

**ASSISTING PEOPLE AFTER A DISASTER:
THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF A SOCIAL SERVICES NETWORK CREATED FOR
DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY**

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Introduction

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, numerous social services organizations responded to assist the many thousands of people who were affected. These agencies in New York City subsequently developed a coordinated recovery network with unique features that may be applicable in a future emergency, as well as to aspects of the ongoing social services delivery system in New York and elsewhere. Several months after the attack, a new nonprofit organization, called the 9/11 United Services Group (USG), was established by major social services agencies and federations to coordinate their activities in assisting surviving family members, residents of downtown Manhattan, workers who lost jobs and income, injured people, rescue workers, and others who were affected by the attack.

Subsequently, a network that has grown to more than 40 agencies based in New York City and the region has formed to operate jointly to provide services. More than 200 case managers (called "Service Coordinators") have provided services and assistance for approximately 15,000 people, including 8,000 who continue to have active cases with these agencies. Organizations that are part of the service network include the American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, smaller community based organizations operating through the Asian American and Hispanic Federations, Catholic Charities and members of other religious social services umbrella organizations, more specialized organizations such as the crime victim agency Safe Horizon and the Mental Health Association of New York City, settlement houses, some independent immigrant groups, and other agencies. (See Appendix A for participating agencies.)

This paper discusses the techniques and coordinating mechanisms that have been developed during the ongoing operation of the service network, the impact the network has had in improving assistance to individuals and families affected by the September 11 attacks, the strengths and limitations of the 9/11 United Services Group's coordination work, and potential applications of its experience to other areas of social services. The paper analyzes the motivations for agencies to cooperate in creating a service network, the nonprofit management strategies employed, and the actions required to maintain and develop the network. Approaches to developing and managing the network and the supporting technology are reviewed. Their general effectiveness and applications to and scalability for other situations and locations are appraised. Such applications include both future emergencies and ongoing operations of social services systems that are supported by government contracts. The paper covers the period from December 2001, when the coordinating organization was created, through the early fall of 2003.

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A basic question remains: Are there any lasting implications for nonprofit management across agency lines and jurisdictions? That is, are the changes in agency practices ephemeral or are they likely to continue beyond the response and recovery periods following this unprecedented disaster? This is an appropriate time to raise the question, since many specific September 11 assistance programs have terminated, and plans are now being made for phasing out of the case management system throughout 2004. Part of the answer will depend on the interest of philanthropy and government in identifying and supporting potential ongoing applications.

Creation of the Organization

Motivations for agency participation

Following the September 11 attack, there were energetic and broad responses by social services agencies, foundations, and corporations to providing assistance to people affected by the attack on the World Trade Center. Assistance centers were established by City government and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with staff from many different agencies providing cash assistance, legal services, counseling, and many other supports. Initially at a State armory, the primary center was subsequently moved to a pier on the Hudson River and separate sections were established for families of the missing and for displaced workers, i.e. people who had lost jobs and income. Additional centers were also created closer to Downtown Manhattan for the affected workers and residents of the area, and then later the family center moved twice more, finally settling in Midtown Manhattan. Meanwhile, agencies such as the American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, and Safe Horizon, among others, utilized and opened their own agencies' services offices, in addition to participating in the multi-agency centers.

As a result of the unprecedented generosity of the American public, donations to numerous funding entities produced large private cash assistance and services programs that supplemented government assistance programs that were created at all levels.² A complex array of assistance and benefit programs became available from many sources. (This early period of response has been well-documented elsewhere³ and need not be repeated in any detail here.)

Role of the New York State Attorney General

One consequence clear to the human services agencies that were providing relief and recovery services was the need to coordinate their activities more effectively. People in need were being asked to present the same basic demographic and impact information and documentation repeatedly to each separate agency; it was difficult to know the range of benefits and services available to people with particular needs; eligibility requirements for assistance varied widely; and there was no central repository of data on the aid people had received. New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer took note of this state of affairs in late September 2001, calling for better coordination among the

² The Foundation Center estimated total private giving by individuals, foundations, and corporations to be \$2.6 billion. See Giving in the Aftermath of 9/11: An Update on the Corporate and Foundation Response by Loren Renz, Vice President for Research, November 2002. Additional updates are planned.

³ Paula DiPerna, Media, Charity, and Philanthropy in the Aftermath of September 11, 2001, The Century Foundation, 2003; Tom Seessel, Responding to the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks: Lessons from Relief and Recovery in New York City, A Report Prepared for the Ford Foundation, Thomas Edison State College, Trenton, NJ, May 2003; September 11: Perspectives from the Field of Philanthropy, The Foundation Center, 2002.

providers of aid and resources and leading to intensified discussions among social services agencies that had already been working informally to coordinate their efforts.⁴

A decision was made to create a new nonprofit organization to act as the coordinating entity for the major agencies that were assisting people. By mid-December, there was a public announcement of the establishment of the 9/11 United Services Group and its first Chief Executive Officer, Robert Hurst, a Vice Chairman of Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., who would serve pro bono, one of many such commitments of corporate leaders, analytic talent, and material support for this effort, as indicated below. The board of the organization included the executive directors/presidents of thirteen of the umbrella social services federations and large direct service providers, and later representatives of groups who were affected by the attack were added. (Board list in Appendix B.)

