

Organizations helping flood victims with long term recovery efforts

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In the wake of the flooding that shocked the region last month, the United Way of Passaic County (UWPC) started facilitating and coordinating help for those in need.

They are leading Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), a group of organizations whose purpose it is to provide social service response in times of need. VOAD draws from the resources of volunteer organizations, for profit organizations, as well as the state Office of Emergency Management, and municipal services. Yvonne Zuidema, president and chief executive officer of the UWPC, said the focus of her organization in the month immediately following the flooding was to find who needs resources and who has resources.

Now, she said, the VOAD is working on long term recovery efforts and is talking about how they are handling people's emotional needs and they are exploring how they can help people manage construction that was needed as a result of the floods.

They are also discussing how they are handling case management, which is care for those with special needs, she said. In such cases a person trained in disaster case management will help a person with their needs related to the flooding, Zuidema said. It may include simple things such as navigating a phone system, she said. It also includes finding what resources are available and walking the client through them, Zuidema said.

She encourages those who need general information to call United Way's information hotline.

"We encourage people who feel like they need additional help to be sure they are following all the steps of the FEMA process, to call 2-1-1 if they need more information and to reach out if there going to need long term help."

Residents looking for assistance can also go to nj211.org.

"You can find the hurricane resource guide there and that lists everything that's possible to support folks who are affected by the flood," Zuidema said.

The UWPC also refers people to NewBridge Services, a non-profit group that operates in Passaic and Morris Counties, and has been helping people manage their emotional needs following the flooding. They are doing so as part of Operation Recover, a program funded by a grant from the

state Division of Mental Health.

"We do outreach," said Michelle Borden, LCS and chief operating officer for NewBridge Services. "We go out to the community and go to people's homes when they feel comfortable having someone come over. It's not in the office counseling."

NewBridge also helps them to prepare to deal with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other recovery organizations.

"I often times find people so overwhelmed that they don't think of the right questions at the right time. So I suggest they carry a notebook around with questions," Borden, who is also a certified disaster response counselor said. "I tell them to take a moment to breathe."

They also go to flood recovery meetings to connect with residents.

"We'll be disseminating information handouts – just tips for taking care of yourself and making sure you're in the right state of mind when talking to people about loans and grants because it can be very frustrating when navigating that system."

Borden said that by going out into the community and talking about stress management they help to prevent major emotional problems that may occur later on.

"It's probably one of the best things that a person can do is to go out and be a shoulder to lean on for a person," she said. "It's absolutely a wonderful feeling to help someone get back on their feet."

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