIVORS

Katrina evacuees also offered ideas for change at personal, social, civic, and governmental levels. These potential solutions express the feeling from survivors that there are positive steps that can be taken to minimize the harm from future hurricanes and other natural disasters.

OVERARCHING THEMES

The need for better communication, greater organization, and more notice and advance warning were stressed over and over again. Also, a better chain of command for massive disasters needs to be established.

Many people shared how prayer and personal faith helped them and their families through the crisis. As one said, “The family’s belief in God carried them through this.”

EVACUATION: IDEAS FOR CHANGE

Here are a few ideas for assisting with evacuation:

- Give more notice to evacuate—not just announce on TV or over the radio.
- The National Guard should have come in earlier to evacuate people, but not by using their guns.
- Exits should have been clearer to get people out.
- Federal government should have been involved from the beginning.

HURRICANE RESPONSE: IDEAS FOR CHANGE

The response to Katrina was inadequate and poorly coordinated. As one survivor said, “There’s no excuse for the government response to Katrina. Nothing excuses the delay in responding.”

Many noticed a discrepancy between the provision of services/resources and the delivery of them. Even as agencies became organized and were aware of the enormous challenges, there

were impediments in the evacuees being able to access these services. Agencies such as FEMA should be mindful of the humanity of their clients, be considerate of the needs and limitations of each person, and they must do a better job of giving people all the information they need to make decisions.

FEMA should have better internal coordination between their national, regional and local offices. In addition, they should coordinate better with all local organizations and providers.

Other ideas for the response include:

- Use other emergency shelters other than the convention center (The Superdome) It doesn't work as shelter.
- Have pre existing emergency centers
- Have a plan for adequate transportation
- Provide quick aid for survivors' immediate needs (including financial help)

There is also a need to tell the stories of the heroes who went house-to-house rescuing people. These are the leaders that we need to follow.

RECOVERY: IDEAS FOR CHANGE

Response to any type of disaster needs to include counseling programs aimed at not only surviving the disaster but also overcoming low self-esteem issues. Such counseling should be available to all who receive government assistance at normal times as well as in response to disasters.

Katrina evacuees expressed the value of their Community Centers, and the need to rebuild these as quickly as possible. These Centers provide the gathering places that will be used to re-create community.

Other ideas included:

- Hire the residents of New Orleans to do the clean-up and rebuilding
- Reduce Government waste, dishonesty and corruption
- "We need a new president. Yes, that's what we need."

RACAL ISSUES: IDEAS FOR CHANGE

Racial issues became highlighted during this disaster.

Evacuees offered these suggestions:

- Stop labeling people.
- Take time to talk, understand, and know one another and don't focus on the color of someone's skin.
- Look at the quality of people's character
- Realize that the diversity that exists in the US is a benefit to everyone.

SOCIAL AND POVERTY ISSUES: IDEAS FOR CHANGE

- Job training and more jobs with increased wages was mentioned frequently. Many who live in poverty are working full time and simply cannot make it at the low wages now given for many jobs.
- Socialize medical care
- Social welfare programs need to be modified so they are more sensitive to the realities of the poor. For example, health benefits are sometimes cut even when someone gets a job at poverty level wages. When families can't make it on such low wages and the health of children is sacrificed, parents can feel discouraged from finding work.
- Reduction of government waste/dishonesty/corruption
- Make programs accessible and advertise to the poor.
- Better funding of education with a focus on education for young mothers.
- Create good job opportunities for young people, so those that go to college will return.
- Create a more diversified economy in New Orleans, not just oil and tourism.
- "Those that have, need to help those that don't." (Mr. Everett Simpson)
- "My husband worked since he was 13; I worked, too. We're angry, we're all angry." (Ms. Kristy Cook)
- Personal responsibility was mentioned in several ways. The primary concern is that people need to grow up in an environment where they learn a good work ethic.
- "We need a new president. Yes, that's what we need." (Unidentified quote)

When asked about to give their preference regarding the following four choices related to taxation, the majority chose C and then B.

- A. Continue tax cuts including tax cuts for wealthiest Americans to stimulate economic growth.
- B. Continue tax cuts to help growth but only for low income or middle class Americans.
- C. No more tax cuts so we can begin to balance the federal budget and improve programs for health, education, job training housing and other social programs.
- D. In addition to no more tax cuts, put some of the taxes back on the wealthiest Americans.

"Increase taxes on mega corporations like Walmart. Wealthy Americans feel like they have the right to do whatever they want to their employees." (Mr. Sherman Brown)

HOPE

Below is a sampling of what hope interviewees had for what might come out of this project:

- ❖ People will learn from this project (Mr. Everett Simpson)
- ❖ Bring people back to where they were or better.
- ❖ Tell all sides of story
- ❖ That my voice be heard
- ❖ That the truth will come out about the way the government and federal funds programs are being abused.

