

**North Carolina State Disaster Recovery Task Force
Nonprofit and Volunteerism Recovery Support Function (RSF 3) Meeting**

WebEx Teleconference

March 11, 2021

2:00pm – 4:00pm

Meeting Minutes

In attendance (by teleconference)

Lead: Daniel Altenau, Catholic Charities

Staff: Amanda Martin and Ruseena Johnson, North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR)

Daniella Archibold, Church World Service

Katherine Asaro, NC Pro Bono Resource Center

Heather Black, NC 2-1-1 and United Way

Dale Deese, Legal Aid NC

Caroline Farmer, Governor's Office

Alfred Foote, DSS Cumberland County

Beth Hardison, Governor's Office

Briles Johnson, NC Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service

Luz Sanabria-Reyes, NC Emergency Management (NCEM)

Andy Shoenig, Rural Forward NC

Jeanne Tedrow, NC Center for Nonprofits

Philip Triplett, NCEM

Guest Speakers

Jermaine Armour, St. Luke AME Zion Church

Courtney Patterson, Frontline Resilience Eastern NC (formerly the Just Florence Recovery Coalition)

Welcome and Introductions

D. Altenau and A. Martin welcomed the RSF and provided an overview of the meeting.

Guest Speakers on African American Experiences of Disaster Recovery and Resilience

Introductions

Courtney Patterson, Frontline Resilience of Eastern North Carolina

C. Patterson works with Frontline Resilience Eastern NC, formerly known as the Justice Florence Recovery Coalition. This organization started as a collective of local leaders that provided emergency supplies to rural and underserved communities after Hurricane Florence, such as generators, food, and diapers. This effort became connected to Operation Airdrop. Operation Airdrop was a privately organized effort to distribute resources by airplane to neighborhoods where resources were most needed in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Florence. Since then, Frontline Resilience has continued to provide basic needs, helped individuals complete electronic applications requesting

recovery assistance, provided rental assistance and other resources to prevent homelessness, and more, throughout eastern North Carolina. They have assisted in every major disaster since Florence.

Frontline Resilience is still a volunteer-run non-profit organization in need of funds and supplies to make the work sustainable. Frontline Resilience volunteers often do unpaid outreach work for organizations that receive major funding. The organization has held numerous press conferences and discussions with state and local government, including elected officials, but has not benefited from any public funds intended for nonprofits. The organization is not often recognized outside the communities it serves.

During a question and answer session, C. Patterson and members of the RSF discussed the challenges in getting existing resources to community members. One challenge is that larger organizations and state agencies often need grassroots volunteers or church leaders to get resources to the most needy, but those grassroots organizations and churches are not funded to do this work. Without funding, the work is not sustainable. Several participants and guest speakers offered that government grants are difficult to manage and have unrealistic expectations, or work on a reimbursement basis, so small grassroots or church-based groups are not able to access those funds. Another barrier is that mainstream white churches often have a large umbrella organization, a 501(c)3, which helps them manage grants. African American churches often do not have such an umbrella and must do this work on their own.

Finally, C. Patterson discussed his experience interacting with state leadership and state leaders while advocating for his community. Often, state leaders will come into a community and tout a large amount of money that has been spent on disaster recovery in that community, when many residents have not received any support for rebuilding their homes. (An RSF member explained that these large sums often go toward roads or other infrastructure, not individuals. He also explained that it is common for residents to feel anger when government officials quote large sums of money in this way, because this money rarely goes to individuals.) C. Patterson described a sense of having “worn out the welcome” because his comments are not welcomed in larger recovery meetings such as those of long-term recovery groups, and he expressed that even though he has been successful in having conversations with state leadership, state officials have not followed up on his concerns.

Pastor Jermaine Armour

Jermaine Armour is Pastor of St. Luke AME Zion Church in Wilmington, and he has been serving the church for seven years. When Hurricane Florence hit, J. Armour co-founded New Hanover Disaster Coalition in Wilmington. J. Armour provided comments based on his experiences with his church, the New Hanover Disaster Coalition, and the Faith Health Network.

J. Armour began his remarks by sharing that C. Patterson’s descriptions resonated with his experience. J. Armour became involved in disaster recovery after Hurricane Florence, when a group of pastors and other community leaders developed a map of local resources such as emergency shelters and food distribution points. This group later became known as the New Hanover Disaster Coalition. J. Armour was also directly involved in assisting his community members, which he described as feeling neglected. He set up a food pantry at St. Luke’s AME Zion Church, and the church continues to provide a weekly hot meal, diapers, water, and toiletries. He also is involved with the Faith Health Network, which offers computer sites to help people apply for aid.

J. Armour explained that the systemic challenges described by C. Patterson causes resources to come to African American communities last or never to come at all. In response, J. Armour explained, he educates himself on every resource available so that he can educate his community and help them access those resources.

In the discussion that followed, J. Armour explained further about his efforts to connect residents with resources. These resources came from many different places, including state and local government. These efforts have included walking community members through an application process on the phone or setting up laptops so individuals can come in to apply for resources online. Many people do not know how to get through these application processes without assistance. It can be complicated even for those of us who use technology on a regular basis. The guest speaker also shared that disaster preparedness has increased in his area, partly because information on preparedness is shared across social media and traditional media.

An RSF member asked what the RSF could do to better support work of both organizations. Guest speakers offered that the state could support a better way of accessing aid applications and information. Another suggestion was support for organizations that distribute information about available resources. In addition to social media, door-to-door canvassing has proven effective for communities that do not use as much technology.

Additional concerns were raised about lack of racial diversity in emergency management, long-term recovery groups and other governmental and non-governmental recovery efforts. There was also a concern that recipients of some LTRG support have been asked to sign a confidentiality statement in order to receive resources, and that other individuals were told that they should vote a certain way to receive resources. J. Armour offered a contrasting view of the New Hanover LTRG, which trained on becoming an LTRG and established criteria, guidelines, and bylaws that ensure that resources are distributed fairly.

An RSF member asked if the guest speakers had recommendations for county Emergency Management to make deeper connections in African American communities. Speakers recommend they engage with those that represent the underserved community, such as Latino organizations, NAACP, or any other organizations that represents communities that are missing from the conversation. Pastors often know both the needs of the communities and what an outside organization or government official needs to do to meet those needs. Speakers offered differing views about whether some LTRGs or other groups intentionally leave some people out.

Next steps

RSF will debrief next week to debrief from guest speakers and discuss next steps related to:

- Increasing connections and financial support for grassroots, faith-based, or other local groups that do groundwork to connect community to resources
- Advocating for more diverse people and communities to have “a seat at the table” and an active voice in decision-making forums related to disaster recovery
- Increasing awareness of the effects of lack of representation
- Passing this information along to NCVOAD’s subcommittee on diversity, equity, and inclusion and other organizations that are positioned to act on it