Mission and structure of the new organization

The original mission of the organization was to improve the coordination and quality of services among various charities and agencies to ensure that the ongoing needs of individuals affected by the World Trade Center attack were met compassionately and efficiently. This objective was to be accomplished primarily by developing a network of agencies that employed trained and technologically well-supported Service Coordinators to work one-on-one with people on a long-term basis, as is described later in greater detail. The role of 9/11 United Service Group was to bring separately functioning agencies together to make their services easier to access for people in need by coordinating their management, ensuring that information about their benefits and program were widely known, training their staffs jointly, and identifying and resolving operational issues.

Subsequently, the organization also put increased emphasis on dissemination of benefit and program information directly to all of the affected communities of victims, the media, and general public, as well as to service providers. USG has also developed preparedness planning systems in the event of future incidents requiring large-scale response by human services agencies, based on lessons learned from the September 11 response and recovery efforts. In addition, the organization is now exploring whether there are applications of its approach to coordinating services to the broader City social services system. (See Appendix C for the mission statement of the 9/11 United Services Group.)

The organization originally divided its work into programmatic support for the case management work of the participating agencies, technology systems and projects to facilitate the service network, and communications to the general public, affected individuals and organizations, and service providers. In addition to a small paid staff of 10 people, the organization has benefited from both full-time Analyst staff donated by three investment banks⁵ and from pro bono legal,⁶ technology, management consulting, public relations, real estate, and many other essential management services. Primary funding for the organization has been provided by The September 11th Fund, which was created immediately after the attack by the New York Community Trust and United Way of New York City to receive and allocate public donations of what became more than \$500 million.

⁴ “STATEMENT BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ELIOT SPITZER REGARDING THE NEED TO COORDINATE CHARITABLE EFFORTS FOLLOWING THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACK,” September 26, 2001.

⁵ Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and Merrill Lynch.

⁶ Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom

While New York’s nonprofit social services organizations come together under venues such as United Way of New York City and the Human Services Council of New York (itself a member agency of the 9/11 United Services Group), USG differs because it is primarily geared to managing a large-scale, joint operation of independent assistance programs that are voluntarily coordinated as part of a network. It is also a temporary organization, established to do a particular job and then to terminate or transition its functions and cease to be a staffed organization.

USG has benefited from the policy leadership of the City’s core social services executives throughout its roughly two years of existence. The network of participating agencies has grown well beyond the thirteen original organizations to more than 40 agencies, some of which are members of the founding federations, while others are independent agencies. Participation in the USG network has provided agencies with access to training for their case management staffs, up-to-date program information, management coordination with peer agencies, technology support, joint advocacy for governmental policy and program actions, and the opportunity to conduct inter-agency problem-solving at both executive and senior staff levels.

Development of the USG Program

Service coordination—management meetings, training, quality assurance, program liaisons

The approach to program development was joint and consensual from the start. Weekly “Case Management Working Group” meetings were held with representation of senior management of the participating agencies, initially people reporting to their executive directors and later the senior staff in charge of September 11 services. These meetings were part informational—new program information, key application and deadline dates for assistance, plans of particular agencies, and the like—and part decision-making—standards for service provision by participating agencies, methods for referrals of cases, content of training for case managers, and so on. Similar meetings were held by senior technology staff to develop a database of client information and related support tools, and among communications staff of the agencies to develop public information strategies.

By the end of its first month of operation in January 2002, USG had sponsored a two-day training program for Service Coordinators and related staff from the agencies participating in its network. Service Coordinators work one-on-one with their clients to assist them to secure necessary benefits from agencies throughout the network, as well as from government and other sources. The generic title “Service Coordinator”—a designation that was intended to convey assistance in a non-bureaucratic way was agreed upon by the Case Management Group to designate the frontline staff assisting people affected by the September 11 attack, including staff whose agency titles were “Social Worker,” “Case Manager,” “Case Worker,” “Family Support Specialist,” and others. Whatever the title, these training programs became the heart of the joint work of the network—occurring nearly monthly since USG was formed in order to inform Service Coordinators about substantive changes in available benefits and services, key programs of other participating agencies, techniques for working with clients, identification of mental and emotional stress indicators, and, perhaps most important, conveying a sense of shared commitment and problem-solving in performing difficult, stressful work.

From the start, training programs have been developed by a committee of representatives of the participating agencies, which determines priority elements, the format and means of presentation, scheduling, and the specific presenters to be invited. Some training sessions have addressed particular assistance programs, such as employment and small business aid or legal assistance, while others have focused on understanding mental health assessment and engagement skills. Other training has focused on utilization of the technology tools, described below, that USG developed for client information, resources and services, and inter-agency communications.

Virtually all trainers have been experts from the agencies themselves, associated government agencies, or people secured by the agencies from their own networks. Trainers, therefore, have not been paid (with only one exception for the many sessions in the past two years), and the only costs have been for food at lunch and breaks. UJA Federation (United Jewish Appeal), one of the USG network agencies, has hosted nearly all of the training sessions at its facility in midtown Manhattan.

As the network has grown, people occupying more than 200 positions in the 40 agencies have participated in training sessions. The training has reached several times this number of people over the past two years, given turnover of staff and including participation of other September 11-related staff members, as well as sessions geared to the Supervisors of the Service Coordinators.

