

# KATRINA INITIATIVE

**Two years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast region Equal Justice Works Lawyers continue to provide essential legal services to thousands of people affected by the disasters. They work in some of the poorest communities in the nation and often under the most challenging conditions to advocate for those struggling to rebuild their lives and their communities.**

With the assistance of a generous one million dollar matching grant from the JEHT Foundation, Equal Justice Works established the Katrina Initiative to provide direct legal services to Gulf Coast residents and generate *pro bono* opportunities for lawyers and law students. This program has placed lawyers and law students at nonprofit organizations in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Alabama to help the hundreds of thousands of people left without homes, jobs, access to health care and social services due to the damage from the 2005 hurricanes.

Now entering its final year, the Katrina Initiative has successfully met the challenge of providing emergency legal assistance and is now focusing on long-term goals. There is still much work to be done. The Initiative now focuses on building strong legal foundations to provide access to justice so that individuals can stabilize their lives, and eventually, communities in the Gulf Coast will thrive once again.

## **Katrina Legal Fellowships**

Through the Katrina Initiative, Equal Justice Works established the Katrina Legal Fellowships Program to send nine experienced public interest lawyers to the Gulf Coast region for two years. Equal Justice Works Katrina Legal Fellowships provide immediate direct legal assistance for hurricane survivors; promote short- and long-term stabilization and community rebuilding efforts.

Our Katrina Legal Fellows impact lives. In the first year, the nine Katrina Legal Fellows and their volunteers assisted 7,425 hurricane survivors. The Katrina Legal Fellows also held 133 legal clinics, offered 153 presentations, recruited 780 law students and lawyers to provide *pro bono* legal assistance, and participated in 182 task forces or coalitions.

Through their fellowship projects, the Katrina Legal Fellows have greatly increased capacity at their host organizations to manage the unprecedented web of legal problems, bureaucratic red tape and financial disruption that resulted from the hurricanes.

### **Katrina Pro Bono Legal Corps**

Equal Justice Works has expanded its Pro Bono Legal Corps, sending 10 Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Attorneys to the hardest-hit areas in the Gulf Coast region. Working in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, these members are implementing projects to recruit hundreds of law students and lawyers to provide essential disaster-related legal services to hurricane survivors.

The 10 Katrina AmeriCorps Attorneys and their volunteers impact lives. They have assisted 3,572 hurricane survivors in the first year. Katrina AmeriCorps Attorneys held 161 legal clinics, offered 47 presentations, recruited 770 law students and lawyers to provide *pro bono* legal assistance, and participated in 144 task forces or coalitions.

The Katrina Pro Bono Legal Corps has received national recognition. In July 2007 Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Attorney Crystal Utley was presented with the Spirit of Service Award from the Corporation for National and Community Service. Ms. Utley was selected from among 75,000 AmeriCorps members serving throughout the country for her service at the Mississippi Center for Justice in Jackson where she manages *pro bono* opportunities for lawyers and law students.

### **Katrina Summer Corps**

In response to the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Equal Justice Works dedicated 65 Summer Corps positions for law students to form the Katrina Summer Corps in 2006. Katrina Summer Corps members dedicated their summer to assist hurricane survivors and evacuees in the Gulf coast region.

Katrina Summer Corps members impact lives. In 2006, the 65 Katrina Summer Corps members helped 2,991 hurricane survivors and worked with 175 organizations on community education presentations and outreach publications. Due to the overwhelming success of the Katrina Summer Corps, Equal Justice Works continues to encourage and support projects that focus on needs related to the Gulf coast disasters of 2005.

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**Additional Resources:** For Katrina Initiative description, progress reports, and press releases: <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/katrina-initiative/index.php>

For Katrina Legal Fellowships program description, Fellow profiles and a list of host organizations: [www.equaljusticeworks.org/katrina-initiative/fellows\\_index.php](http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/katrina-initiative/fellows_index.php)

For Katrina Pro Bono Legal Corps program description, AmeriCorps Attorney profiles and a list of host organizations: [http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/katrina-initiative/pro\\_bono\\_index.php](http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/katrina-initiative/pro_bono_index.php)

For Katrina Summer Corps program description and other information: [www.equaljusticeworks.org/participants/summercorps.php](http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/participants/summercorps.php)