

Kansas Department of

Social and Rehabilitation Services

Don Jordan, Secretary

Disaster Relief and Recovery Special Committee

July 13, 2007

SRS response to recent weather disasters in Kansas

SRS

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Chairman Tafanelli and members of the committee, I'm Candy Shively, Deputy Secretary for Integrated Service Delivery, with SRS. Thank you for the opportunity today to give you a short review of how SRS has responded to the recent weather disasters in our state

Greensburg and Kiowa County Tornado

Immediately after the tornado hit Greensburg and Kiowa County, SRS staff from the area responded to the Red Cross Shelters in Haviland and Mullinville to offer support to individuals seeking shelter. SRS, in conjunction with the Regional Mental Health Center and Foster Care Contractor, also began the process of accounting for consumers and staff located in the path of the tornado. Friday evening, staff also drove to the community to check on the SRS office building and insure that confidential information was not compromised. The SRS Service Centers in Dodge City and Pratt were opened on Saturday and Sunday to receive and relay information about consumers and staff, and to begin the process of coordinating SRS services with the other agencies and organizations responding to the community of Greensburg.

SRS established a temporary service center in the Haviland Disaster Recovery Center. The site was initially staffed by three SRS workers. Staff spent a great deal of time listening and talking to customers in order to determine what services to offer. SRS also established a temporary service center in the Mullinville Red Cross Shelter. This site was initially staffed by two SRS workers.

Regional SRS staff continued to be present in the Mullinville Shelter and at the Haviland Disaster Recovery Center as long as they remained open. During that period of time there were approx 46 West Region Employees who actually worked at one of these temporary offices. A total of 1221.5 hours were worked with 411.5 being week end hours and 78 being evening hours past 5 pm. Staff came from Pratt, Great Bend, Garden City, Liberal, Hays, and Phillipsburg.

Immediately following the disaster, the most common need was for people to have someone to talk to and just listen to their stories. They had many questions about the process of getting their identification restored and applying for FEMA help and low interest loans. All of these requests were referrals to other agencies who were stationed at the DRC. It was very helpful to have the state agencies available at the

DRC to reissue driver's licenses and birth certificates, and many people took advantage of those services.

In addition to listening, providing comfort and support, and making referrals to FEMA, SBA and other state agencies, the SRS staff at these sites were issuing replacement food stamp benefits, taking applications for disaster food assistance, and replacing Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Vision cards and Medicaid ID cards that were lost in the tornado. A total of 14 households (29 persons) needed \$458 worth of May Food Stamp benefits replaced, due to the purchased food being lost in the tornado.

The disaster food assistance program, approved by the Federal USDA Office for families who either lived or worked in the disaster area, waived income verification requirements and allowed disaster expenses to be deducted from income. A total of 371 households (846 persons) received disaster food assistance benefits totaling \$109,575.

In addition to putting up posters about the benefits available from SRS for disaster survivors, we also posted the announcement on the local Greensburg emergency radio station that was developed by Emergency Management. This was the most reliable method to get news to all the survivors who had to move to other communities because there was no housing left in Greensburg. As they came back into Greensburg to salvage what was left of their homes, they could listen to all the announcements from city, county, state and federal government resources.

In addition to the food assistance offered by SRS, a special Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) was established. This allowed persons impacted by the disaster to apply for assistance to help pay their heating or cooling bills. A total of 10 households were approved with benefits totaling \$3477. Additionally, the application processes for cash, child care, and medical assistance was simplified by allowing individuals to apply with reduced identity and income verification requirements. Certain program criteria were also waived.

The Kansas All Hazards Behavioral Health (KAHBH) teams from several Mental Health Centers, who were trained by FEMA to respond in times of crisis, were activated on Saturday and deployed to the Greensburg area. These mental health workers were present in the Shelter and DRC as well as throughout the community to assist survivors. The teams are still offering crisis counseling for those dealing with the emotional affects of the tornado. People can call 1-800-575-2038 to schedule an appointment.

Collaboration with Iroquois Mental Health Center began immediately after the disaster. Both their staff and consumers were affected. SRS helped with setting up office space

on the Barclay College campus for Iroquois by providing phones, a fax machine and Herman Miller equipment.

The Iroquois Mental Health Center's community transitional living units were destroyed killing two consumers who resided there. Five independent living clients were temporarily relocated to the annex at Larned State Hospital, while others went to live temporarily with relatives. These consumers will now begin to move into FEMA trailers located in Coldwater, Mullinville, and Bucklin. Iroquois has also purchased two large modular homes which are set up in Havliand behind the nursing facility. Some of the transitional living consumers will live there until more permanent housing can be built in Greensburg.

There were no youth residential facilities or group homes in Greensburg, however, two foster families in Greensburg did lose their homes. The four children who were placed in these two homes have either been moved or were returned home with their family subsequent to the storm.

There were about 30 Child Support consumers in the Greensburg area. Their checks were sent by the Kansas Payment Center and routed to Pratt with the rest of the Greensburg mail for pickup. Signs were posted at the DRC and other shelter sites regarding this. Direct deposits continued as usual.

Durable medical equipment and other assistive technology devices were made available by Independent Living Centers throughout the state to survivors of the tornado. Rehabilitation Services had served 66 people in the Greensburg/Kiowa County area over the past few years. Letters were sent to the last known address of former and current Rehabilitation Services customers from the area to inform them of the many services available. This information was also broadcast on the local radio station that carried resource information.

As more time has passed the need for emergency funds has increased. Residents are just now being assigned FEMA trailers to live in and those on low income have no extra money to provide for certain necessities needed in their new home, such as towels, sheets, and dishes. SRS has some limited funding that can help, but the need will probably exceed the money we have available to assist with these types of things. Referrals will be made to the Red Cross and Salvation Army who can also help meet these needs.

The three staff who worked out of the SRS Greensburg Service Center were relocated to the Pratt Service Center, while waiting for modifications to be made to a trailer that will serve as a temporary SRS office in Greensburg. The trailer is located near the Iroquois Mental Health Center at 610 E. Grant Avenue. With the help of a local construction company electrical hooks ups are being put in place for the trailer; and a

water and sewer line on the Iroquois property is being trenched. When all of this work is completed the three staff will resume operations from Greensburg.

SRS is committed to retaining a permanent Service Center in Greensburg. The Director and Assistant Director from the SRS West Region have been in contact with local officials and are participating in the Greensburg community meetings to help insure an appropriate location is found for the permanent SRS Service Center.

Flooding in Southeast Kansas

With the recent flooding that has taken place in the state, Regional SRS staff are once again responding to the needs of their communities. Last Saturday and Sunday, staff went to the shelters and recovery centers, sometimes setting up a table under shade trees when there was no room inside, to listen to survivors tell their stories, provide information and offer assistance. SRS will be located in each of the permanent Disaster Recovery Centers, and plan to be a part of each temporary DRC as well.

The disaster food assistance program is available in the counties that have been approved for individual FEMA Assistance. Initially these counties are Miami, Elk, Montgomery, Neosho and Wilson. There is a strong potential that additional counties will be added to this initial declaration over the course of the coming weeks.

SRS will continue to monitor both situations and stands ready provide appropriate services when needed. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you and am happy to answer any questions you may have.