As noted below in the “Phases of assistance” section, recent training has performed a role that, in many ways, contrasts with its original objective of assisting Service Coordinators to understand and access the large and complex array of benefits and services for people affected by the September 11 attack. Currently, as deadlines have passed for both private and public assistance programs, the challenge has become more how to provide support for people who are unable to get help in the absence of specific September 11 programs and to help them to utilize the City’s system of ongoing social services. Recent training programs have been geared accordingly to how Service Coordinators can provide emotional support and encouragement in the face of the City’s bleak economic situation. Given the stressful nature of Service Coordinators’ work and their susceptibility to secondary trauma from continuous exposure to the tragic losses and challenging situations of their clients, training programs also include advice on self-care and techniques to avoid burn-out.

In addition to training and joint management decision-making, both USG and its primary funder, The September 11th Fund, wanted to ensure that good quality case management was being provided for clients served by the network. A Quality Assurance system has been developed to determine how well people were being served and to assist agencies to improve their practices. Since the network consists of voluntarily participating organizations—many, but not all supported by The September 11th Fund—this Quality Assurance program, like other USG undertakings, was developed through agency participation and consensus on the service standards and approaches to measurement. A senior advisory group—including Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York (whose executive director is Chair of the USG Board of Directors), Safe Horizon, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and The September 11th Fund—guides the effort, and a much broader working group of agency representatives has developed the techniques and instruments. A periodic survey of clients has been conducted by a firm with substantial experience in telephone interviewing related to the September 11 attack to determine how well people are being served by

their Service Coordinators.⁷ In addition, consultants identified and supported by USG have assisted the agencies to develop common performance standards, including outcome measures, to be implemented through an instrument for file reviews of a sample of each agency's cases. After a pilot test with five agencies, this instrument is now in use at all of the participating agencies in the USG network.

To maintain consistent and personalized communication and information flow between USG and the agencies, five USG staff each act as program liaisons with a designated group of the agencies in the network. This system has ensured continuity in the relationships, data flows, and information exchanges between USG and the agencies, as new plans and needs develop. The program liaisons also provide onsite training for agency staffs in how to utilize the technology tools that USG has developed, as well as an affording an overview of the policy, procedures, and standards for the network. This approach has been important for smaller community-based organizations with relatively fewer internal resources, enabling them to receive technical assistance and attention and to keep USG informed about policy shifts, programmatic decisions, and personnel changes in both smaller and more established agencies.

Information Portal

Provision of information both for people affected and for professional staff has been a key function for USG, increasing in importance as the event fades in time and there is less media and public attention to these needs. Centralizing the gathering of information makes possible its dissemination through Internet mechanisms that are publicly available, as well as by providing more specialized information for Service Coordinators and other professional staff. The specific tools developed to disseminate information are described below in the "Applications of Technology" section. In addition, USG has regularly mailed newsletters (now called Updates) to more than 80,000 people who received assistance from the network of agencies, informing them about key benefits, deadlines, important phone numbers, and sources of further information. These Updates are available in Spanish, Chinese, and Russian, as well as English.

Ongoing community and public relations activities involve many organizations of September 11 victims, other interested groups, and affected public officials. An Advisory Council was formed immediately after USG was created, and this well-informed and committed group of people who were affected by the attack in various ways continue to advise USG about its programs and priorities. (See Appendix D for members.)

Coordinating communications among the agencies has also been a challenge for a voluntary network of agencies with their own missions, need for visibility, and concern about the kind of public scrutiny that occurred after the attacks.

Financial Advice Referral Program

Recognizing that families of people killed and missing as a result of the attacks on New York and Washington could benefit from financial advice about managing and investing awards that many would receive from the federal Victim Compensation Fund, USG's first CEO, Bob Hurst, secured the commitment of colleagues in six brokerages and investment banks to establish a Financial Advice Referral Program. With assistance from McKinsey and Co. and intensive work by

⁷ The firm is Schulman, Ronca, Bucuvalas, Inc.

volunteers and Analysts assigned to USG by the banks, a program of free financial advice by experienced financial planners, who were specially trained for this work, was implemented. People can attend financial planning seminars, have individual financial plans developed free of charge, and participate in investments at discounted rates.⁸

Phases of assistance

The actual assistance received by people affected by the World Trade Center attack has gone through several phases, although these are more matters of degree than they are sharp demarcations. Initially, people in need—including both the large numbers of displaced workers and family members of the deceased and missing—received substantial amounts of cash assistance from many different organizations, supported by a variety of different special funds and foundations.⁹

Later, approximately six months after the attack, many of the charitable sources of funds were reduced or terminated, and more attention was paid to governmental assistance. In particular, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was a focal point for its Mortgage and Rental Assistance (MRA) program, which had been only lightly used in other federal disasters, such as hurricanes, floods and other events of nature, which were not terrorist attacks on the heart of a major City's financial district. The MRA program had particular relevance in New York because it provided assistance in paying rent or mortgages for people who had lost jobs, businesses, and substantial amounts of income as a result of the attack. Initially, guidelines were tightly drawn and administered, enabling only relatively few to become eligible (approximately 3,000 by the summer of 2002). But political advocacy by New York's Senators, key Representatives, and others—in addition to critical New York Times attention¹⁰—led to broadening of the program so that it eventually served more than 16,500 people and has provided nearly \$200 million in assistance.¹¹

In addition, agencies began to emphasize concrete services—including employment and training, mental health services, health insurance, scholarships, camp opportunities, legal assistance, and others. Recovery plans were developed that went beyond cash assistance, as Service Coordinators attempted to help people make lifestyle decisions to restore their families in the aftermath of great personal and economic tragedy. These changes in the relationship between client and agency have been very difficult because of the large amounts of money that were raised and the sense of entitlement on the part of many affected that it should simply be distributed. Those funds, such as The September 11th Fund, that believed in the need for long-term recovery assistance, including communities, as well as individuals and families had to push hard to make the case to hold some resources for services over the years to come.

