



[Photo by Kevin M. Cox](#)

Mark Davis, executive director of the Galveston County Food Bank, talks Wednesday about trucks purchased with Social Service Block Grant funds in Texas City.

## Agencies scramble as post-Ike assistance ends

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A \$40 million federal program ends Sept. 30 that has for more than a year helped supply food, medicine, rent and utility assistance and other services to county residents who lost their jobs or homes to Hurricane Ike. But the need remains, leaving social service agencies scrambling to find new funding sources.

Despite some delays in allocating a Social Service Block Grant awarded to storm-damaged counties, the program has been a rare success story with tangible results in a county where other federal recovery programs have moved at a glacial speed.

The grants, doled out to dozens of area agencies, created hundreds of jobs, allowed some social service agencies to grow and expand their reach, kept thousands of families fed, and helped to pay for prescription medication, hygiene products and housing needs, including debris removal, roof repairs, rental assistance and replacement of furniture and appliances.

But some agencies say the program will end at a crucial time in the county's recovery.

Catholic Charities, a lead agency in the program, received \$10 million in social service grants, some of which it distributed to 18 smaller agencies. It also received \$5 million in collaboration with Lutheran Social Services.

### 'Need Still Significant'

Catholic Charities has helped thousands of families throughout the county pay rent and utility bills or to make storm repairs to their homes. But what the organization worries about is what will become of those displaced families when their Ike-damaged houses are demolished and rebuilt or repaired through a program paid for by \$259 million in Community Development Block Grants — \$99 million for the county and \$160 million for the island.

The housing program has been excruciatingly slow. Through the program, which began two years ago, the county has completed 100 houses; the island has completed 46. Both programs have more under construction, however.

Homeowners in that program need temporary places to stay while their houses are being rebuilt or repaired. And they need a way to pay rent and utilities, officials say. When the social service grants end Sept. 30, they'll have few places to turn.

"There are thousands in the application process who won't have any access to these types of funds unless we find additional funding sources," said Harold Fattig, southern regional director for Catholic Charities. "The need is still significant when measured by the number of people not in their homes."

To date, the island has about 1,001 eligible applicants awaiting repairs or rebuilding of their houses.

The county, after screening for eligibility, expects to help about 600 homeowners through the program. Hundreds more applied, but were not eligible or dropped out of the program. Still, each month new families continue to apply.

Along with rental and utility assistance, Catholic Charities has used its grant to help several thousand families replace appliances, furniture and in some cases get their cars repaired so they could return to work. Catholic Charities also has used the grants to help homeowners repair roofs damaged by the September 2008 storm.

#### Lasting Benefits

Galveston County Gleanings from the Harvest, which supplies low-income families with food and hygiene products, has been able to greatly improve its facilities and expand services through \$1.7 million from the Social Service Block Grant program

Hurricane Ike, which pushed storm surge into thousands of houses and businesses around the county, wiped out jobs and created a need unlike any the organization had ever seen, executive director Mark Davis said.

And the need has not subsided.

Gleanings from the Harvest continues to help people who are struggling to get back on their feet after a storm that also coincided with a severe national economic downturn.

"A large majority of jobs lost haven't been replaced," Davis said.

Hurricane Ike destroyed some of the organization's food supplies, vehicles, refrigeration units and forklift trucks on the island.

Gleanings from the Harvest used \$660,000 of the Social Service Block Grants to buy equipment, pallet jacks, storage racks, trucks, forklifts, freezers and other accouterment necessary for food bank operations.

"We have in place equipment that should serve us for 10-plus years," Davis said.

### ‘Goodness Of Their Hearts’

The social service grants allowed Gleanings from the Harvest to renovate its 11,500-square-foot building, 624 4th Ave. N. in Texas City. With those renovations, Gleanings from the Harvest was able to meet the minimum requirements necessary to become Galveston County’s first certified food bank. It now partners with the Houston Food Bank. The grants also have helped to pay for the organization’s utilities, insurance and some salaries, Davis said.

The grants gave Gleanings from the Harvest a reprieve from having to raise money through a capital campaign, Davis said.

With the Sept. 30 end of the program, the organization, which receives some help through the United Way, will again have to seek help through charitable contributions to continue to maintain its new staffing and service levels and to pay for insurance and utilities.

“That’s going to have to be raised through foundations and from people out of the goodness of their hearts,” Davis said.

### ‘Desperately Needed Assistance’

The University of Texas Medical Branch, also a lead agency in the program, received \$6.7 million in social service grants. The medical branch divvied up the money among 13 agencies providing health services to Ike-affected families. Now, it also is seeking other sources of funding to continue work and meet a demand that has not gone away, said Becky Trout Walsdorf, executive director of community relations at the medical branch.

The social service grants helped to pay for 76 jobs for the period of the grant, which began in February 2010 after initial delays in disbursing funds, with total payroll of \$3 million. Unless another source of funding is secured, all those jobs are at risk of being cut.

The grants also provided medical services for the uninsured, health coaching, prescription assistance, dental care and access to food for low-income people who were adversely affected by the storm.

“The bottom line is that the SSBG funding has allowed UTMB Health and health-related social services countywide to provide desperately needed assistance to persons affected by Hurricane Ike,” Walsdorf said.

“In every instance, the agencies want to continue this work and are seeking new/additional funding to do so. However, if those funding sources cannot be identified, the level of service will be scaled back or perhaps eliminated altogether.”