



## Continuation of Child Care Services: Louisiana's Experience

This brief is part of the Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (EPRR) discussion brief series. These briefs are provided to Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grantees and their partners to offer guidance regarding strategies and options for consideration in the development of state and territory child care disaster plans.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 requires Lead Agencies to develop state- and territory-wide child care disaster plans. These plans must demonstrate how each state and territory will address the needs of children—including the need for safe child care—before, during, and after a major disaster or emergency, including a state of emergency declared by the governor.

Specific requirements for these plans include guidelines for continuation of child care subsidies and child care services, which may include the provision of emergency and temporary child care services and temporary operating standards for child care providers during and after a disaster. Lead Agencies must also describe how they will coordinate postdisaster recovery of child care services.

This discussion brief describes how the Louisiana CCDF Lead Agency responded to the issue of continuation of child care services in the face of a large-scale disaster (see box). This brief highlights CCDF and Lead Agency flexibility following disaster as well as interagency collaboration.

### 2016 Baton Rouge Flood

- Beginning on August 11, 6.9 trillion gallons of rain fell in one week. In one area, more than 31 inches of rain fell in 15 hours.<sup>1</sup>
- East Baton Rouge, Ascension, Livingston, and Tangipahoa Parishes saw the most widespread flooding. In all, it's estimated that 50,000 to 75,000 structures flooded, according to the National Weather Service, and 13 people died in the flood.<sup>2</sup>
- 20,000 people and 1,000 pets were rescued by civilians, emergency responders, the Coast Guard, and the National Guard.<sup>3</sup>
- 106,000 individuals and households have registered for Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance.<sup>4</sup>

## Response

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) is the CCDF Lead Agency in Louisiana. In addition, through local community networks, LDE has engaged public prekindergarten programs and Head Start grantees to meet standardized requirements for publicly funded early childhood programs.

Although more than 40 percent of LDE staff members were themselves affected by the flooding, the Office of Early Childhood issued a memo on August 19, 2016, titled "Serving Displaced Birth to Age Five Children." This memo, along with the accompanying "Request for a Waiver from the Office of Early Childhood," described the need for waivers to regulations on licensing, subsidy, and program standards and accountability, as well as the process for requesting such waivers.



This approach offered maximum flexibility to allow child care providers and other early childhood and school-age programs to meet the needs of their programs and affected and displaced children. Note that before using this approach, agencies must ensure that they have the statutory and regulatory authority to implement policies and the authority to waive rules and establish priority service categories during and after a disaster.

A total of 86 waiver requests were received between August 23 and November 14, 2016. An internal review team representing staff from child care licensing, CCDF child care assistance (subsidy), state prekindergarten and other early childhood programs, the Head Start State Collaboration Office, and the LDE legal team met daily to review requests and identify next steps. Next steps often included asking for additional and more specific information. The review team attempted to respond to each request within 48 hours.

These requests can generally be grouped into the following response categories.

## Increased Capacity

LDE staff reported that they were able to expand licensed capacity by working with the Office of the State Fire Marshal (SFM) to review requests on a case-by-case basis using SFM square footage requirements rather than the child care licensing requirements. These waivers were time-limited and resulted in providing services to children displaced from flooded centers and those who had relocated because their homes were unlivable.

## Temporary Location

A number of programs requested waivers to allow them to use space not previously licensed for child care. Personnel from licensing and the SFM, as well as the Department of Health's Sanitarian Services office, conducted site visits and, where appropriate, provided capacity and time-limited approvals.

## Personnel

In addition to children, their families, and state staff, the early childhood workforce was also affected. As providers struggled to meet the needs of displaced children they also had to accommodate their staff who needed time away from work to remove debris, flooring, and sheetrock to prevent the spread of mold in their own homes, and to apply for disaster assistance and insurance benefits.

Only a few waivers to teacher-to-child ratio requirements were approved, and these were limited to 2 weeks. These waivers were only approved in special circumstances involving fewer than three children. Staff who were displaced from an affected child care program were allowed to work in another program as long as their criminal background check (CBC) was on file. Before the flood, LDE had waived certain CBC requirements because of a processing issue in a partner agency. This waiver was granted to prevent staff shortages and required that fingerprints had been submitted and the person was supervised by someone with a clear criminal background check at all times. These accommodations are in alignment with the 2016 CCDF final rule.<sup>5</sup>

## Child Respite in Shelters and Temporary Licenses

Heavy rain and floods killed 13 people and displaced tens of thousands more as they destroyed 60,000 homes across 20 parishes.<sup>6</sup> Shelters were quickly set up as volunteers and first responders took people to safety. In the days that followed, many smaller shelters quickly closed as larger shelters were opened and people found alternative housing until they could assess the safety of their homes.

Child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies, as part of their ongoing contract with LDE, provided respite care in three large shelters where parents remained onsite. Respite services of a few hours per day were offered to allow parents time to apply for disaster benefits or attend to personal care routines while children were



supervised, kept safe, and able to enjoy age-appropriate activities. Save the Children and Church of the Brethren Children's Disaster Services also provided respite care in other shelters.