⁸ The six participating brokerages and investment banks are American Express, JPMorgan Chase, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley, Prudential Financial, and Citigroup.

⁹ See as one source on funds provided: An Analysis of Survey Response Information About Funds Raised and Services Provided by 9-11 Charities, The Education and Research Foundation of The Better Business Bureau Serving Metropolitan New York, July 2003.

¹⁰ Diana B. Henriques and David Barstow, "Change in Rules Barred Many From Sept. 11 Disaster Relief," New York Times, April 26, 2002; David W. Chen, "After Criticism, U.S. Broadens 9/11 Aid Pool," New York Times, June 29, 2002.

¹¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency, DR-1391 New York, "Mortgage & Rental Assistance (MRA) Determination Summary," 8/25/03.

A further phase of assistance is occurring with the passing of the second anniversary of the attacks. There is now less specific assistance available from any source—governmental or private—that is tied to September 11. Deadlines have passed for FEMA assistance and for most remaining cash help from social services agencies. Some funds have closed, and others are planning phase-outs.

Deadlines will occur early in 2004 to apply for Ongoing Recovery Program benefits from The September 11 Fund assistance, including employment training and placement and health insurance. Mental health benefits are an exception with plans for reimbursement of treatment for two more years through support from The September 11th Fund and the Red Cross. The Red Cross, which has continued to review applications and process cash gift assistance, has set deadlines for termination of this activity, although its support for case management and related services will continue. Finally, the federal September 11 Victim Compensation Fund of 2001, which makes awards to families of direct victims of the attacks and to those seriously injured, has an application deadline of December 22, 2003 and expects to complete its work by summer 2004.

Looking ahead, plans have been announced by The September 11 Fund to discontinue case management grants for Service Coordinators by the end of 2004 with a considerable phase-down of activity during the year. There are, as of the end of September 2003, more than 200 Service Coordinators from over 40 agencies currently serving approximately 8,100 people and families in addition to 7,500 previously assisted, whose cases are inactive. Such a phase-down three years after the precipitating event is not unreasonable, although the continuing high level of need and utilization of case management services suggests that much of the burden of assistance will shift to the ongoing social services and mental health systems in the City. As much of the direct benefits for September 11 have terminated, reliance on the ongoing public and private nonprofit social services organizations is already becoming the norm for help. Since many affected families and workers have not previously dealt with publicly supported social services, the situation presents particular challenges to both people in need and to the service agencies assisting them. USG information tools are intended to enable people to find their own resources, as well as utilizing the assistance of Service Coordinators.

Applications of Technology

From the beginning, the 9/11 United Services Group has used technology applications to maintain and inform the network of service providers and to improve communications and service to their clients. Attorney General Spitzer's initiative leading to the establishment of USG derived from his identification of the need for a common database of information about the benefits and services that people were receiving from the various agencies. But the use of technology has grown well beyond that initial mission. The DataMart—the term of art used by its developer, IBM—has been supplemented by a Community Web Site to enhance information flow among the participating agencies, as well as an Online Assistance Guide maintained on the Internet to provide searchable information about available programs and benefits for both people in need of service and also Service Coordinators and other agency professional staff. USG maintains, in addition, a public web site with information about its member agencies, reports about September 11 impact and needs, and links to other relevant sites.

DataMart

Attorney General Spitzer's initial statements urging coordination among "leading charitable organizations" anticipated the "development of a database that will assist charities in making decisions on how to allocate disaster relief funds.... [and] to help avoid duplication and overlapping in the disbursement of funds."¹² The realization of such a database—later called a DataMart, the term of art employed by IBM, which worked with the agencies to develop it—proved to be a long and complex task, requiring several months of intensive legal, technological, and programmatic work on the part of the cooperating social services agencies.

Because this was an unprecedented sharing of client information, especially for the Red Cross, great attention was paid to confidentiality and data security in the arrangements among the participating agencies and in the architecture of the data system itself. A formal "Database Participation and Services Agreement" was developed and executed by IBM, the 9/11 United Services Group, and the original group of agencies (American Red Cross in Greater New York, Safe Horizon, and The Salvation Army). The Agreement was subsequently agreed to and signed by all of the agencies that were participating in the USG network and viewing client data.

IBM provided several levels of security in the design of the hardware for the system, as well as in the requirements for access and updating of information, and then hosted the system itself for its initial year of operation. Data was fed on a weekly basis by the agencies, so that no ongoing client data was maintained in the database. Social Security numbers were used in part and only for matching purposes to reduce duplicate entries of the same clients, and were not retained in the system. Passwords were required for all agency Service Coordinators and Supervisors who would be using the system, and maintenance of current and accurate lists of users was required of the agencies.

