

The Case Manager

General Description of Role

The disaster case manager is a special person acting out of a deep concern for the vulnerable, and whose role is to enable/empower survivors to help themselves as much as possible. Some prefer the name *Recovery worker or Family Service Worker*, because people aren't "cases." However, "Case Manager" and "Casework Supervisor" are more customary terms. The job is to identify survivors' needs and connect them to resources. Most often this is done in a collegial way, with several agencies working together on the more difficult situations. The older term, "Caseworker," is currently perceived as carrying authoritarian emotional freight and is not recommended for use.

Regardless of what structure a long term recovery organization might have, it's the case manager working one-on-one with disaster survivors who puts their recovery in motion. **Nothing moves toward recovery until casework begins.** Casework provides an intentional method of coordinating services and determining priorities for using our limited resources.

*Although case managers are advocates, providers of necessary information, cautioners about pitfalls, builders of morale, and channels of hope, their chief task is to assist clients to develop and own a Recovery Action Plan, a comprehensive strategy to examine resources and address needs.

* A primary case manager is assigned to each client or family. This person interviews survivors, verifies information, helps the clients explore all available resources and options, links them to a wide range of agencies that might help, presents any remaining needs to recovery group(s), and does follow-up to close the case.

Case management has two components.

Basic Level: To help survivors get back on their feet. This requires a comprehensive step-by-step Recovery Action Plan. This

plan is not intended to be a "Band-Aid" form of assistance whose only purpose is to keep the "wolf from the door" one more month.

Second Level: If funds are available, cases may be considered for measures that would lessen the impact of future disasters on homes. To test for eligibility, determine if the needed assistance is feasible for a voluntary group to tackle and is cost-effective. (Example: elevating a structure subject to repeat flooding when no governmental mitigation funds are available.)

Job Description for the Case Manager

The case manager works over the long-term with survivors to make an in-depth assessment of their needs in order to determine which are disaster-related, and then help the survivors develop a recovery plan. Case managers must continually ask themselves, "Is this problem created or exacerbated by the disaster?" The relationship a caseworker establishes with the survivor is as important as the client's need.

The Case Manager Will:

- Attend training sessions.
- Receive and undertake assignments given by the Casework Supervisor.
- Prioritize cases and set objectives in consultation with Supervisor.
- Make calls on survivors as soon as possible, keeping in mind safety factors involved in a disaster area. This usually requires a team approach of pairs traveling together for all client interviews outside the office.
- Help clients work through urgent needs first. Know where they can obtain cleanup supplies, fresh water, fuel for heating. Furnish forms and information to start recovery. Enable clients to take responsibility for their recovery. Our work is in partnership with survivors.
- Keep detailed records of every case, every home visit, every referral, and every contact with stores or other agencies in the client's behalf.

- Remain in contact with the client until the disaster-related needs are met and/or the case is closed. (Because of the intensity of the work, each case manager should have a limited number of clients.)
- Relay all information to Casework Supervisor at daily debriefing. Keep detailed records of these meetings.
- Network with other agencies. Know what's going on.
- Present individual cases to the Long-term Recovery Committee, when appropriate.
- Respect confidentiality at all times, even at home, in public, in committee meetings, and in consultations.
- Follow up with Casework Supervisors to make sure that requests made of them are accomplished.
- As appropriate, follow up with other agencies that have made assistance commitments to the client.
- Close or refer the case when you've done all you can. Have closure with family.