As time passed, shelters were consolidated and closed as individuals and families were able to find alternative housing or return to their homes. In order to allow parents to leave the shelter to return to work or to the salvage efforts in their homes and neighborhoods, LDE licensing staff granted a temporary license at the largest remaining shelter. This space was limited to 30 children and approved to remain open for up to 2 weeks.

## Other Waiver Requests

LDE also received requests to waive and delay deadlines and requirements related to specific publicly funded early childhood programs. These included professional development hours and child and program assessments.

As recovery progressed, early childhood program providers found that waivers were also needed to accommodate repairs and construction. These included waivers related to capacity and access to playgrounds.

## Child Care Assistance Eligibility

Access to quality child care supports children's ability to respond to and rebound from trauma. In addition, access to quality child care allows parents to return to their work, school, or training and regain a measure of normalcy and routine. In order to respond to families who needed to change their child care provider, LDE streamlined its process. LDE child care assistance staff also went to the largest shelter to talk with now-homeless families about CCDF subsidy for child care. This has increased the number of families experiencing homelessness served by CCDF by nearly a third.

## Lessons Learned

Upon reflection, the CCDF Lead Agency staff reported that they were very pleased with the level of support provided to families and providers in their response to this disaster. Even in the face of staff shortages in the LDE state office, CCDF staff were proud of their ability to respond to requests for information and action as they worked with partners from the Office of the State Fire Marshal, Department of Health, and the licensing department to streamline and minimize processes.

Staff reported that they will develop and maintain a list of agency contacts and increase their efforts to build interagency coordination following a disaster. They suggested that a tabletop preparedness exercise that brings state agencies together would be helpful.

Staff discussed the roles and contributions of contractors and nonprofit organizations and voluntary organizations active in disasters. CCR&R staff provided respite in three shelters while the Children's Disaster Services of the Church of the Brethren set up respite in another shelter. Save the Children established child-friendly spaces in emergency shelters and operated the licensed center located in the largest shelter. CCR&R staff also distributed donations to child care programs as they returned to operation.

The Region VI Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Emergency Management Specialist provided an additional type of support to state staff by being onsite during the weeks following the flooding to coordinate with other ACF and federal staff and connect state staff to these resources.

This discussion brief is meant to support planning efforts in the development of state and territory child care disaster plans. The [State Systems Specialists](#) in each ACF Region are available to provide technical assistance and supplementary [resources](#). Emergency preparedness resources are also available from the [Office of Child Care](#).



## Resources

Child Care Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2005). Flexibility in spending CCDF funds in response to federal or state declared emergency situations (Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-CC-05-03). Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/information-memorandum-acyf-im-cc-05-03>

Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2011). Guidance to assist Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies in developing, exercising, and maintaining written child care emergency preparedness and response plans pursuant to submission of the CCDF Plan (Information Memorandum CCDF-ACF-IM-2011-01). Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/im2011\\_01.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/im2011_01.pdf)

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Yan, H., & Flores, R. (2016, August 19). Louisiana flood: Worst US disaster since Hurricane Sandy, Red Cross says. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/18/us/louisiana-flooding/>

<sup>2</sup> What caused the historic August 2016 flood, and what are the odds it could happen again? (2017, August 5). *The Advocate*. Retrieved from [http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana\\_flood\\_2016/article\\_3b7578fc-77b0-11e7-9aab-f7c07d05efcb.html](http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana_flood_2016/article_3b7578fc-77b0-11e7-9aab-f7c07d05efcb.html)

<sup>3</sup> Yan, H. (2016, August 22). Louisiana's mammoth flooding: By the numbers. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/16/us/louisiana-flooding-by-the-numbers/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> See note 3.

<sup>5</sup> Child Care and Development Fund regulations state the following:

(4) A prospective staff member may begin work for a child care provider described in paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section after completing either the check described at paragraph (b)(1) or (b)(3)(i) of this section in the State where the prospective staff member resides. Pending completion of all background check components in paragraph (b) of this section, the staff member must be supervised at all times by an individual who received a qualifying result on a background check described in paragraph (b) of this section within the past five years.

[Child Care and Development Fund, 45 C.F.R. § 98.43(d)(4) (2016).]

<sup>6</sup> Louisiana flood of 2016: One year later (2017, August 2). *Greater Baton Rouge Business Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessreport.com/business/louisiana-flood-of-2016-year-later>

*The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with state and territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.*

### State Capacity Building Center, A Service of the Office of Child Care

9300 Lee Highway  
Fairfax, VA 22031

Phone: 877-296-2401  
Email: [CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info](mailto:CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info)

**Subscribe to Updates**  
[http://www.occ-cmc.org/occannouncements\\_sign-up/](http://www.occ-cmc.org/occannouncements_sign-up/)



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**