Because of the security features, the system was difficult to use initially by the Service Coordinators, who were seeking information about the benefits received by their clients from their own and other agencies. Improvements were made gradually to ease utilization without compromising confidentiality. An automated, Internet-based assignment system was developed, enabling the September 11th Support Hotline managed by Safe Horizon, to direct cases to each of the participating agencies. The system also identified the Service Coordinator for each client, so that other agencies serving that client could communicate with the person with primary responsibility for assisting that individual or family. And a screen was developed to enable Service Coordinators to see their clients' utilization of benefits and services from the Employment Assistance Program supported by The September 11th Fund.

A cost/benefit analysis conducted by USG in April 2003 indicated that the agencies placed a high value on the utility of the DataMart.¹³ Besides client-specific information for Service Coordinators, there are bi-weekly management reports with indicators for the volume and types of cases handled by each agency and by the network as a whole. The DataMart has also enabled USG to do the periodic mailings of its "Update" newsletters to the 80,000 plus people who have received

¹² "STATEMENT BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ELIOT SPITZER REGARDING THE NEED TO COORDINATE CHARITABLE EFFORTS FOLLOWING THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACK," September 26, 2001.

¹³ "USG Datamart cost-benefit analysis," prepared by BJ Greenspan and Udai Tambar, April 22, 2003.

assistance, as well as to respect the privacy of those who indicate that they do not wish to receive such communications.

Community Web Site

To facilitate dispensing of critical information and ensuring its communication to and among staff in the various service agencies, USG maintains an extranet system, dubbed the Community Web Site, to post announcements of programs and key deadlines, relevant information from government and other organizations, application materials, flyers for special events, training dates, documents related to provision of services by participating agencies and USG, daily headlines and summaries of news stories relevant to September 11, contact information for agency staffs, management data on services provided, and more.

All staff, including many beyond the network of USG agencies can utilize the Community Web Site, since there is no confidential client data on it. There is new and updated information posted on a daily basis by USG. Utilization data indicate that the Community Web Site is heavily used by staff in the network. The technology costs of the system are zero,¹⁴ but maintaining current content is key to its continuing value.

Online Assistance Guide and USG web site

Similarly, USG developed and maintains an Online Assistance Guide, consisting of searchable benefits and services for people affected by the September 11 attack. Since the Guide is on the Internet, it is directly accessible by people wishing to find their own services, as well as supporting the Service Coordinators who are looking for help for their clients. Originally created by The September 11th Fund, the Guide is not a comprehensive treatment of all social services and assistance programs that could be helpful; rather, it focuses on those that are most directly relevant to September 11—either created for that purpose or providing substantial assistance to those affected.

Impact, Effectiveness, Evolving Coordination

The network of agencies developed by the 9/11 United Services Group remains operational and productive nearly two years after its creation. While there are no direct evaluations of its work, the client surveys conducted as part of the Quality Assurance process by the survey research firm Schulman, Ronca, Bucuvalas, Inc. indicate general satisfaction with the Service Coordinator model of assistance.¹⁵ The objective of service coordination has been to meet client needs through a single case manager, who is well-trained both in substantive information about programs and benefits and in good practice techniques for working with people in stressful situations, identifying their needs, and planning with them for the future.

This approach has evolved, as indicated above, from the early period of assistance, when cash payments were prevalent, to the more recent period where recovery, lifestyle adjustments, and utilization of more traditional social services are primary. The focus of training sessions for Service Coordinators has continually adapted to meet changing conditions, as training needs are

¹⁴ Donated by Intranets.com

¹⁵ “Quality Assurance System Survey, Second Wave Findings,” Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc, Spring 2003.

identified by the senior managers from the agencies who meet regularly to provide feedback from their line workers. USG staff have also obtained direct feedback from Service Coordinators through a shifting group of experienced case managers meeting every two weeks as a Service Coordinator Steering Committee.

In fact, the effectiveness of the network in coordinating assistance depends on working at all levels of the participating organizations. The Board of Directors of USG includes the chief executives of the major social services providers and federations in New York, as well as several corporate executives and representatives of the groups affected by the attack. In setting policy for the organization, they bring collective perspective about the political and social climate for service delivery and the priority and feasibility of USG initiatives.

The policy level perspective is supplemented by the Case Management Working Group of senior staff of all the agencies participating in the network that was described earlier. This Group, which met weekly for the first year and now meets bi-weekly, reviews operating procedures for the network, acts as a clearinghouse for program information from the agencies, reviews data about supply and demand for Service Coordinators, develops advocacy strategies for government services, develops the training programs for Service Coordinators and other staff, and generally provides a sounding and decision-making body for all manner of issues. Related committees oversee the training specifically, the development and implementation of the Quality Assurance system, and other operational issues, as needed.

USG has also convened technology staff from the agencies on a regular basis during the developmental phases of its technology tools and continues to bring them together when necessary. The communications staff of the agencies also meet periodically to review promotional plans for services, client communications, press relations, and related issues. In all of these areas, USG maintains up-to-date contact information and facilitates the flow of information among the agencies.

As mentioned, USG also works directly with some Service Coordinators and maintains informal contacts with many others and their supervisors to exchange information about client needs and reactions and to test out new approaches to service delivery. The Advisory Council of family members of attack victims, downtown residents, workers, and survivors of the attack continues to meet to indicate their priorities and to comment on USG program plans and public initiatives.

