

## Hurricane recovery slow: 2005 storms hold back many

*By Joe Gyan Jr.*

*Advocate New Orleans bureau*

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Significant and visible progress has been made in the physical recovery of south Louisiana since the 2005 hurricanes but the human recovery is “far from complete,” a report by the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps warned Monday.

The nonprofit agency recently surveyed nearly 2,200 residents of Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Calcasieu and Jefferson parishes and found that only a third consider themselves mostly recovered from hurricanes Katrina and Rita, while merely a quarter of Orleans residents put themselves in that category.

Even across areas that showed greater recovery, a majority of affected residents indicated they have not reached a complete state of recovery.

Many residents, even some with higher incomes, are still reporting hardships in meeting basic household needs, Louisiana Family Recovery Corps Chief Executive Officer Raymond Jetson said in releasing the survey results to the Baton Rouge Press Club.

“No group of people has faced an easy or immediate process to rebuilding their lives. For many, recovery remains a continuing journey rather than a destination to which they have arrived,” the report — “Progress for Some, Hope and Hardships for Many” — stated.

“The collective future of Louisiana is tied to the way in which we continue to approach recovery, particularly human recovery. The voices of people, our people, are shouting loudly to all that can hear. Are you listening?” the report asked.

Despite significant financial investments for post-storm recovery from both public and private sources, the survey found that nearly all affected residents believe there are not enough services available to help them in their recovery.

“Moreover, many indicate that of the services available, most are not targeted towards the true needs of impacted residents,” the report noted.

The survey found the single most critical barrier cited by affected residents to their recovery is “access to money — to fix houses, to pay for basic needs like utility bills, or even to merely obtain a level of stability in their lives.”

Jetson said a large portion of residents also listed help with managing stress and depression as a needed service.

# THE ADVOCATE

“Our people are saying to us that the impact from an emotional perspective is dramatic, profound and has not been adequately addressed,” the former state representative said.

The residents of Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Calcasieu and Jefferson parishes the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps surveyed between late February and early March also lived in those parishes at the time of the storms.

Jetson said if the surveyed residents are struggling to recover, he can only imagine how rough it must be for residents still displaced by the storms.

“The experiences of people still scattered across the countryside are more dire,” he suggested.

Jetson also stressed that with all the struggles that the survey revealed, Louisiana “doesn’t have the luxury of suffering from Katrina fatigue” when so much remains to be done. Asked if the survey’s 49 percent response rate might be an indication that some south Louisiana hurricane victims are suffering from survey fatigue, Jetson said that would be a safe assumption.

Some 51 percent of the surveyed households were white and 45 percent were black. The survey, which had a margin of error of about 2 percent, found a great disparity in the post-storm experience between black and white households, even after accounting for similarities in income. Black households still report significantly lower levels of recovery than do white households, the report said.

“The transition back to the work force after the storms may have been easier for white households, while some black households began their recovery not by returning to work but by looking for work,” Jetson said.

The survey found about 70 percent of affected residents were able to return to their pre-storm living situation. Most are living in a house they own, followed by those living in a rented house, then a rented apartment. Less than 5 percent are in public housing, with friends or family, or in FEMA trailers.

“When examined by race, white households are more likely than black households to be living in a house they own,” the report said. “Low-income white residents are twice as likely as low-income black residents to be living in houses they own, indicating an economic disparity between these groups.”

The survey also found that black households were more likely to be displaced — living somewhere other than their pre-storm arrangement — than white households.

“This could be related to the tendency for black households to be pre-storm renters, whereas white households were more likely to be homeowners,” the report said. “Black households are also more likely to be single-parent families, so the post-storm disruption in living situation also suggests a high level of disruption for children of those families.”

# THE ADVOCATE

The agency's report suggested that further housing efforts, particularly in Orleans, may want to expand into identifying ways to convert some pre-storm renters into post-storm homeowners.

The survey also found that black households at all income levels are more likely to have experienced a recent hardship than their white counterparts.

"In some cases, indicated hardships for black households are almost double that of whites, even within the same income levels," the report said.

The agency said there are many unanswered questions regarding the long-term impact of the storms on children.

"The true impacts will likely take years to discover," the report said. "For now, impacted households believe that for the most part, their children have adjusted well since returning to school."

The recovery corps recommended that the storms' potential damage to children be carefully monitored over the coming years.

The Louisiana Family Recovery Corps hopes the survey results will more adequately prepare policymakers to make informed choices about further investment in human recovery.