**"That there will never be another time that so many will suffer so much for so long."
(Ms. Evelyn Kostellic)**

GCLP FOLLOW-UP EDUCATION AND ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES -- GETTING INVOLVED

Activities and Opportunities in Atlanta, Columbia and Birmingham

In all three GCLP locations, positive relationships have been developed between interviewers and interviewees and a sense of support and community has been developed among many who have participated in this Listening Project.

In Atlanta, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and GCLP held a gathering of evacuees which allowed for further building of relationships and improving response to ongoing needs of evacuees. In Columbia, the Carolina Peace Resource Center, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Columbia and GCLP will present a Katrina Anniversary Remembrance titled “Levees and Liberties: Two Sides of the Gulf Coast” on Saturday, August 26 at 7:00 p.m. Many leaders from the broader community are participating in this event, including Mayor Bob Coble, Sam Tenenbaum, and South Carolina Christian Action Council Executive Minister, Rev. Brenda Kneece.

GCLP sites will be developing further follow-up work in the coming months. An 8-18-06 report details the follow-up plans in Birmingham which include a focus on connecting evacuee needs with the ongoing social justice issues in Birmingham:

“Gulf Coast Listening Project here in Birmingham has brought together a variety of volunteers and agencies to meet and listen to individuals and families displaced by the natural and social disasters of Hurricane Katrina. In the process of doing the interviews, we realized the similarities between the frustrated evacuees and the challenges of those who have struggled to survive in Birmingham for years. Lack of safe affordable housing, limited and unreliable public transportation, heavy taxation on food and necessities, lack of living wage jobs, lack of affordable and accessible healthcare and other systems have for so long disenfranchised and overburdened the poor, the weak and the vulnerable. As national programs and assistance fade, the evacuees are having to find assistance, like the indigent population already in Alabama, at agencies already strained beyond their resources.”

“As we move forward and lift up the stories of those struggling to reclaim community after Katrina, the Birmingham GCLP feels the necessity to lift up the stories of all who struggle to survive here; both those impoverished by the effects of the storm **and** the already indigent population. We want to begin with gatherings of the volunteers and the interviewees to maintain the relationships already begun and to discuss the formation of a task force. The task force must include representation from many groups, including:

- 1) the agencies serving the poor in the area including those serving evacuees,
- 2) already existent grass-root coalitions and advocacy groups, and
- 3) individuals and families who have been affected, both evacuees and those who have struggled for years.”

“Representation from all groups will be included in the planning process. Too often, the poor have been the recipients of services without being included in the planning and development of effective services. The task force would determine the issues needing to be addressed and discuss ways to better engage those affected and the agencies providing assistance and revise systems to better serve the needs of the citizens.”

By working together and lifting up the stories and voices of ALL our poor, the Birmingham GCLP hopes to engage the larger community in the long overdue process of finding just and compassionate solutions to the many systemic problems.”

Opportunities In Your Community

GCLP regional and national sponsors will help initiate GCLP follow-up organizing and education work regionally and nationally. Wherever you may be located, you too can get involved by developing GCLP programs described below:

- **Media campaigns** will carry the voices of Katrina survivors to the American people.
- **Educational / artistic displays** of interviewee photographs with inspirational quotations, as well as children's drawings of their Katrina experience, will be made available for viewing at public institutions, churches and wherever you and other citizens arrange for a respectful viewing.
- **Community Dialogue and Action:** The results of our interviews will become a focal point for citizen dialogue in communities throughout the country. YOU can organize one in your hometown! GCLP will provide materials and training for these programs including the facilitated dialogues. Dialogue will be conducted in the manner of the Listening Project and will enable people in communities throughout the nation to go through a reflection and discernment process on issues of diversity, inequality, race human needs and other social justice issues including the ongoing needs of Katrina survivors. Dialogues will conclude with individuals and groups considering actions for social justice.
- **Faith Based Initiatives:** The Southeast Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church will feature a GCLP facilitated dialogue with a focus on GCLP interviews at its 2006 Conference on Multi-Cultural Diversity. We believe faith based communities are a great forum for addressing issues of poverty, race and inequality – whether it be at the local, regional or national levels.

GETTING STARTED

If you are a member of an organization with a local, regional or national membership that cares about social justice - ask that organization to sponsor GCLP. For example, ask your church to sponsor a study group and dialogue on the social and spiritual implications of Hurricane Katrina. Ask your local library to sponsor a showing of Katrina drawings and picture stories? Would a civic organization you are a member of be interested in promoting GCLP dialogue? Can you educate and promote GCLP within a national organization you are a member of so it could in turn encourage its wider membership to consider a GCLP education action program. **The first step** is to contact us so you can become informed about GCLP and we can decide together the best strategy and timing for you to get involved. Contact Herb Walters: 828-675-4626 or hwalters@yancey.main.nc.us.