While none of these techniques is unique or particularly innovative, the fact that they have been persistently pursued for nearly two years through active management has enabled this network of independent agencies to operate effectively and responsively to changing needs. The ability to interact at all levels of the participating organizations—executive, senior staff, line worker, and specialist staff—has been critical to having a functioning network.

Commitment by the agency heads has provided consistent executive leadership through USG's Board. And bringing together the various working levels of the organizations on a regular basis has also been essential to operation of the network. Working as liaisons to each of the agencies, USG staff members reinforce these lines of communications and show that a modest infrastructure is necessary to make operational coordination work effectively.

Limitations

The 9/11 United Services Group was designed to coordinate the recovery efforts of the primary nonprofit social services agencies serving people affected by September 11. In a City the size of New York and with the scale of this disaster, there have been many more public and private organizations providing assistance than the forty involved in USG. USG was not created until two months after the September 11 attack and had no involvement in the first response phase by law enforcement, rescue, and immediate relief organizations. Many charitable and religious organizations, which are not formally part of the USG network, continue to provide direct assistance to people. USG works with some of these groups through referrals to an “Unmet Needs Roundtable” of religious donors providing direct help on a case-by-case basis. In addition, USG staff participate in the work of the local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), which is a broadly based group of agencies that respond to all types of natural and man-made disasters, similar to counterpart groups around the country.

The USG model includes the recovery work of large direct service organizations, such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army, religious federations, and smaller community based organizations, but it is far from being all-inclusive in a City with the manifold number of service organizations that New York has. The network expanded over time to include organizations reaching New York’s diverse ethnic communities—including Committee on Hispanic Children and Families, Asociacion Teyeyac, Alianza Dominicana, Latin American Workers Project, Islamic Circle of North America, Shorefront YMHA, Filipino American Human Services, Japanese American Social Services, Hamilton Madison House (Chinatown Resource Center), Church Avenue Merchants Block Association, and others—but reaching and communicating effectively across all affected communities is a continuing challenge.

USG works with government agencies primarily on a program-by-program basis, not through any regular structure. In its role as the City’s preparedness planning agency, the New York City Office of Emergency Management has worked with USG in coordinating disaster center services in the year following the attack and in a number of current planning initiatives. USG also works with City mental health, housing, welfare and social services agencies on both current assistance issues and future response and recovery planning. Relations with the primary national government disaster recovery agency—the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), now a part of the new Department of Homeland Security—have been continuous, but informal. More about preparedness planning work is described below, but other than VOAD committees with particular purposes, there are no ongoing mechanisms to unite the voluntary social services agencies with government counterparts.

While USG has coordinated specific activities with particular foundation and corporate funders, there has been no ongoing mechanism to bring together disaster recovery service providers and funders in New York. As indicated, USG is supported primarily by The September 11 Fund, which was created by United Way of New York City and the New York Community Trust. There have been periodic ad hoc meetings of foundations and of a Corporate Contributions Advisory Group to address mutual concerns about September 11 assistance, but there is no regular vehicle for bringing

service providers and donors together for planning purposes. In Washington DC, by contrast, a more structured Task Force has operated to involve both service providers and corporate and foundation donors in preparedness planning, as well as the aftermath of the September 11 attack.¹⁶

Application of Lessons Learned

To preparedness planning

To improve the recovery assistance provided by human services agencies in a future disaster, USG developed a planning document, based on extensive interviews with participants in the response by agencies to the September 11 attack and on USG's own experience.¹⁷ The primary emphasis is to develop a better system for sharing client information, on a confidential basis, in order to prevent people needing assistance from having to provide the same information and documents to multiple agencies. A local inter-agency implementation team has been addressing the recommendations from this report and the requirements for an information sharing system. Among specific local actions would be scanning and sharing of documents and inter-agency agreements for eligibility determinations, creating a common intake form, providing for confidentiality and client consent, and preparing communications agreements among agencies.

A draft Memorandum of Understanding for social services agency response has been developed between USG and the City's Office of Emergency Management and is undergoing final review. USG is also included in the draft Protocol for mental health response capabilities that has been prepared by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Training for New York-based social services agency staff members to be volunteer Intake Specialists, if disaster centers are required in the future, has been initiated. During summer 2003, 450 people were jointly trained at the Salvation Army's facility in a joint program developed and presented by the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Safe Horizon, and USG. Having locally prepared volunteers would reduce the future need for the very large numbers of people from outside the City who responded after September 11 to volunteer needs of the Red Cross and other agencies, but were unfamiliar with New York's communities.

The data elements for information sharing among agencies have been agreed upon locally, but to implement key aspects of this local plan, it is necessary for the national parent organizations—including the American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, United Way of America, the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, and others—to take the lead in developing the information sharing system which their local counterparts would implement around the country in response to large-scale natural and man-made disasters. USG and Safe Horizon have been engaged for several months in a planning effort with these national organizations, leading to a specific requirements document for data sharing, selection

¹⁶ The Greater Washington Task Force on Nonprofit Emergency Preparedness has published "Blueprint for Emergency Preparedness by Nonprofits" and "Building Nonprofit Sector Capacity for Emergency Preparedness in Greater Washington," Community Foundation of the National Capitol Region, September 2003.

