

Project Description

Nearly five years after Hurricane Katrina, the economic, emotional and social needs of many low-income New Orleans communities, particularly those of children and youth, remain completely unmet. Many families are still struggling to return home. As a result of the storm's devastation, the at-risk youth population in this community exhibits higher rates of HIV/AIDS and other health problems, most frequently among youth ages 13-18. High school dropout and juvenile incarceration rates and a web of post-disaster mental health issues have dramatically increased as well. A staggering 38% of children in this area live poverty (compared to 17% in the U.S. as a whole).

Sadly, however, many local non-profit groups now have even less ability to deliver adequate services to their constituents than they did pre-Katrina. The small non-profit group, Camp ACE (Alert Community Empowerment), in the 7th Ward of New Orleans has been especially hard-hit, losing much of its funding and staffing. Its programs to help low-income families, children, teen mothers and HIV/AIDS survivors to improve their lives and better cope with their conditions have been sharply curtailed.

I am currently living in this community and volunteering with the Camp ACE HIV Outreach and Prevention and Youth Counseling and Tutorial programs. Partnering with Camp ACE and building upon the social programs they currently offer, I am helping to provide education and services to at-risk youth in the 7th Ward on issues related to HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases, academics, and mental health. For my project, I am assisting Camp ACE with establishing a Youth Empowerment Board that will equip youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to become community leaders and agents of change. Alongside these youth leaders, I will conduct outreach and service learning projects to help meet the needs of these young people. In doing this work, I plan to augment the current services and programs of the organization to underserved children and youth. The Youth Empowerment Board aims to educate and empower youth to help their peers while also improving their own self-advocacy skills and career prospects. While implementing this project, I plan to establish new programs and services that will be sustainable in this community far beyond my time of service.