¹⁷ 9/11 United Services Group, "Framework for the Coordinated Delivery of Social Services in Future Major Emergencies," January 2003.

of a software vendor, draft legal protocols, and an ongoing working group to implement the system according to an agreed upon timetable. The cooperation of this range of organizations in developing an information sharing system to serve people following a disaster is unprecedented in an area where cooperation has been informal at best, and client data has been gathered separately by each agency—to the detriment of those needing assistance.

A further step will be to build on preliminary discussions that have been held with senior officials of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is now part of the Department of Homeland Security. The preparedness work done in New York, as well as that by the Washington, DC Task Force, can be helpful as general guidance to other communities undertaking such planning.

To the social services system in New York City, and elsewhere

There are many potential applications of the USG network model and technology support tools to other areas of social services delivery beyond September 11. The USG experience has demonstrated the application of techniques for organizing and managing a voluntary network of social services agencies of differing sizes, missions, and capacities to September 11 services. As outlined in this paper, this experience involves regular management meetings of senior staff of the participating agencies, assignment of people calling a central hotline to appropriate agencies within the network for case management, frequent training of line Service Coordinators (case managers) across the agencies, provision of information about changes in benefits and services, identification of common service issues, joint advocacy where necessary, and other activities that have maintained a well-functioning network for nearly two years. Persistent operational support at all levels of participating agencies is required to maintain effective coordination—executives, senior management, line supervisors, and case managers working with clients. A Quality Assurance mechanism to measure and improve performance of agencies participating in the network is also necessary as a check on the system.

Whether these techniques and the associated technology applications can be applied to other areas of social services, beyond September 11 services, depends upon further exploration with City government officials and social services leaders to determine whether they have translatable value. Many of the agencies already participating with USG in providing September 11 services also provide other social services through contracts with City government and grants from private funding sources. Preliminary discussions with City government and social services leaders about applying the USG experience raise the following questions about transferring the experience:

Are there projects involving City departments and/or their contracted provider agencies that could be enhanced by greater emphasis on operational coordination among the participating organizations? Several potential examples include—

- a) Supporting networks of social services agencies that are working to address common programmatic problems and to achieve common goals and objectives through private and government funding;
- b) Assisting one or more City government departments and the nonprofit service provider agencies to improve communications, identify program goals and measures, share information on client services and benefits, reduce time required for contracting procedures, and potentially reduce costs;

- c) Developing joint networks among nonprofit agencies which are geographically based in particular communities and that are providing services in related program areas—such as family and children’s services, early childhood education, employment & training, homeless and housing programs, or youth development—but are funded by several different government departments to operate distinct, but functionally related programs.
- d) Improving government contracting and increase revenue through more accurate and timely billing and claiming reimbursement from the state and federal government for eligible individuals served by different programs.

Is there a compelling reason to for the City and the service providers with which it contracts to enter into an operational network? The propulsion for creating the USG network was the original public criticism of the agencies by the New York State Attorney General, the availability of large sums of dedicated funds that needed to be spent effectively for specific categories of people, and the willingness of agencies to cooperate in the face of an overwhelming disaster. The September 11 Fund also encouraged participation in the USG network for its grantees receiving funding for case management, which includes a substantial number of the USG participating agencies.

Nevertheless, the USG network has operated very much on a voluntary and consensual basis. There is no central dictation of direction, but rather the development of consensus about issues and procedural steps to take among willing partner agencies. While there is give-and-take between USG and the agencies and among some of the agencies, as well, issues have consistently been resolved by agreements and understandings.

Certainly, City government agencies that contract with nonprofit service providers for particular social services can encourage—or require—their agencies to work together. And some do. As an example, the New York City Administration for Children’s Services has established Neighborhood Networks for children and family services. As part of its reform plan, which decentralized child welfare services to communities, ACS brings together in 25 community districts its local foster care and family services contractor agencies, its own field office staff, and other relevant community agencies. Further steps toward operational coordination could be explored over time, including electronic resource and services information dissemination. However, whether client data sharing (even with confidentiality protections) would ever be appropriate is a very difficult question. Confidentiality is of particular concern in the case of child abuse and neglect and is appropriately protected by strong legal constraints.

There are many other examples of City social services contractor agencies cooperating informally in the areas of homeless services, child care, senior citizen centers, and others. The USG experience also suggests that cooperation must occur on a regular basis among all levels of the participating organizations—executive, senior management, supervisory, line worker, and technical. The question to be explored is whether there is value in a further step toward more operational coordination, in which regular management meetings are held, client information is shared confidentially to some degree, and formal electronic systems for non-confidential inter-agency communications about resources and services are developed. To proceed cautiously seems the wise course, especially regarding client information.

Conclusion

The experience of the 9/11 United Services Group is a case study in establishing and managing a voluntary network of social services agencies. The story has a beginning and a middle, which are told above, and it will have an end, even though the impact and need generated by the September 11 attack will go on for a very long time. The 9/11 United Services Group itself is not a permanent agency. It was established to coordinate case management and improve information and services to people affected by the September 11 attack. Transition planning is currently underway to transfer to other agencies or to terminate particular functions before the end of 2004.

This review has the strengths and weaknesses of the perspective of an insider who has worked in the organization from the outset. It has addressed the techniques employed to bring agencies together and to maintain and improve the level of their service to people affected. It does not profess to be a comprehensive review of the assistance that has been provided or of the wide-ranging and dedicated work done by the participating agencies. It does not attempt to describe the incredible response provided by agencies that rushed in when they were most needed right after the attack in the immediate response phase. Nor has it described the program development and creativity of the many grant-making organizations that channeled donations and funds to those in need and the organizations assisting them.

Focus has been on the recovery period, which has been underway for nearly two years and will go on much longer. An evaluation from a longer perspective would be useful at some point and can hopefully be informed, in part, by this paper.

Appendix A

Organizations Participating in USG Service Coordination

American Red Cross in Greater New York
Asian American Federation of New York
- Chinese American Planning Council
- Chinatown YMCA
- Filipino American Human Services Inc.
- New York Asian Women's Center
- Japanese American Social Services, Inc.
Asociacion Tepeyac*
Black Agency Executives, Inc.
Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service*
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens
Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York, Inc.*
Church Avenue Merchants Block Association, Inc.
Community Service Society of New York
Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Inc.
- Lutheran Social Services of Metropolitan New York
Hispanic Federation
- Alianza Dominicana
- Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
- Puerto Rican Family Institute
- Unitas Therapeutic Community
- Urban Health Plan
Human Services Council
- Children's Aid Society
ICNA-Islamic Circle of North America
Latin American Workers Project*
Legal Aid Society*
Mental Health Association of New York City, Inc.
Safe Horizon
The Salvation Army
UJA-Federation of New York
- F.E.G.S. NY
- F.E.G.S. Long Island
- Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services
- Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty
- Westchester Jewish Community Services
- Shorefront Y
United Neighborhood Houses of New York
- Forest Hills Community House
- Hamilton Madison House
- Henry Street Settlement
- Supportive Children's Advocacy Network New York (SCAN)
WTC Permanency Project*
- Jewish Child Care Association
- Council on Adoptable Children

Appendix B

Board of Directors of the 9/11 United Services Group

Msgr. Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, Chair

Stephen Solender, Chief Executive Officer, 9/11 United Services Group

Donna Petrucelli, Counsel, American Red Cross in Greater New York
(Robert Bender, Chief Executive Officer, American Red Cross in Greater New York, until retirement)

Cao O, Executive Director, Asian American Federation of New York

Darwin Davis, Executive Director, New York Urban League
(representing Black Agency Executives; originally, Mary Redd, Director and Vice President, Steinway Child and Family Services)

Robert Siebel, Executive Director, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens
(Thomas DeStefano, same position, until retirement)

Fatima Goldman, Executive Director, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
(Megan McLaughlin, same position, until retirement)

Lorraine Cortes-Vasquez, President, Hispanic Federation

Michael Stoller, Executive Director, Human Services Council of New York
(originally, Alan Siskind, Chair, Human Services Council of New York)

Lt. Col. William LaMarr, Divisional Commander, The Salvation Army
(retired, awaiting confirmation of his successor to the Board)

Louise Greilsheimer, Vice President, Agency & External Relations, UJA Federation of New York

Nancy Wackstein, Executive Director, United Neighborhood Houses of New York
(Emily Menlo Marks, same position, until retirement)

Robert Hurst, Vice Chairman, Goldman Sachs & Co.
(originally, also Chief Executive Officer, 9/11 United Services Group)

Steven Wisch, The Edgewater Funds
(originally, Chief Operations Officer, 9/11 United Services Group)

David Chen, Executive Director, Chinese-American Planning Council

Kathleen Gupta, Henry Street Settlement

William Feehan, Feehan Barr Partners

Shelly Horowitz, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

Elizabeth O'Brien, Saratoga Springs, New York

William Rodriguez, American Immigrant Federation



Appendix C

Mission

[AS OF NOVEMBER 1, 2002]

REVISED MISSION:

The 9/11 United Services Group facilitates, expedites, and enhances the coordination and quality of services among various charities and agencies to ensure that the ongoing needs of individuals affected by the World Trade Center attack are compassionately and efficiently met. As time passes, and fewer resources are available to meet 9/11-related needs, USG believes that this mission will become more critical to the long-term recovery process.

To achieve this mission, the 9/11 United Services Group, a not-for-profit organization, is:

- Serving as the primary information portal on available 9/11-related benefits, services and newsworthy items for the affected communities, donors, civic leaders, and the general public through direct communication channels, including a nationwide newsletter and web site.
- Enhancing the coordination of social services, including financial aid, by assisting agencies in developing and sustaining a high quality network of well-trained and technologically supported Service Coordinators from many agencies to work one-on-one with individuals on a long-term basis.
- Advocating to key policymakers and public service providers for policy change to meet the existing needs of the affected people and communities.
- Developing and mobilizing a framework for the coordinated delivery of social services in response to future major emergencies.

In addition, USG will seek to promote the adoption of applicable strategies within the social services system based on lessons learned from the 9/11-response.

APPENDIX D

9/11 United Services Group Advisory Council

Marian Fontana

Lisa Friedman

Thomas Lawler

Wing Ma

Susan Magazine

Greg Manning

Terry McGovern

Tammy Meltzer

Maria O'Sullivan

Nikki Stern

Herm Wille

Carrie Coen Sullivan

[Bios of Advisory Council Members are on the 9/11 United Services Group website,
www.9-11usg.org]